

# The eight steps to resilience at work

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March 2010

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## Introduction

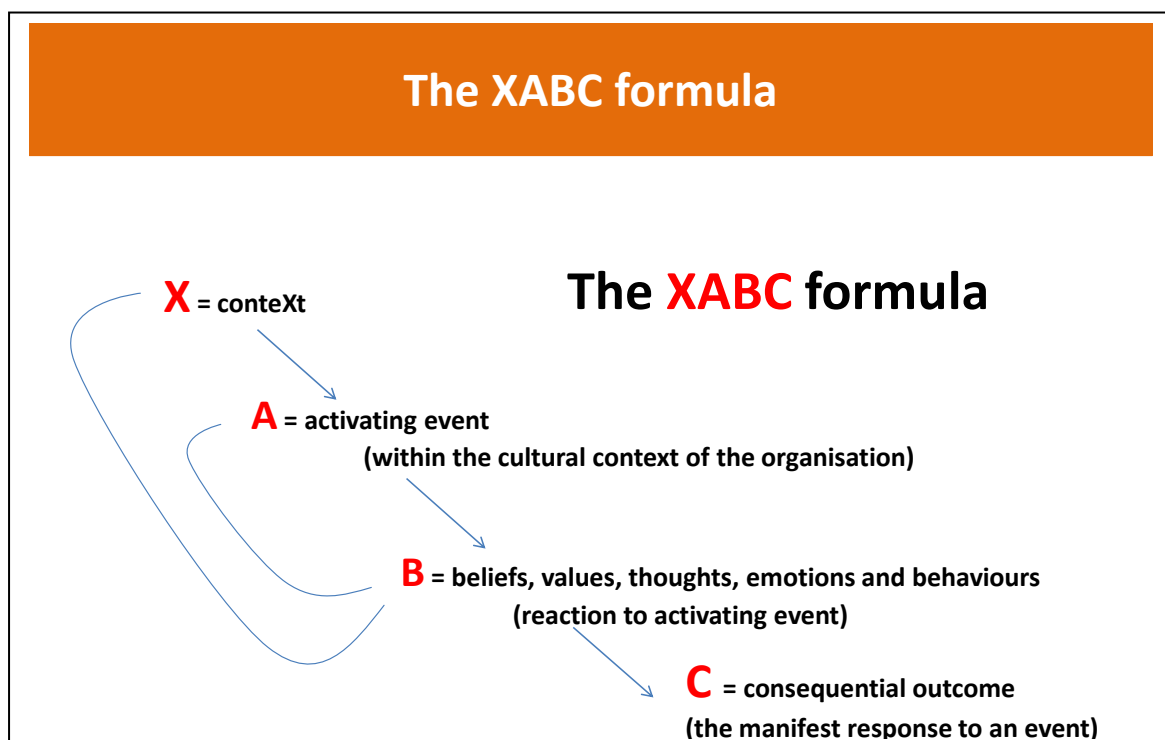
Resilience is the personal capacity to cope with adverse events and return to normal life – normal being idiosyncratic and perceived differently by everyone.

Resilience is also the determination to see something through to its conclusion, even in the face of significant pressures to do something else or give up. The conclusion might be reached some time away or almost immediately depending how far the person is along the pathway towards the conclusion.

Resilience is a psychological feature that contributes towards the prevention of the damaging effects of psychological distress; resilient people are able to cope better with adverse events than people with little resilience. The impact on the costs of psychological distress is, also, significant, in that a resilient workforce is less prone to the costs of sickness absence, staff turnover and presenteeism.

## Where resilience fits in

To understand where resilience fits into our working lives it is necessary to explain how we respond to ordinary, everyday events and activities. This can be explained by referring to the XABC formula.



In this formula X = the context in which we work. This includes the type of work we are doing, the type of business or service we are engaged in, the culture of the organisation and the current status of the organisation – whether it's trying to save costs, or expanding, for example.

A = the activating event. This can be anything, from a conversation, to an accident, or act of friendship, to witnessing a crime. In the main events cannot be changed. They happen or have happened. They might be prevented, however.

B = are our beliefs, thoughts, emotions and behaviours that predispose our immediate reaction to an event. If our belief is that infidelity is wrong our reaction to reading about affairs of well known people may be hostile. If our emotions include anger we may be angry at hearing about an affair.

C = the behavioural consequences arising from our immediate reaction to A.

Our immediate reaction to A will also be influenced by the context within which A takes place. In a small, informal workplace where we know everyone else, if someone is rude (A) we may simply tell them to stop being rude. If, however, we work in a large formal organisation with plenty of procedures and policies that aim to control our behaviour we may decide to report the rude person and hope someone else will tell the rude person not to be rude. We may do this because we don't know everyone else well enough to talk directly to them. We may feel inhibited by the consequences of talking directly to someone about their rudeness because of the 'status' of the rude person. We may not feel assertive or resilient enough to talk directly to the person concerned taking everything about the context of the rudeness into account. We may not wish to expose ourselves and demonstrate this by showing behaviour that seemingly condones the rudeness, reinforcing the belief in the rude person that rudeness is OK.

