

Chapter Title: BUILDING RESILIENCE IN TEAM MEMBERS

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CHAPTER 8: BUILDING RESILIENCE IN TEAM MEMBERS

Put well-being on the team agenda

In this chapter, we consider the importance of creating a healthy work environment and provide advice on how to do this.

To help build resilience, managers need to make a conscious effort to raise awareness of the need for well-being and resilience in the team and to continually communicate its importance.

This task is more difficult if the manager and the team are working remotely. The manager needs to prioritise regular communication with team members. For example, there could be increased one-to-ones and check-ins to see how things are going with individual team members both on a work and a personal level.

Each team member may have different preferences for the frequency and type of contact you have with them. Ask your team members how they would like to keep you up to date and to communicate with you.

Actions the manager can take to build team resilience

The manager can help the team build its resilience by:

- **Setting expectations** – being clear about roles and responsibilities, standards expected, objectives,

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deliverables and how these will be measured and monitored;

- **Developing a team charter** – setting ground rules with the team for how they will work together when everyone is not in the office all the time and having regular check-ins with the team about how things are going;
- **Organising training** – providing development opportunities for the team to increase their competence and confidence both in terms of skills and knowledge; and
- **Thanking the team and individual team members** – showing appreciation and highlighting achievements.

Regular two-way communication

When a team works at different times and is geographically dispersed, communication and spontaneous, informal discussion and creativity can suffer. Remote workers who never come into the office miss out on necessary connections and can be some of the least engaged employees.

Technology such as Skype, Messenger, WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams can facilitate communication and collaboration. For example, you can check in with team members each morning via a quick message on Messenger.

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Technology can help support virtual team meetings. However, in my experience this should supplement but not replace regular face-to-face meetings and spending time keeping people up to date. Regular team meetings are essential to create a sense of team cohesion.

As well as holding face-to-face team meetings where possible, ensure that one-to-ones with team members allow for physical contact as well as virtual.

Build the social element of work

People can feel isolated when they do not have regular contact with co-workers. The problem when people are in lockdown or geographically dispersed is that they miss the ‘coffee machine’ conversations and the chance to go to lunch with colleagues. Many people’s motivation to come to work involves social interaction.

When staff work remotely, managers should take steps to encourage informal conversations, talking about things other than work. Start a conversation for the sake of it and use icebreakers in team meetings to help people share life experiences. For example, ask people to say what their first pet was or their greatest achievement or their favourite holiday destination. By spending time on people, rather than tasks, managers can help build trust and confidence in the team.

It is also important to stay connected. Use informal communication tools like Messenger and WhatsApp to maintain the social element of work. However, as mentioned earlier, respect the boundaries between work and home life; don’t message or email outside office hours, or look at your work messages. It is helpful to establish

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with the team a communications charter where you agree email and social media etiquette, so everyone is aware of and agrees to the same set boundaries.

If you are holding a face-to-face monthly meeting, you could, for example, ask the team to bring in lunch to share afterwards. Invite people in the team to run a biannual optional social event. Hold away days with the team that include an element of fun and team interaction.

Encourage the team to share and collaborate around work and non-work topics. For example, they can tweet or post on Facebook images of team lunches, off-site events, conferences, evenings out and other fun or collaborative experiences. This helps people feel connected to the team.

My own team has a virtual ‘Fun Friday’ lunch every month. A different person organises the session each time. They host the virtual lunch and select a theme for the hour. The only constraint is that they must involve everyone where possible and make it fun. Our sessions have included a wide range of activities, from magic to a Mexican-themed lunch. The spirit of the hour is focused on strengthening social interaction among the team.

However, a personal learning is that not everyone in a team may want to engage in this type of social activity – and this is OK. It is helpful therefore to give people permission not to engage in work social activities as they may prefer to fulfil this need outside of the workplace.

The power of recognition

Acknowledge birthdays. People will appreciate that you took the time to get to know them on a deeper level and

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show appreciation for something other than submitting a project on time.

Recognise achievement and acknowledge someone specifically by name. Give them public praise for a job well done. Share team triumphs and successes.

Career development

Development is a powerful motivator, and most people want to be experts in what they do. Career progression can take many forms: deepening an existing skill set or learning a new skill for example, moving sideways in an organisation to another role of a similar status, undertaking an assignment or a project, moving to a higher-grade post.

Employees who choose to work remotely and have flexible working arrangements should still enjoy career progression. Managers need to be conscious not to be biased in favour of those people who are more physically present in the office. It is important to be fair and create personal development plans for all team members. There should not be a hierarchy of entitlement; everyone should have the opportunity to develop based on merit.

Highlight the importance of well-being

Pay particular attention to your team's stress levels, especially in times of change and uncertainty and if you have remote workers on your team. Isolation can aggravate a period of stress that may be alleviated easily with prompt support.

As a manager, watch out for signs such as a dip in performance – team members missing deadlines,

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producing poor-quality work and not reaching targets. Monitor the times of day that emails are being sent. Team members may work longer hours than contracted when they are under pressure or work remotely, and this can lead to stress and burnout.

Here is a list of tips and techniques you can use as a manager to help promote well-being:

- Arrange regular face-to-face meetings with team members – don't just rely on teleconferencing or videoconferencing. Seeing each other in person allows you to pick up on signs of excess pressure and stress, and can build closer bonds.
- If you do schedule catch-ups via phone, watch out for the other person's tone of voice and be aware of the impact your tone of voice can have on others.
- Encourage your team to undertake a workstation assessment when they work from home to check it is fit for purpose.
- Discuss with team members how they create work routines and set boundaries when working from home.
- Encourage the team to assess their own stress levels on a regular basis and talk about any issues as they arise.
- Ask each person what they would like most support with now.
- Include a well-being session in a team meeting and share tips about how to maintain a good work-life

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balance and techniques for switching off. (You can use some of the activities in this book to help.)

- If you see that someone is struggling, act quickly to offer support.
- Listen, show empathy and understanding, and explore practical solutions with the team member.
- Make sure your team know about any assistance available to them if they are feeling stressed, such as well-being training or employee assistance schemes.
- Ensure the team know that they have another outlet to discuss their issues/worries if they don't want to speak to the manager in this case: HR, other teams?

Team temperature checks

Remember to check in with your team to see how they are feeling as well as what they are doing.

As a consultant, I often work with teams to help facilitate a dialogue around resilience and well-being. Below is a short questionnaire I use to gauge levels of well-being and team morale. This can be completed anonymously by each team member. You then discuss the range of scores and agree resulting improvement actions.

It is useful to use the same team temperature check over time to see what progress, if any, is being made. For example, I facilitated a series of quarterly team meetings over a year with one team in a government department that was undergoing major structural change. The temperature check was a useful way to evaluate the well-being of the team as things changed.

Table 11: Temperature Check

Temperature check	
Please rate on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) your:	Score
Satisfaction with the current working arrangements	
Current perception of how well we operate as a team	
Current personal level of morale	
Current level of personal well-being at work	

Discuss the temperature check results with the team so you can understand their perceptions. You can then develop a plan of action, repeat the temperature check at intervals and evaluate progress over time.

One-to-one check-ins around well-being

One-to-one discussions with individual team members gives the manager the opportunity to talk about the individual's general well-being and happiness at work. Ask questions like:

- How are they finding work?
- What is working well for them?
- What barriers are they encountering?

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- What do they think about the quality of team interventions?
- How happy are they about the level of communication they receive?

Also pay attention to what is not being said. Check your understanding of the situation and don't make assumptions. For example, you may say: "I sense from what you've described that you're finding it difficult to establish boundaries for stopping working in the evenings at home." The team member may say: "No it isn't that - it's the isolation factors that get me down." Either way, you will have identified the causes of anxiety or stress and you can then help the team member consider how to overcome them.

Team resilience questionnaire

If the team is facing difficulties, challenges or uncertainties, it is helpful to discuss the topic of resilience with them and collectively agree how they can pull together to come through hard times.

Here is a questionnaire you can use with your team to help identify and discuss their perceptions on the level of resilience in the team. Each member of the team scores the questions. The manager then facilitates a discussion around the scores with a view to seeing where there is agreement and the reasons for differences in perspectives, as well as ideas for improvement.

The outcome is the creation of a collectively owned plan of action to help build resilience across the team.

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Table 12: Team Resilience Assessment

	Disagree completely	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Agree completely
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Purpose: The team has a clear purpose that provides direction for working through difficulties.						
Skills and experience: The team has the skills and experience to deal effectively with what is happening.						

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	Disagree completely	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Agree completely
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Trust: There are high levels of trust in the team and a belief that we can rely on each other in times of stress.						
Resources: The team has sufficient resources to manage the difficulties we face.						
Adaptability: The team has the will and the						

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	Disagree completely	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Agree completely
	1	2	3	4	5	6
ability to adapt to change as necessary.						
Support: We are supportive of each other as a team.						
Positive attitude: We have a positive attitude as a team about finding solutions to the challenges we face.						

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	Disagree completely	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Agree completely
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Influence: The team believes it has the power to influence events that are in its control.						

Case study

An IT team in a national charity faced unprecedented challenges during the pandemic as the organisation experienced a massive drop in revenue. The charity had initially adapted to the changing circumstances by furloughing some workers and asking others to work from home. It then reluctantly decided to ask for some voluntary redundancies as it recognised that it would take some time to recover.

The IT team was not included in the redundancy programme, and its five members are working from

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home. There has been increased demand for IT interventions and the team is working long hours to install and fix new technology. As well as the additional pressure this involves, the team feels very concerned about its long-term future and whether there will be further redundancies or job furloughs.

The team manager noticed the drop in morale. Some team members were displaying signs of irritability and others were withdrawing into themselves. The manager decided to hold a team meeting around well-being and resilience, which I facilitated as an external consultant. I asked each team member to complete the resilience team questionnaire beforehand.

It emerged from the questionnaires and subsequent discussions that the team felt positive that they:

- Had a sense of purpose;
- Trusted each other;
- Had the skills, experience and resources to do the job; and
- Had the will and ability to adapt to change.

These results were encouraging and boosted team morale.

The discussions also revealed areas of improvement:

- Belief in the team's ability to influence events in its control.
- Having a positive attitude to finding solutions to challenges.

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- Being supportive of each other during difficult times.

The results led to open discussion among team members about the support they needed from their manager and each other. I also facilitated a discussion around what was in the team's control and influence and what was not, and ran an activity with the team around the importance of a positive mindset.

This led to the team creating a plan of action to help improve their resilience levels and well-being. The plan is being regularly reviewed and the manager has made well-being a topic for discussion in all her one-to-ones. The results to date are that, although the organisation is still in difficulty, the team feels more able to cope and deal with challenges.

Compassionate leadership

To create the right conditions for people to be able to express how they are feeling and to seek help where needed, managers need to demonstrate what is called “compassionate” leadership. Compassion is now recognised as an important asset to support employee well-being.¹⁴ Showing compassion can be a great support to employees, particularly when they are feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed.

¹⁴ www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/6-global-employers-on-how-to-improve-workplace-mental-health/.

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Far removed from the traditional ‘command and control’ style of leadership, compassionate leadership means actively listening to team members. It is about arriving at a shared understanding of the challenges they face, empathising and caring for team members and taking action to support and help them.

Reflection and action points from this chapter

If you are a manager, I hope that this chapter has made you consider the amount of time and effort you place on enhancing team members’ well-being.

As a manager, you have a duty of care to your team to help create the best working environment for them where they can give their best. Your actions serve as a beacon to employees and by taking time to focus on building resilience in your team, you and the team will be better able to face and overcome difficult situations.