Strengthening Personal Resilience

By Derek Mowbray

Resilience is a key component in the primary prevention of stress at work. We all have a responsibility to be as resilient as possible against the uncertainties of everyday working lives.

Resilience is about our personal attitude towards work and the challenging events that take place in the working environment. My definition of resilience is

the capacity to mobilise personal resources to form an attitude to tolerate and overcome such adverse events without experiencing stress, and to increase psychological immunity as a consequence of such events.

Resilience, however, is a choice. You can decide to be resilient or not, depending on the answer to the question ‘what’s in it for me’? This question is posed (consciously or unconsciously) every time you come across a challenging event or difficult behaviour.

As the answer to ‘what’s in it for me?’ is often linked to a compulsion to survive to the next moment, you either decide to escape the situation and hope there are no consequences (passive resilience) or face up to the challenge and invoke your resilience (active resilience).

You can use passive resilience as protection against challenges that you know are too difficult, complicated or beyond your capacity, to deal with. You accept the situation and seek to carry on as normal without directly addressing the challenge. You neither escape the situation nor confront it. In effect, you hope that time will enable you to emerge again and lead your normal life without you having to think about ‘the monkey on your shoulder’.

Active resilience is a process of forming a robust attitude to a challenging event.

How do you strengthen personal resilience?

Some aspects of active resilience are personality dependent whilst others are skills determined.

All elements can be learnt and strengthened, although determination and an open mind are required to bring about the necessary change of habit and behaviour required to strengthen resilience.

Mental strength comes from knowing you have the capability, self-belief and mental capacity do something.

To strengthen resilience, you need to build your mental strength, and your capability to rise up to, and overcome, challenges, by learning techniques that will help impart understanding and improve your ability to choose resilience against challenging events wherever they arise. You need mental control, a positive attitude, motivation and have the energy to overcome the event.

The framework I use to help strengthen personal resilience is based on three aspects of personal control:

- Personal control over oneself
- Personal control over responses to events
- Personal control over responses to people

Within each of these groups there are a number of elements, eight in total (self-awareness, vision, determination, confidence, organisation, problem solving, interaction and relationships) which provide focus for individuals to strengthen their control – as shown in the following diagram.
The reasons why these 8 elements were chosen is explained below.

**Self-awareness** If you are aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, and know you have the inner capacity and capability to overcome many types of challenge, you can choose to be resilient.

**Determination** Determination has a lot to do with knowing your core values, which are also your core drivers. If you know what drives you to take the decisions you take, you will have the tools to remain determined to see things through to a conclusion. When this happens your resilience against adverse events will be very strong.

**Vision** If you have a reasonably good idea of what you want out of life, and what you want to do, you will have a focus that helps place other challenges in perspective. Having a longer term aspiration that you really, really want to achieve gives you the mental strength to drive you forward and over the bumps of everyday life.

**Self-confidence** You boost your self-confidence by controlling your anxiety, for which there are many tried and tested techniques. This gives you the confidence to do anything you want.

**Organisation** If you know you can organise yourself in a chaotic environment, you know you can deal with almost anything that’s thrown at you. For example, knowing how to arrange and successfully cope with a heavy workload will give you a sense of achievement and success which is like feeling a reward. Which will drive you on with the anticipation of feeling successful again when the next task is completed.

**Problem solving** If you know you can solve different types of problems, you will have the flexibility, knowledge and confidence to tackle difficult and challenging events without feeling stressed by them.

**Interaction** If you know how to persuade others to do what you want them to do without causing them any distress, you will know how to interact effectively with anyone, at any time, about anything, even those who are aggressive towards you.
Relationships  
If you have strong relationships with others who are important to your success and happiness, you will know you can trust and rely on their support in difficult situations. This boosts your confidence; their advice helps your flexibility, and their encouragement helps your strength of mind.

Try this short Questionnaire based on the 8 elements and see how you score. The full version of this Questionnaire – the RAQ 40 is used in our various Resilience programmes.

Resilience Assessment Questionnaire (RAQ 8)

Please answer the following questions by circling the relevant number.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I usually know how others perceive me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am determined to achieve my lifetime ambitions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can see my future clearly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I normally feel comfortable in new situations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I plan my next day in advance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I enjoy the challenge of unravelling puzzles and solving problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>In general, I like people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>My most important relationships are my strongest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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Scores:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Determination</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Self confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
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Any score of 3 and below indicates a need to strengthen this element of personal resilience.
18 Tips for Personal Resilience

Tip 1  Work out what you really, really, really want to achieve in your life and work; write it down and bring it out from time to time to refresh your determination to achieve what you want to do.

Tip 2  Always keep an open mind about everything; you never know where this takes you, and it adds to your flexibility and adaptability in coping with stress.

Tip 3  Be clear about the key values that drive your choices and decisions in your everyday life.

Tip 4  Take time to understand what is happening to you every day; reflect on the good and positive events and think about how they have made you feel.

Tip 5  Take an interest in other people; find out what interests them and makes them tick.

Tip 6  Make sure you strengthen your relationship with those who are important to you.

Tip 7  Always think of asking something different about those you meet.

Tip 8  If you experience a problem during the day, try to resolve it there and then.

Tip 9  Write down what you intend to do during the day.