Resilience fits into B – our beliefs, thoughts, emotions and immediate behaviour. If these personal characteristics are developed in known ways of building personal resilience we stand a greater chance of being both determined and more flexible in reacting to events at A.

## **Threats to wellbeing at work – the context and activating events**

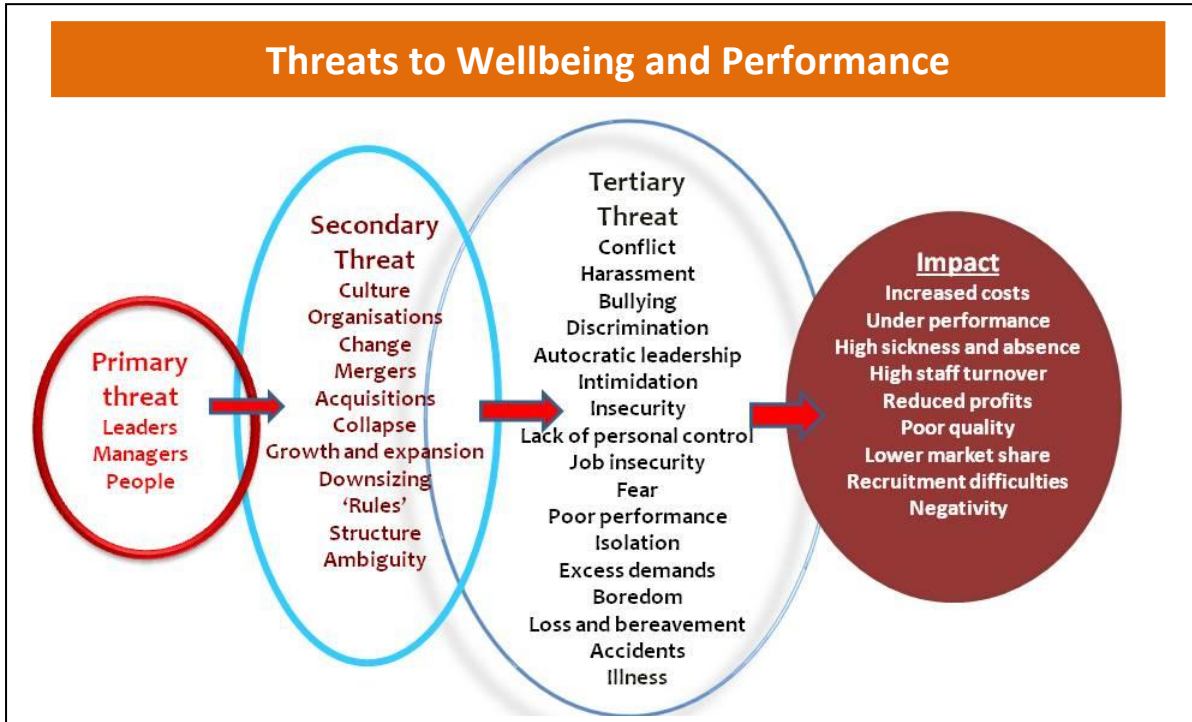
There are three types of threat to the wellbeing of people at work.

The principal threat is ourselves. Almost all reactive psychological distress has a root cause in either ourselves or someone else. As the workplace is a controlled community, the controllers have a very forceful role in our wellbeing, not only in the demands they may place on individual workers, but the manner in which they behave towards the worker and the workforce as a whole.

The second level threat is events that are mainly organisationally inspired. These include the type of organisational culture, the events that may affect the organisation, such as mergers and acquisitions, and the structures and rules of the organisation that may run counter to promoting wellbeing at work.

The third level threat arises from events taking place within the organisation, such as bullying, harassment, excessive demands, boredom, bereavement and intimidation.

The focus for building resilience seeks to equip individuals to cope effectively with people, events caused by the organisation or workplace, and the events that occur within the organisation.



## Building resilience

In our model of resilience there are 8 features that build and sustain resilience.

1. **Self Efficacy.** This involves a high level of self confidence and a self belief that one can meet any challenge. Self Efficacy includes the understanding that, while the world is challenging, one has the ability to succeed despite these challenges.
2. **Personal Vision.** Resilient people know what they believe in and have a clear idea of what they want to accomplish or create in their life. With a personal vision, however blurred this may be, people use this as a guide through life challenges, and provides them with hope for the future.
3. **Flexible and Adaptable.** Being adaptable and flexible enables people to respond flexibly to unknown challenges by seeking out ways of overcoming events, and being able to adapt to the new reality. This reduces the impact of rigidity in the face of a constantly changing environment.
4. **Organised.** Creating a structured approach to tasks that need completing add to individual ability to maintain personal control in the face of a seemingly chaotic existence, or uncontrollable external events.
5. **Problem Solving.** The ability to resolve problems enables people to find causes and solutions to adverse events that impinge on daily life. Those who train themselves to enjoy problem solving will enjoy the challenge that adverse events present.

