



Resilience in Leadership

Summary

Resilience in leaders
Organisational resilience
Developing resilience

Resilience is the ability to be flexible in the face of adversity, bending but not breaking. At any stage of our lives, we are likely to need an element of resilience, whether in relationships, health, finance or at work where we may have to deal with job insecurity, redundancy, bullying or periods of significant change.

Our ability to be resilient can be affected by internal and external factors such as our view of ourselves, our belief systems and thought processes, and our external support network. A person with strong self belief, a positive approach to life and a supportive network of family and friends will generally fare better when dealing with life's ups and downs than somebody without these advantages.

The good news is that wherever we are on the 'resilience scale', it is something we can improve on over time. While some people may seem to have a natural tendency to resilience, due to nurture or other life experiences, being resilient is not a fixed aspect of our personality. Nor is it an end goal. Developing resilience is an ongoing personal journey, which may at times involve emotional distress and uncertainty, but through which we can learn, adapt and grow stronger.

Resilience in leaders

Leaders in organizations are often presented with a range of challenges on a daily basis, and require reserves of resilience in order to survive emotionally and physically 'intact'. Today's business environment presents issues such as cost cutting, downsizing, redundancies and restructuring, juggling resources, managing risk, and addressing employee performance issues. The inability to remain strong in the face of such challenges can affect both performance and health, so developing sound coping mechanisms is essential.

The level of resilience in a leader can be influenced by several factors:

- EQ (Emotional Intelligence)
- Self belief
- Personal thought processes
- Support networks
- Self-nurturing behaviour
- Openness to change

It is estimated that a successful CEO or senior leader needs a combination of 85% EQ and 15% IQ. EQ, or Emotional Intelligence, is about self awareness and our ability to build relationships with others (unlike IQ which, in the workplace, is about knowledge, skills and experience). Leaders with high EQ understand their own strengths and weaknesses, recognize their impact on others, are able to manage strong emotions, and know how to change unhelpful behavioural habits in themselves and their reports. Such leaders communicate well, are responsive and adaptable, humble yet confident in approach, and have the skills to inspire loyalty and get the best out of a team.

Closely linked with high EQ is a strong belief in oneself. Such leaders trust in their own ability to make a difference, exhibiting a high level of authenticity and a commitment to see things through. Combined with positive thought processes which enable the leader to focus on reality and make clear decisions, and a willingness to learn from experience, the result is a purposeful, resourceful, proactive – and resilient - leader.

All these elements are key contributors to both the development and maintenance of resilience, but perhaps one of the most important factors is the ability or willingness to look after ourselves. In times of difficulty, being physically and emotionally healthy is especially important. If we are not in optimum health, dealing with adversity becomes much harder. The most resilient leaders usually take time to charge their batteries, relax and enjoy life. They make healthy decisions in relation to food and exercise, and turn to their network of friends and family for support and companionship.