Tip 10  Keep a diary or picture album of the positive events that give you a rosy glow; when you feel low, read or look at your diary or album; it will make you feel so much better.

Tip 11  Always imagine everything positively - use your imagination to produce positive actions and behaviours.

Tip 12  Talk to yourself out loud and positively – embrace the idea of talking to yourself.

Tip 13  Take the long view – envisage the future. A long term purpose enables you to ‘ride over’ adverse events as you are focused on achieving the long view.

Tip 14  Deliberately build your human capital so that you feel fulfilled in all aspects of your life. Human capital is who you are - the combination of skills, knowledge and experience.

Tip 15  Establish a personal brand and show off to the world what you want to be seen as standing for.

Tip 16  Think and behave in ways that build commitment, trust and engagement when interacting with others.

Tip 17  Behave assertively when appropriate - be very considerate of others when you want to convey a strong message about how you feel and what you would wish to see happen.

Tip 18  Be determined to strengthen your resilience – make an appointment with yourself every month to monitor your progress.

Note to organisations:

Organisations intending to embark on resilience training for their people should note that a Personal Resilience Programme can only go so far. They should not view a resilience programme in isolation, but as part of a transformation process to achieve peak performance throughout the organisation.

Without the elements of corporate resilience in place (supportive culture, great management and a working environment that aids psychological wellbeing), there comes a time when individuals are unable to cope effectively with certain challenges, no matter how robust their personal resilience may be.

I do hope you have found this information helpful.

To find out more... If you would like to find out more about Personal Resilience, read Derek Mowbray’s Guide to Personal Resilience or take Derek’s Personal Resilience ELearning Programme.

More information is in our Article Library, or why not try our Questionnaires.
Strengthening Personal Resilience Programmes:

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<tr>
<td>Our personal resilience programme is designed to strengthen individuals, and to provide techniques for dealing with chaos and problem solving, as well as strengthening relationships. The programme contains 8 elements – self-awareness, vision, determination, confidence, organisation, problem solving, interaction and relationships.</td>
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<td>A variety of options are available to suit different requirements:</td>
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<td>One day workshops</td>
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<td>Shorter Awareness sessions between 1 and 3 hours</td>
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<td>Individual Coaching</td>
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<td>Resilience Elearning Programme</td>
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<td>Resilience Masterclass for internal Wellbeing Champions</td>
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<td>Train the Trainer Programme</td>
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Call 01242 241882 or email barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk to discuss running these programmes in your organisation, all of which are customised to client specific requirements and needs.

About Derek Mowbray BA., MSc., MSc(Econ), PhD., DipPsych., CPsychol., CSci., FBPsS, FIHM., FISMA..

Derek Mowbray, founder and director of MAS, created the WellBeing and Performance Agenda, and Psychological Responsibility as frameworks to be used to transform organisations into ‘fabulous places to work’. He has devised programmes that cover the whole agenda, as well as workshops, awareness sessions and Guides for each step along the way.

Derek is an Organisation Health Psychologist and a Chartered Scientist with a doctorate in leadership, with previous and current experience of leading large and small organisations. Everything he writes he has applied in practice.

Dr Mowbray was previously a visiting Professor in Psychology at two UK Universities and a chief executive in three NHS organisations as well as a director in his own businesses. He was a Principal Consultant with Tribal for a while.

Derek Mowbray acts as a consultant, facilitator, coach, advisor and is well known as a motivational speaker who is passionate about his work with organisations to make them psychologically safe and high performing. His analytical skills in organisations have left clients in awe of his accurate assessments of the underlying causes of their distress.

Derek Mowbray leads a team of psychologists and an expert in mindfulness. His work is adapted into practice throughout the world.
Our Products:

**Personal Resilience ELearning**

**Derek Mowbray’s Guides** – innovative, practical resources
The Guide to the WellBeing and Performance Agenda
The Guide to Corporate Resilience
The Guide to Adaptive Leadership
The Guide to Psychological Responsibility
The Guide to The Manager’s Role in Resilience
The Guide to Personal Resilience
The Guide to the Manager’s Role in Stress Prevention
The Guide to Team Resilience
The Guide to Transforming Managers

Our Guides are available to purchase from [http://www.mas.org.uk/publications.html](http://www.mas.org.uk/publications.html)

**Our Questionnaires** – available for use under licence

‘Just how fabulous a manager are you?’
Quick Leadership Assessment Q (a mini 360° instrument)
The Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire
Emotional Intelligence
Behaviour Assessment Questionnaire
The Ethical Questionnaire
Organisational Cultural Assessment
Cultural Values Questionnaire
Corporate Values Questionnaire
Intelligent Behaviour@Work Questionnaire
The Wellbeing and Performance @ Work Questionnaire
Psychological Responsibility@Work Questionnaire
The Personal Values Questionnaire
The Values and Beliefs Questionnaire
The Resilience Assessment Questionnaire (RAQ 40)

**Tips Booklets** – extensive range of high quality tips booklets which make great giveaways to accompany wellbeing initiatives. These could be branded for your organisation.

Tips for Strengthening Personal Resilience
Tips for Personal Resilience
Tips for Managing Pressure and Preventing Stress
Tips for Taking Psychological Responsibility

For details about our products and services, email [barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk](mailto:barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk) or call 01242 241882