Building Your Resilience

Using a Range of Strategies to Cope
Building your levels of resilience is important for helping you feel good at work. The key to maintaining your resilience during times of challenge and difficulty at work is adaptability in your coping styles.

It is important to note that different approaches work in different situations, dangers comes when we over rely on a single approach as it is not likely to support your wellbeing in the long term. This is because inevitably there will be time where you meet a challenging situation that means your chosen approach is not available and you then risk becoming stressed.

Explore each of the four areas below and understand how they can help to build your resilience.

- **Confidence** - While some of us may feel more uncomfortable than others in talking about our strengths, we all have them! Good levels of understanding of our natural strengths and capacity to cope creates a bedrock of comfort that we can deal with whatever challenges we encounter.

- **Social Support** - Research suggests that people who have supportive social networks choose more active coping strategies for dealing with stressful situations. An active coping strategy means that individuals manage their reaction to, and actions in the face of, the challenges they face. Social support also opens up additional resources in terms of input and practical help.
• **Adaptability** - Adaptability is a personal quality that's important in coping with ambiguity, dealing with uncertainty and change. It allows us to be able to adjust to different situations and think through the consequences in a logical way, rather than subjecting our bodies to the negative impact of a chemical response (preparing for fight or flight) because we perceive changes as threat rather than opportunity.

• **Purposefulness** – Creating a focus and a sense of purpose in our lives overall is important for our resilience; it helps us to put things into perspective when they get difficult. On a more day-to-day level, it is also very important to find a sense of purpose at work and to identify with the goals and objectives of our job.

Here you can learn about different coping styles and develop a broad range of coping strategies:

1. **Building Your Confidence**
   Confidence is multidimensional – we can be more confident in some ways and less so in others. For example, you can be very socially confident in dealing with others, yet be less confident in your own skills and abilities and vice versa. Or it may be that you're ready and willing to take the lead when you need to but when you think there's a chance of creating conflict, you back down too easily.

   Different aspects of confidence can include the following:

   • **Positive emotions** – e.g. how often do you experience strong feelings of happiness, joy and enthusiasm?

   • **Confidence in your accomplishments** – e.g. are you proud of your achievements?

   • **Confidence in your own abilities** – e.g. to what extent do you feel competent and capable?

   • **Social confidence** – e.g. how comfortable are you in dealing with others, particularly those you don't know very well?

   • **Dealing with conflict** – e.g. are you confident in standing your ground even if it will cause conflict?

   • **Anxiety** – e.g. to what extent do you worry about things going wrong?

   • **Negative emotions** – e.g. how often do you feel downhearted or discouraged?

   • **Dealing with stress** – e.g. how confident are you in your ability to cope with potentially stressful situations?
Exercise: Building Confidence

Personal Reflection
Does your natural approach to work help you naturally use confidence in yourself as a coping strategy?

Consider the questions below:

- Do you critically evaluate your own work, always seeking to identify ways to improve?
- Do you celebrate success of work completed, or quickly focus on your next priority?
- Are you comfortable telling others about your strengths and achievements?
- Do you worry about your ability to meet unexpected demands, or are you comfortable to react to things as you encounter them?

Identifying your Signature strengths
A brand you like and think reflects your values and personality is:

The characteristics you like about that brand are:

Reflect on those characteristics. How could they be translated to describe you?

What are your Signature Strengths?
1.
2.
3.
2. Building Your Social Support
We all need people around us – at least some of the time – and the positive effects of social support have been widely studied and shown to buffer against the effects of stress.

Researchers have looked at what is meant by 'social support' and have found that we can receive support in various different ways.

One approach breaks social support down into the following types:

- **Emotional support** - offering reassurance, expressing love, listening in an understanding way, showing concern. For example, giving a friend a hug or your partner a kiss.

- **Esteem support** – showing encouragement, respect and confidence that builds another’s self-confidence. For example, praising a colleague when they've done a good job.

- **Network support** – the perception that others are available, willing, and able to help; the feelings of social connection which come from the expressions of others that give us a sense of belonging. For example, inviting someone to a party.

- **Tangible support** – the provision of material assistance to help (goods, services etc). For example, helping a colleague on a project to lighten their workload.

- **Informational support** – providing facts, advice, and different perspectives about a situation of concern. For example, advising a junior colleague on how to approach a task.

It’s important to remember that not all of these types of support will actually be helpful in all situations. For example, too much informational support (e.g. unwanted advice) can have a negative effect when emotional or esteem support is actually what you want.

