Building Employee Resilience During Crisis

Yala & Propel Consult

What is employee resilience?

Employee resilience
is the ability for individuals to continually adapt to, cope with, and recover from internal and external stressors

Resilience is dynamic and can be **strengthened over time** as employees successfully encounter new, unfamiliar situations

Cultivating resilience **requires the support and facilitation** of the organisation

Building resilience is a process that **starts from within** each individual employee

Responding to change and building resilience involves:

Reacting → Responding → Recovering

Dr. Na Fu says that resilience is a skill which can be developed over time. As employees encounter new, stressful experiences, they move through a three step process of reacting, responding, and recovering. The more opportunities employees have to move through change while being supported by their organisations, the more employees can strengthen their resilience.

Watch Na discuss the process of developing employee resilience:

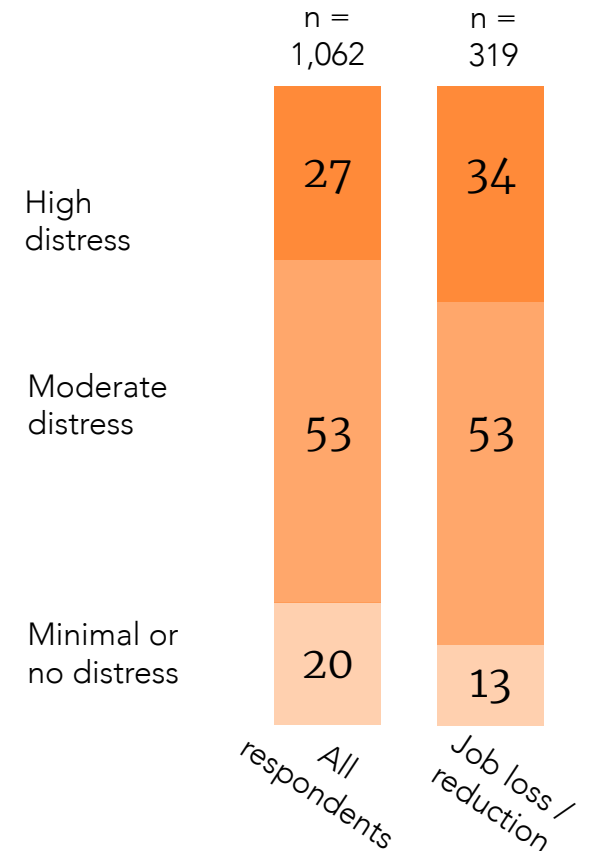Associate Professor, HRM
Trinity Business School

How is Covid-19 impacting employee wellbeing?

Prior to the pandemic, **70%** of Irish workers noted feeling stressed at work, and **4 in 10** said they were suffering from burnout

But now, COVID-19 brings a new set of challenges to employees as they balance working from home, new family dynamics, health concerns, and insecure labour markets.

Increasingly, workers are reporting high levels of COVID-19 related stress, especially when facing job loss or redundancy
% of respondents

	n = 1,062	n = 319
High distress	27	34
Moderate distress	53	53
Minimal or no distress	20	13
	All respondents	Job loss / reduction

How do leaders respond to crisis & change?

While the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event, **we can learn from how organisations have responded to other crises and workplace trends**, avoiding past mistakes

During moments of crisis, such as the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, organisations can fall prey to the threat-rigidity hypothesis, enacting inflexible policies and procedures meant to impose control over employees and processes as a means of minimizing the threat.

Leaders may also shift their leadership styles to be more directive, focusing on one-directional lines of communication and valuing employee output rather than employee input

Managers have been observed to compensate for a lack of visibility when leading employees who work from home, utilising increased surveillance capabilities and focusing on short-term, output targets

How can leaders support building employee resilience?

Leaders can usher employees through the phases of building resilience by creating a **psychologically safe work environment** for employees and returning to the idea that **resilience starts with the self**

1. **Remaining sensitive to employees' needs**. As employees continue to react and respond to the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape, organisations should ensure that they regularly survey and solicit feedback from employees

2. **Address stress and emotions directly**. Leaders should prioritise open and compassionate conversations and validate the emotional impact of the pandemic. Organisations can use this as an opportunity to show appreciation for how employees have managed this challenging experience.

Dr. Patrick Flood says, when encountering crises, psychological safety is key, and that employees need to have their voices heard.

Watch Patrick discuss enabling employee feedback:

Professor of Organisational Behaviour
Dublin City University

Supporting employee resilience requires organisations to:

3. **Honour change and new rituals.** The last few months have been marked with the development of new practices, rituals, and transitions. By celebrating these changes, leaders can establish psychological safety and acknowledged the hard work of employees.

4. **Embrace a new sense of purpose.** Organisations can capitalise on this moment to define and demonstrate a shared sense of purpose with their employees. As leaders communicate additional changes over the comings months, aligning these messages to the common purpose can help employees react and respond productively.

Chief Operating Officer
Broadlake

Brian Crowley says that exposing employees to new challenges in supportive environments helps individuals and organisations evolve and build resilience.
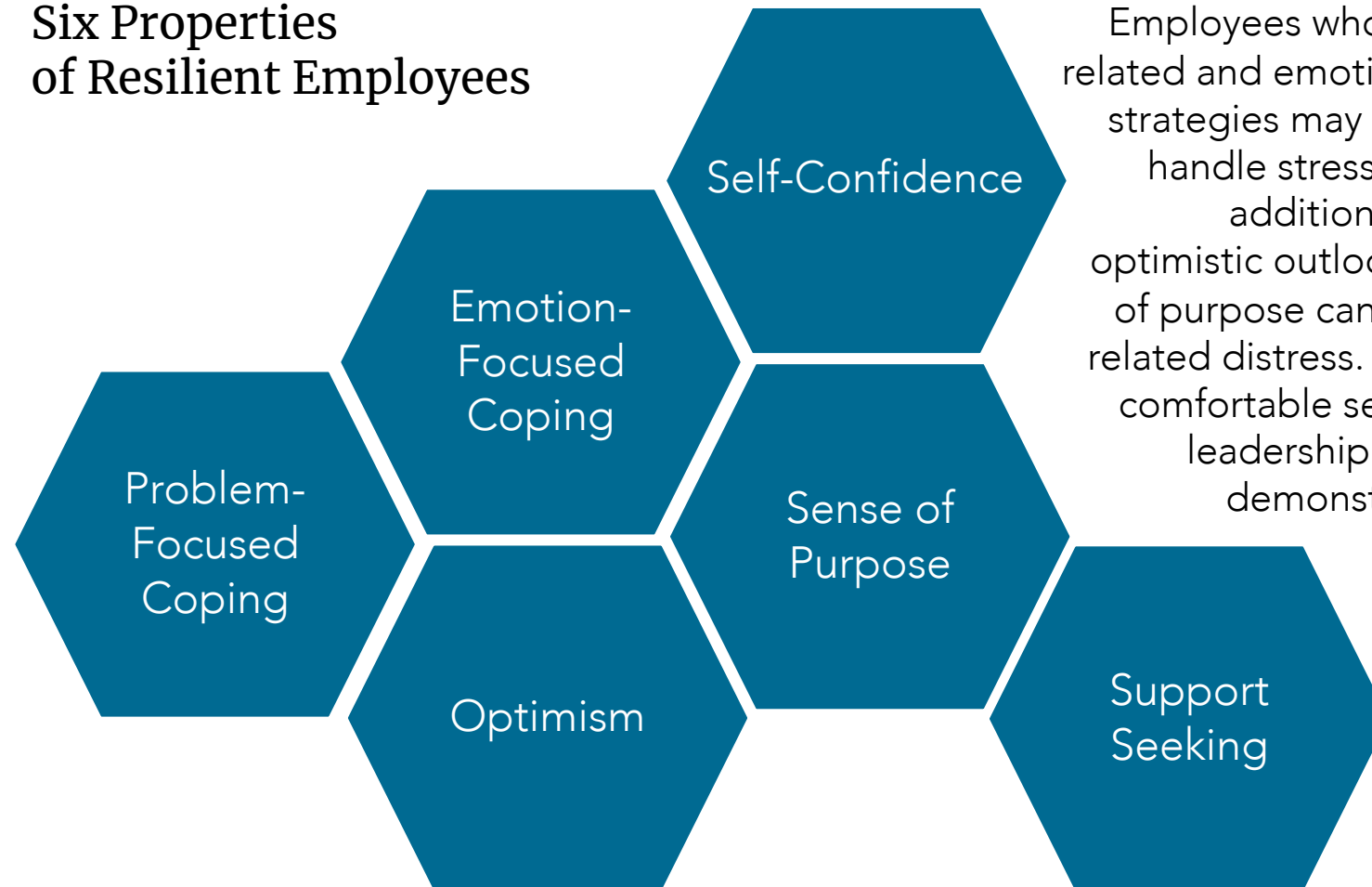
Watch Brian discuss building resilience capabilities during rapid change:

How can leaders identify resilience within employees?

As organisations continue to face new and unexpected challenges, the **ability to identify resilience within employees** will help leaders adapt their organisations to meet the rapid pace of change

Six Properties of Resilient Employees

Self-Confidence

Emotion-Focused Coping

Problem-Focused Coping

Sense of Purpose

Optimism

Support Seeking

Employees who demonstrate work-related and emotionally-aware coping strategies may be well equipped to handle stress in the workplace. In addition, self-confidence, an optimistic outlook, and strong sense of purpose can help mediate work-related distress. Employees who feel comfortable seeking out help from leadership and colleagues also demonstrate higher levels of resilience.

Organisations can use tools like the EmpRes scale to gauge resilience:

1. Can you tell me about a time you faced an unexpected challenge at work?
2. Can you tell me about a time when your workload was very high? How did you handle that?
3. Can you tell me about a time you had to resolve a crisis at work?
4. Can you tell me about a time you made a mistake at work? How did you handle that?
5. How do you know if you're performing well and meeting expectations at work?
6. Can you tell me about a time you received critical feedback at work? How did you respond?
7. What do you do when you feel stuck at work?
8. Can you tell me about a time you encountered change at work? How did you react to this change?

The EmpRes scale was developed in order to measure employee resilience and **hiring managers can use tools like these to assess candidate resilience during interviews and increase resilience in their organisations.**

What is employee resilience and how can organisations help foster resilience?

- Resilience is the ability for an individual to cope with and recover from stress

- While organisations and leaders can help facilitate building resiliency, it's ultimately an individual experience

- Leaders can seek to build psychological safety within their organisations by creating supportive environments in which stressful events can be overcome

- As organisations continue to respond to the rapid pace of change in the world, it will be important for leaders to identify resilience within their workforce

Yala and **Propel Consult** were both founded by Jamie Groom and Barry Prost. Jamie and Barry moved to Bahrain in 2008 and grew Propel to the largest agency in the Kingdom. In 2018, they expanded the business, under the Yala brand, back to Ireland to provide a monthly subscription, recruitment service encompassing employer branding for organisations in Ireland and internationally. Our bespoke recruitment process assistance service has been successfully employed by clients for public and private sector projects in Ireland and internationally.

About the Author

Christine Zdelar holds an MSc in Human Resources Management from Trinity College Dublin. Her research focuses on the employee experience during COVID-19.

For more information
visit yala.ie or propelconsult.com

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