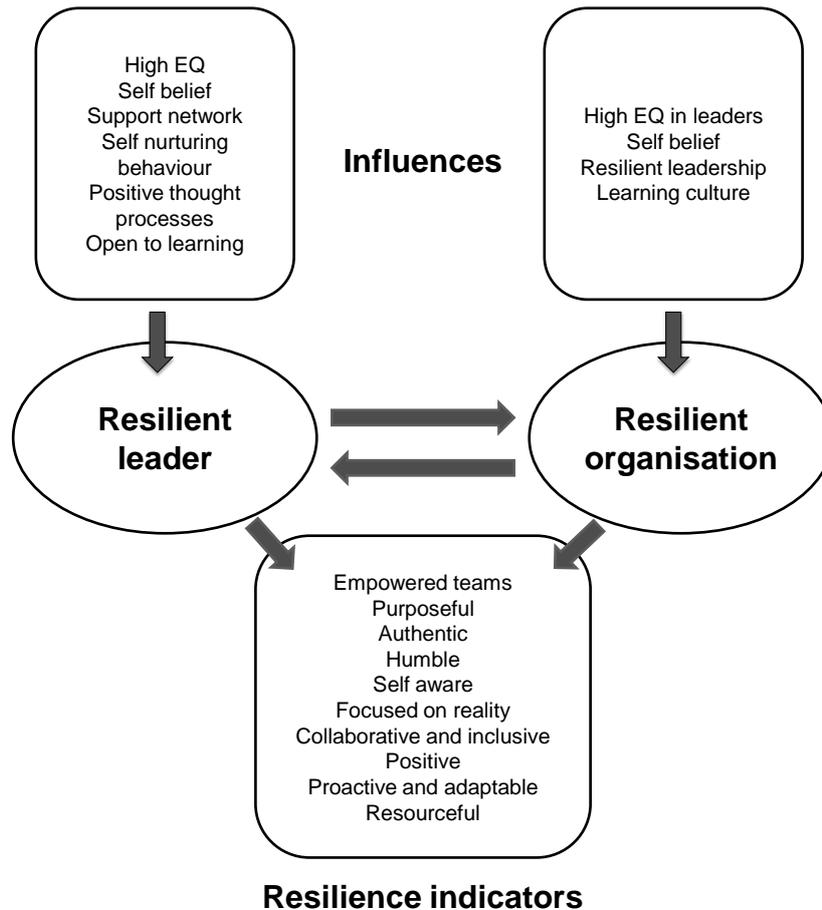
Organisational resilience

Being a resilient leader naturally produces a style of leadership which promotes resilience in others and in the organisation as a whole. Resilient leaders involve and empower their teams, providing a level of support and encouragement that promotes self belief, purpose and positivity in others. A 2010 survey by Robertson Cooper and YouGov shows a link between the resilience of an organisation and the level of support its employees receive from their managers: 65% of the 2000+ respondents who believed their organisation was “very resilient” also felt supported by their managers.

Likewise, an organisation that is itself resilient enables the development of resilience in its employees through a non-blame culture where people have the space to make mistakes and learn from them. A resilient organisation collaborates with its employees, sharing information and planning together so that all are working for the common good. The phrase ‘stronger together’ applies perfectly here.

A high level of resilience is apparent in the ability of the organisation to be proactive and plan for any potential future difficulties, as opposed to dealing with adversity on an ad hoc basis or reacting in a knee jerk fashion. With a whole raft of internal and external factors potentially impacting on businesses, such as politics, technology, finance, changing customer needs, societal changes, the employment market and competitor developments, an organisation that does not assess its own resilience and plan for future challenges may find itself in trouble when adversity strikes.

A resilient organisation regularly examines business trends for potential upcoming challenges and assesses its own capacity to change. It understands its capabilities and limitations but believes in its strengths and abilities to adapt in the face of adversity. As a result of this readiness, highly resilient organisations may even be able to transform serious setbacks into business opportunities by maximising both the creative talent inherent within their workforce and their own ability to adapt.



Developing resilience

It's important to remember that in terms of developing resilience, what works for one person may not work for another. We suggest 10 different ways that leaders may develop their resilience:

1. Believe in your ability to make a difference.
2. Identify your goals in a positive way, i.e. what you want rather than what you don't want. For example, "I'm going to find a new job", rather than, "I don't want to be in this job any more".
3. Accept the things you cannot change, and you may be able to continue to function alongside them rather than being overwhelmed by negative emotions. Mindfulness is an effective technique to help with this.
4. Assess your situation objectively. Is it reality, or your view of reality? Try to keep things in perspective.
5. Be proactive. Taking positive action encourages a sense of control, which in turn promotes feelings of confidence and optimism. Remaining passive can bring about feelings of negativity and powerlessness.
6. Develop a strong, supportive network of friends, family and colleagues.
7. Understand those things that particularly impact on you in a negative way and plan your coping strategies in advance.
8. Adapt. There is wisdom in the Japanese proverb which says, "The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists."
9. Look after yourself, emotionally and physically.

10. Learn from challenging situations and value them as an ongoing personal development tool.

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<http://www.coachingcultureatwork.com/case-histories/>.

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