We get these various types of support from different sources such as our friends, family, partners, or professional groups and organisations. A key point here is that different sources will be more important than others for different people. For example, some people will draw more support from their friends while others will get most support from their spouse or partner.
### Personal Reflection
Does your natural approach to work help you instinctively use social support as a coping strategy?

Consider the questions below:

- Are you more reserved and distant in your manner towards others or are you usually more warm and friendly?
- Are you very outgoing or do you prefer to rely on a small number of people?
- Do you readily trust others’ intentions or do you tend to be more sceptical and cautious?
- Do you tend to be guarded in what you share with others, or are you generally open and sincere?

### Exercise: Building Social Support
A first step in building social support is to develop a clear understanding of the resources you have in this area. We can have a tendency to forget the people we have available to support and help us. Mapping your support network is an important first step to considering where you can access this from and provides a good basis for considering whether you need to create new links. Below we provide a space for you to plot all the people you have in your support network. Write down the names of everyone you can think of. Then consider how support flows between you and draw arrows to represent. Not all the arrows will be the same for example do you have a friend/colleague who you give support to but not ask for it from? Also think about amount of support provided, make the line thicker/darker depending on support levels.
3. Building Adaptability

We all face change frequently – whether it’s at work or in our personal lives – and these changes can range from the small (e.g. moving desk) to the large (e.g. getting a new line manager). To cope with these changes successfully, we need to adapt to the new situations in a constructive way.

Have a look at on each of the defining statements below for a more detailed description. There may be one or two areas that you think you have difficulty with – and the detailed description could help you pin down what’s acting as a blocker to your ability to use this strategy:

- **Handling crises and emergencies;** Reacting with appropriate and proper urgency in life threatening, dangerous, or emergency situations; maintaining emotional control and objectivity while keeping focused on the situation at hand; stepping up to take action and handle danger or emergencies as necessary and appropriate.

- **Dealing with work stress;** Remaining composed and cool when faced with difficult circumstances or a highly demanding workload/schedule; not overreacting to unexpected news or situations.

- **Solving problems creatively;** Thinking outside the given parameters to see if there’s a more effective approach; developing innovative methods using resources when insufficient resources are available to do the job.

- **Dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations;** Taking effective action when necessary without having to know the total picture or have all the facts at hand; readily and easily changing gears in response to unpredictable or unexpected events and circumstances.

**Personal Reflection**

Does your natural approach to work help you to think positively and constructively in the face of setbacks and pressure? Consider the questions below:

- Do feelings of irritability and impatience make it difficult for you to deal with everyday frustrations, or are you more calm and patient?
- Are you able to exercise self-control to respond in a constructive, adaptable way or do tend to give in to your impulses too easily?
- Do you prefer to stick to what you know and tried-and-tested methods or do you naturally prefer variety and trying new approaches?

Different aspects can affect our adaptability. For example, our thinking patterns can affect how capable we feel to deal with new and uncertain situations.

The ability to consider an alternative scenario with an alternative set of beliefs and attitudes can help you to ‘reframe’ challenges and pressures and as such reduce their negative impact you.

If you were responding to career or job changes (an external event) our focus is the “outside world”. We commonly don’t consciously think about our “internal world” or, even less, consider how the two are connected.
At the core of building resilience is the need to recognise that our own beliefs and attitudes are fundamental to our resilience and to build our resilience we each need to understand the relationship between the "external world" and our "internal world".

**The ABC Model**

**A = Adversity** - at an interview you were answering a question and became “tongue tied” and became very flustered.

**B = Beliefs** - I have lost my credibility, I’m making myself look a fool, people won’t respect me after this fiasco.

**C = Consequences** (emotional or thinking) - internally you felt a combination of embarrassment, anger and anxiety whilst externally you blushed and smiled weakly so as to hide your emotions and nervously continued with little confidence or conviction.

You might argue that this is a perfectly normal, appropriate, unavoidable and perfectly understandable response to an adverse situation. However, you have choices and those choices are about your level of resilience.

The source of your choices and your resilience in the face of adversity lie in the “B” of the “ABC” model, namely your “Beliefs” which unconsciously drive your responses and the consequences.

Now consider an alternative view:

**A = Adversity** - At an interview you were answering a question and became “tongue tied” and became very flustered.

**B = Beliefs** - I hate being tongue tied but I’m determined to keep going as this is an opportunity for me to improve my interview skills and learn how to manage a situation when under pressure. This is giving me useful practice.