6. Interpersonal Interaction. A key dimension of resilience is an individual's ability to understand and empathise with others. Resilient people demonstrate the competencies of emotional intelligence: a high level of self and social awareness and the ability to use this awareness to effectively management themselves and their relationships with others.

7. Social Connections. This dimension involves the quality of personal and professional relationships. Resilient people have a strong relationship with selected friends with whom they share ideas, problems, solutions, frustrations, hopes, and so forth.

8. Active. Resilient people actively engage in change. Faced with adverse events, resilient people will be assertive in stating their contribution to the changing situation and will maintain personal control through their assertiveness and maintenance of self efficacy.



### Resilience Assessment questionnaire

People wishing to build their personal resilience should first establish the areas where they need to concentrate. This can be achieved by completing a questionnaire based on the model above and is reproduced below.

Please read the statements below, and using the scale strongly disagree to strongly agree (1 – 5) indicate how the statement applies to your perception of yourself.

1	I have the knowledge and skills and experience to deal with almost anything that happens to me	1	2	3	4	5
2	I know what's important to me	1	2	3	4	5
3	I approach new situations with an open mind	1	2	3	4	5
4	When faced with new challenges, I am able to take control of the situation.	1	2	3	4	5
5	When I have a problem, I take time to define the problem before deciding what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have the capacity to laugh at myself.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I have a diverse network of good friends	1	2	3	4	5
8	I view change as an opportunity	1	2	3	4	5
9	I am able to think positively about myself when faced with challenges	1	2	3	4	5
10	When I look back I can see some clear patterns in my life about the types of choices I have made	1	2	3	4	5
11	I am able to adjust to changes	1	2	3	4	5
12	I start each day by working out what needs to be achieved during the day, and I end the day by reviewing what has been achieved, and what needs to be achieved on the next day	1	2	3	4	5
13	I perceive the problems and challenges of everyday life as challenges I can solve	1	2	3	4	5
14	I can empathise easily with others' frustrations, joys, misfortunes and successes	1	2	3	4	5
15	I find it easy to form lasting relationships and friendships	1	2	3	4	5
16	When an unwelcome change involves me I can usually find a way to make the change benefit myself	1	2	3	4	5
17	When I face difficult challenges I can maintain confidence in my own ability to overcome the challenges	1	2	3	4	5
18	I know what I want to achieve at work and in life	1	2	3	4	5
19	I can easily find ways of satisfying my own and other peoples' needs during times of change and conflict	1	2	3	4	5
20	I keep a 'to do' list, and use it every day	1	2	3	4	5
21	I try to find the cause of a problem before trying to solve it	1	2	3	4	5
22	During stressful and challenging times I can maintain effective relationships with those involved	1	2	3	4	5
23	I share the frustrations in life, as well as the successes, with my friends	1	2	3	4	5
24	I am able to focus my energy on how to make the best of any situation	1	2	3	4	5
25	When I face challenges I look to myself to find ways of rising to the challenge	1	2	3	4	5
26	I know what I need to do to achieve my ideas for personal and professional achievements	1	2	3	4	5
27	I am able to accommodate other people's needs whilst focusing on achieving my own ambitions	1	2	3	4	5
28	When I am uncertain about what to do I write down the choices and my thought about them	1	2	3	4	5
29	When I solve problems I identify the links between the problems and other issues that may be around	1	2	3	4	5
30	I value the diverse experiences, skills and knowledge that others have in their interactions with me	1	2	3	4	5
31	I regularly participate with friends in social activities where I can relax	1	2	3	4	5
32	I believe my own decisions and actions during periods of change will determine how I am affected by the change	1	2	3	4	5

Self efficacy	1	9	17	25	
Personal vision	2	10	18	26	
Flexible and adaptable	3	11	19	27	
Organised	4	12	20	28	
Problem solver	5	13	21	29	
Interpersonal interaction	6	14	22	30	
Social connections	7	15	23	31	
Active	8	16	24	32	
				Overall score	

People with scores of 12 or less in any dimension should consider focusing on building up resilience in that dimension.

### How to build personal resilience

There are a number of practical tools that exist to build personal resilience. These tools are best suited to processes, such as problem solving and building personal organisational ability.

Other dimensions require a combination of personal training and Cognitive Coaching to introduce alternative beliefs and thinking about adverse events.

Other dimensions require training in behaviours that promote successful interactions and the building of social connections.

### Conclusion

Personal resilience helps prevent the damaging effects of psychological distress at work.

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March 2010.