



SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE

Guidance for HR
professionals

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Guide

Supporting employee resilience: guidance for HR professionals

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1 Introduction

Resilience is regularly mentioned as a source of business advantage and individual wellbeing, so it is important to understand what the term means and how HR can boost employee resilience. This guide will help you consider what you need to do to support your employees and organisation to be more resilient.

What is resilience?

Resilience is an individual's ability to recover from or stay well in the face of adversity. In a work setting, this translates into an employee having *'the capacity to thrive, rather than just survive, in high stress environments'* (see [CIPD research](#) for more detail). So, resilience helps employees adapt, cope, and respond positively to stressors in the workplace.

Resilience can also be viewed at an organisational level, where it includes not only the individuals within the organisation, but also the processes and culture those individuals work with/in. Organisational resilience looks at how well the organisation can 'weather the storm' or adapt to the challenges it faces.

Individual resilience is a mixture of a relatively stable personal attribute and a variable psychological state that is affected by the situation someone is in. Some people will naturally be more resilient than others, but the onus must not simply be put on employees to 'toughen up' and 'be' resilient. The context in which people are working, their colleagues, work content, working environment, and organisational factors will all affect their resilience. This means that individual resilience needs to be considered within the context of team and organisational resilience. Employers have responsibility to support resilience and mitigate mental health risks through preventative measures, such as managing work demands, providing autonomy and voice, and providing a supportive culture. It's not about just training employees to withstand unhealthy work conditions.

Why is resilience important?

In the context of the challenging world of work, the ability of employees to cope with adversity and display resilience is essential to individual, team and organisational success and even survival. Resilience helps employees protect and regain their personal resources at work, which in turn protects them from problems like psychological distress, emotional exhaustion and burnout. [Research](#) shows that individual resilience is linked not just to employees' wellbeing and ability to deal with stress, but also their capacity to be proactive and creative at work, their performance on work tasks and the role they play in the organisation. It is also linked to their engagement with and commitment to their work and employer. As an HR professional, you will reap considerable benefits from supporting employees in your organisation to be resilient, both because there will be fewer people management issues to deal with and because you will have a better-performing, more creative and thriving workforce.

What is the role of HR in supporting resilience?

As an HR professional, you play an important role in supporting resilience at both individual and organisational levels. This will include:

- planning resilience interventions
- supporting line managers to boost resilience in their teams
- providing training to support individual resilience.

This guide provides advice and top tips to help you fulfil your role in each of these areas.

2 Planning resilience interventions

Consider when and whether resilience interventions would add value

Before embarking on building resilience, it is important to determine whether resilience is the best approach for your workforce and organisation at this point in time. You will need to consider your organisation's available resources: appropriate resources will be key to sustaining adaptability and to changing behaviours. There is a risk of 'unintended harm' if the intervention actually increases the demands on employees, for example, expecting people to undertake resilience interventions on top of an already high workload. Having genuine senior management buy-in will be essential to ensure you have the resources needed to run effective interventions.

Address resilience at both individual and organisational levels

There is a wide range of resilience interventions available, most of which focus on building individual resilience. It is important not to see resilience as a way of getting employees to 'toughen up' in order to withstand ever greater demands and challenges at work. So, when choosing interventions, look at addressing resilience at individual, group, leadership and organisational level.

Individual-level interventions can be categorised into three types:

1 Addressing personality/individual characteristics (for example, cognitive behavioural approaches, mindfulness and self-efficacy training)	2 Addressing the environment (for example, helping individuals explore and manage job demands)	3 Addressing person-environment interaction (for example, providing resilience training that looks at both individual and environmental aspects and how these interact)
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Group, leadership and organisational-level interventions can help build resilience in employees, by creating the conditions in which individuals are enabled to be resilient. They can also address organisational resilience. They tend to focus on one of the following four areas:

1 Leadership development (for example, supporting and developing managers in relevant leadership capabilities, helping them to manage wellbeing and prevent/manage stress in their team)	2 Job design (for example, taking a risk management approach to look at factors that can cause work-related stress, reviewing critical incidents)	3 Organisational culture and structure (for example, HR strategies that foster positive psychological contracts, organisation development and culture change interventions)	4 Systemic/external environment (for example, business continuity measures)
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Start small, monitor and ‘course correct’ before rolling out more widely

To ensure that a resilience intervention will have the intended benefits – and not cause unintended harm – it is advisable to start with small-scale, simple interventions that you monitor carefully and adjust according to how they are working on the ground. Organisations are complex adaptive systems that are constantly changing in response to internal and external influences, so it is important to consider how your chosen approach to resilience will allow for complex adaptation across different parts of the organisation (see Part 2 of [this report](#) and this [World Health Organization note](#) for more information).

Look to integrate resilience interventions with other relevant activities

Resilience interventions are less likely to succeed if they are viewed as a stand-alone initiative, so it is worth exploring how to integrate and align them with other activities. For example, many of the resilience interventions available use approaches that closely mirror stress management interventions, so linking any resilience initiatives with your existing or planned stress management may be helpful. Building resilience through good leadership and management needs to be integrated and aligned with existing leadership and management development programmes. Resilience considerations also need to be integrated into wider organisational interventions around culture, structure and business continuity.

3 Supporting line managers to boost resilience in their teams

Help line managers recognise they have a vital role to play

The [CIPD evidence review](#) makes it clear that people managers – including senior and line managers – play a crucial role in influencing employee resilience. It is important that line managers recognise this and understand the benefit to them of supporting their team to be resilient. This will help them be motivated to play their part in building individual, team and organisational resilience. You can point line managers to the [CIPD guide for line managers](#) on supporting employee resilience to help explain this.

Support line managers to explore the aspects of their management style and behaviour that will influence resilience in their team

The [CIPD evidence review](#) shows that line manager behaviour will influence the resilience of their team members – individually and as a team – in two ways:

- 1 Through the direct impact of their behaviour on their team – the top priority here is their capacity to develop high-quality relationships with their team members. It is also about their management behaviour more broadly, including how they set goals, celebrate success, coach their team, help create a supportive environment, and ensure that people know what to expect.
- 2 Through the way their approach supports employees with other factors that are linked to resilience – including employees’ confidence, optimism, sense of coherence and level of social support.

The [CIPD guide for line managers](#) on supporting employee resilience provides details of the key manager behavioural areas that are important for building and maintaining their team’s resilience. It also provides links to the broader package of [CIPD line manager support materials](#) designed to help line managers adopt a management approach that supports good health, wellbeing and engagement.

Provide coaching, learning opportunities and support

The management behaviours that support resilience and wellbeing in employees are essentially part of general good management and leadership. So, building individual resilience in your workforce is partly about ensuring that your managers are good at leading and managing their teams, and providing effective leadership and management development to boost their capability. Management development is most likely to be successful when it includes a range of methods and is regarded as a process that unfolds over time, so it will be helpful to set up a range of support mechanisms to help line managers develop – for example, coaching and/or mentoring, action learning groups, development workshops or webinars to address specific development needs. You can also offer individual support with anything that managers find challenging or confusing. The [CIPD line manager support materials](#) provide further information on how to support managers with developing management and leadership capability.

4 Providing training to support individual resilience

Ensure training is evidence-based and grounded in experiential learning

The [CIPD evidence review](#) concluded that interventions aimed at enhancing individual resilience have a positive effect. The interventions that have been tested in this research were mostly workshops or training involving techniques to develop self-awareness, critical reflection, relaxation and mindfulness. Most of the programmes studied drew on the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which include developing the capacity to identify our ways of thinking and improving resilience and wellbeing through changing the way we think and behave. The evidence suggests that interventions based on cognitive behavioural techniques and psychological capital tended to have slightly greater effects than other types of intervention (such as stress management). It also suggests that mixed interventions that include a range of techniques have somewhat greater effects. So, when looking at potential training providers or programmes, explore what techniques they include and what evidence base they have been developed from.

Combine training programmes with related learning practices

The [CIPD evidence review](#) also found that factors such as delivery, facilitation and implementation influence the effectiveness of training interventions. The interventions showing effective outcomes were those that combined workshops or training with related learning and development practices, such as goal-setting, coaching and small group discussions. One-to-one and small face-to-face programmes tended to have stronger effects than classroom and computer-based programmes. When designing your programme, it is worth considering how to build in these supportive practices and create individualised and/or small group learning and development opportunities.

Learning programmes should be relatively intensive

The [CIPD evidence review](#) also suggests that interventions with long sessions and more sessions over a short period are more likely to have a sustained effect, for example, 8–12 sessions over four or five weeks. Do ensure that the intensity of the programme is balanced with the resources available and employees' capacity to dedicate time to it.

5 Useful resources

Resilience:

[CIPD podcast](#)

[CIPD evidence review on employee resilience](#)

[BITC report](#)

[Affinity Health Hub](#)



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