**C = Consequences** (emotional or thinking) - different emotional and behavioural responses to the same situation:

- Emotionally - a bit annoyed and miffed at the blunder, but also determination and satisfaction that I am learning and improving
- Behaviourally - stand quietly, neither embarrassed nor blushing, and continue confidently and enthusiastically

The dramatically different set of emotional and behavioural consequences are the direct result of a different set of “beliefs and attitudes” towards the situation.

Similarly, by becoming more self-aware of your past “beliefs and attitudes” to adverse or challenging situations, you have choices in the future as to how you react and can change the resultant emotional and behavioural consequences.

The result of doing so will be to increase your resilience to adverse or difficult situations and genuinely enable you to positively manage change and be significantly more in control of your destiny.
**Exercise: Building Adaptability**

Below you will find an “ABC Model” grid for completion and sharing with a view to considering alternative “beliefs and attitudes”.

Think of a situation where you felt you could have handled the situation differently.
- Jot down in the left hand column, the situation (adversity), what your past belief was at the time, and the consequences.
- Now move to the right hand column and write down the same situation (adversity).
- Now identify what your alternative future beliefs could be and what the consequences would be of changing your beliefs.

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<th>ABC Model</th>
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<th>Past Consequences (Emotional and Behavioural)</th>
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3. Building Purposefulness

We all want to feel good – imagine how you would feel being on holiday, relaxed, your favourite food and drink to hand, watching the waves in the ocean... feeling pretty good? How good would it feel after being sat there all day? Maybe still pretty good. What about after a week, a month, or a year? As much as you might hate to admit it, experiencing this same pleasurable situation will gradually become less enjoyable over time and not produce the same initial positive emotions. What's missing here? Purpose. Beyond feeling good, we need to find purpose in what we do.

A strong sense of purpose can be thought of as a set of core beliefs that are not easily broken and can help you find meaning in the face of adversity. Achieving a sense of purpose in our lives overall is important for our resilience; it helps us to hold on to something when things get difficult.

At a more day-to-day level, it is also very important to find a sense of purpose at work and to identify with the goals and objectives of our job. Those who are successful will use a number of the methods below related to goal setting. They will:

- set goals which are specific, observable and measurable;
- clearly identify the time constraints;
- set moderately difficult goals – challenging, but not impossible to achieve;
- write the goals down and regularly monitor progress;
- use short-term goals to achieve long-term ones;
- ensure goals are internalized – they will accept and feel in control of their goals;
- consider their personality in goal setting, e.g. a preference for competition, or working slowly towards a target;
- set positive goals as opposed to negative goals (e.g. I will do …, rather than I will not do …);
- identify a goal-achievement strategy – they will consider how they will actually work towards achieving their goals;
- discuss goals with at least one other person;
- seek support in achieving their goals from others, e.g. friends or colleagues.

Consider which of these methods do you think you already use. Do you have any goals or objectives that you think you should look at again after reading these suggestions?

Personal Reflection

*Your i-resilience report you will give you some idea as to how your personality will help you to tailor your goals to ensure that they are more likely to be achieved?*

- Do you prefer others to do the talking and take the lead, or are you more assertive?
- Do you prefer a slow and steady pace or a fast pace?
- How much emphasis do you place on striving to achieve results and objectives?
- Are you hasty or cautious in making decisions?
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Exercise: Building Purposefulness
Developing your own sense of purpose and clarity of direction and priorities is a very personal activity. If you were to consider 3 people in the same team who seem motivated and energised at work, their reasons for this may be very diverse:

For one they may have a desire to provide a service or support to particular group, another may be focused on how their performance at work and the characteristics of their job enables them to have flexibility or fund activities that truly energise them such as specific hobbies or time with family and the other may focus on specific career attainment or goals.

No one view is better than the other - this exercise is designed to help you focus on what is important to you.
Spending some time considering these questions, especially those that you feel are most important to you, should help you in establishing what you value most and find a sense of purpose in.

Take a moment to read through the questions:

- What do I believe in so much that I am willing to take a stand on – no matter what the cost?
- What would a 'perfect' world look like?
- How do I want to contribute to my world?
- What do I need to feel free and healthy?
- What do I want to learn?
- What brings joy to my life?
- What aspect of life/work energises and excites me?
- The thirty things I want to do before I die are.

My Sense of Purpose
Consider your reflections on the question above and use that to identify the top 3 points you think will support your ability to create a clarity of purpose within your own life. It may be that the questions above do not stimulate your thinking in the area. Other ways to consider what is truly important to you include:

- Imagine yourself waking up in 10 years, think through your morning routine, where are you? Who are you with? What clothes are you wearing? How do you feel about the day ahead? What are you going to do with your day?

My top 3 priorities for life and work are: