

# The power of people

## A resilient workforce creates a thriving workplace

An overview of our comprehensive framework, adaptable to your organisational needs, to reap the rewards of a resilient workforce

Over the last few decades many executive teams have primarily concentrated their efforts on driving efficiencies, often through re-designing structures and enhancing decision-making. Given that the pace of change is ever increasing - the growing to-do lists, blurring of work and home life along with political and environmental 'curve balls' to contend with - organisations that will **not just survive but truly thrive** are those that **proactively** pay attention to the **physiological and physical needs** of their people. This will nurture a **resilient workforce**, enabling firms to adapt and respond more effectively to the challenges confronting them. **Building workforce resilience**, enables employees to strengthen their "**bounce-back**" reflex to develop a much **happier and productive** workforce.

### 2020...a wake-up call

"Change is the only constant in life"

It's true. Economic fluctuations, political turmoil, advances in technology, product innovation and shifting consumer demands all create a business environment that is ever more frantic and fast-paced.

However, the impact of the global Covid pandemic has brought about levels of change and workforce disruption at an unprecedented speed and scale. In attempts to curb the spread of the virus, local and national lockdowns have forced employees into isolation at home, corporate cultures are suffering and many firms are struggling to survive.

### Uncertainty breeds anxiety

The rise of Covid has heightened uncertainty over the state of the economy, job security, personal finances, relationships... Uncertainty is unsettling because it means that we can't predict or control the outcome. This triggers the brain's 'threat circuit' - worrying, ruminating and catastrophising - with a loss of ability to respond rationally.

While in recent years there has been greater awareness of mental health, the pandemic has escalated this issue from important to critical for organisations. Many people are experiencing serious challenges with mental health for the first time, others are seeing existing mental health deteriorate.



more people in the UK may have mental ill health due to Covid (Centre for Mental Health, August 2020)



of employees say their mental health has declined significantly (CIPD, 2020)



are feeling anxious and/or overwhelmed (Positive Group, October 2020)



A report by the Positive Group from October 2020, showed that out of 650 respondents globally, over a third rate their stress to be 8 out of 10 or higher and 1 in 5 are struggling with concentration on most days or every day.

### A new context rather than a new normal

Many businesses and leaders are facing a challenge in knowing how to respond to this new reality - often deploying more tactical interventions to help mitigate the impact for individual and firm-wide performance. Yet we won't return to 'steady state'; the chaos, crisis, complexity, confusion and constant change we are dealing with now are not going away. We are operating in a new context, rather than a new normal.

Organisations cannot affect what happens externally but they can take this opportunity to help alter how their staff react, through a long-term and sustainable systemic commitment to resilience.

### Bouncebackability

*"It is not the strongest, nor the most intelligent of the species that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."* Charles Darwin

Historically, there has been underinvestment in the workforce particularly supporting the wellbeing of colleagues. The challenging new reality has generated significant, relevant conversation around promoting psychological and physical health.

During any period of intense adversity the key to operating successfully will be proactively building workforce resilience, essentially enabling employees to strengthen their "bounce-back" reflex. Organisations that prioritise resilience through both individual and organisational interventions will reap the benefits of happy and productive teams.

Resilience leads to greater:

- ✓ **Flexibility** - to embrace change
- ✓ **Innovation, vision and clarity** as to what can be achieved
- ✓ **Self-belief, optimism and energy**
- ✓ **Focus** and ability to ignore distractions
- ✓ **Determination, tolerance and patience to solve problems**
- ✓ **Profitability.**

Achieving long-lasting workforce resilience is more than offering a standard remedial approach; it's about establishing authentic and human-centric platforms for mental and physical stability, that reinforce personal robustness. Organisations have a responsibility to put in place proactive support programmes - education and guidance - to drive sustained resilience rather than 'quick fixes'. There is a call to action for leaders to ensure workforce resilience is a top priority; applying solutions can no longer remain a side activity by HR or Occupational Health, it needs to be a planned and structured part of every leaders' role. Leaders must be upskilled 'catalysts', consistently practising and promoting resilience. Importantly there is also shared accountability on individual workers to develop resilience and self manage their health, once they have been given the tools to do so.

### Has your organisation got the 'Res-Factor'?

At Q5 we have developed an integrated framework with four factors that we believe contribute to creating a more resilient workforce:



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### Resilience Factor 1: Psychological safety

Culture of trust, non-judgement, learning and engagement

Psychological safety is when employees feel able to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other. This may include speaking up with an idea in a meeting, challenging the status quo, or accepting a failure.

Amy Edmondson, professor at Harvard Business School, first defined the concept in 1999 when she discovered that clinical teams with the best outcomes actually admitted to more mistakes than lower performing teams. In 2013, Google's Project Aristotle validated Edmondson's finding, identifying psychological safety as the single most important factor that a team must possess in order to reach their full potential.

Instilling a 'fail fast' culture is easy to say but hard to do. To avoid falling into a 'blame' culture that will negatively impact psychological safety, expectations should be stated upfront with a mechanism to call out poor behaviour.

Staff who work in safe, supportive environments report:

- Significantly higher psychological wellbeing
- Significantly fewer issues with focus
- Feeling significantly more optimistic and hopeful about the future

Psychological safety isn't a binary "on or off", it's a sliding scale. Teams (and members of those teams) possess it to varying degrees.

There are three fundamentals to psychological safety:



These may seem simple, but in practice they extend to every single leadership behaviour and each aspect of communication. When these conditions are met, teams are happier, engaged, take more intelligent risks, learn quicker, raise concerns sooner, are more resilient to change, and ultimately deliver a better 'bottom line'. Tom Geraghty, [psychsafety.co.uk](http://psychsafety.co.uk)

### Q5's box of tricks for leaders



Devise a simple survey to measure the degree of psychological safety felt by your team members - we have 10 simple questions.

Review the results for any gaps that need corrective practices.

Agree what is going to be done, who is accountable and by when.

### Facilitate a team performance workshop –

to understand which quadrants your team 'sit' within today and document what actions are needed to move towards, or further into, the learning zone.

This should include contracting around a shared purpose as a platform from which all can work and grow, collectively agreeing a set of values that the team endorse and the underlying behaviours that reflect them...a team charter can codify this.



"The Fearless Organization",  
Amy Edmondson

Introduce reflection sessions and hold retrospectives to foster a culture of compassion - leaders should admit any fault first and not be afraid to show emotion; personal and professional vulnerability helps to meaningfully connect with employees and engender relationships based upon trust. It is important that team members feel valued and their contribution is recognised.

Have weekly 'fear conversations' to encourage honest and transparent communication- we have a useful template to empower others to share what's uncomfortable and inspire conscious communication. Consultative behaviours can contribute towards positive conversations.

Devise a set of 'decision principles' to be inclusive in your decision-making. Create forums (including virtual ones) for employees to communicate, raise questions or concerns, as well as brainstorm and input ideas. Invite feedback (upwards too!) by adopting a 360 degree feedback system.

### Resilience Factor 2: Psychological health

Mind as a tool to positively shift and boost mental state

#### WHO's definition of mental health

*"a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his/her own potential, can cope with normal stresses and can work productively and fruitfully to make a contribution to his/her community"*

The charity Mind estimates that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England, resulting in 70 million lost working days. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Psychological health impacts on everything and can be thought of as a continuum from distress/dysfunction to happiness/optimism.

WHERE ARE YOU TODAY IN TERMS OF YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH?



It is critical for organisations in terms of how they deal with change, assess risk, operate productively and safely and re-emerge from this current crisis. Organisations need to become 'psychologically informed environments', and as such it is imperative that leaders take a psychologically informed approach with their people.

Dr Brian Marien, a leading psychologist, explains that while some stress and anxiety is helpful in driving protective behaviours, chronic levels can be problematic, leading to:

- ✗ Negative thoughts and emotions
- ✗ Unhelpful habits
- ✗ Lack of focus or concentration
- ✗ Lowered immunity
- ✗ Poorer performance



It is possible to build cognitive control to allow the mind to be more adaptable in difficult situations and tolerate uncertainty.

When practiced regularly, this can enhance wellness and resilience. Dr Marien describes an 'emotional vaccine' remedy, consisting of awareness, focus, connection and positivity.

### Q5's box of tricks for leaders



Increasing understanding psychological health of your people is part of your role

Increase your frequency of contact – to improve tolerance of uncertainty (ongoing check-ins, individual as well as group with attentive and active listening). Leverage the power of social support and human connection. Reach out to team members regularly and try to video call where possible to see colleagues 'face to face' - help each other to align on collective goals and recognise achievements.

Create space for this conversation - normalise mental health challenges, grow awareness and emotional literacy (for yourself and your teams) so that people can bring their true selves to work.

Provide support to build psychological health - there are many tools & techniques that can help us all build resilience and psychological health from the field of positive psychology (the study of what keeps people mentally healthy). These include: increasing emotional awareness and regularly monitoring our 'state of mind' for ourselves and our teams, exercises to help switch 'state' and improve focus, and activities that give us a greater sense of agency at times of uncertainty. Leaders need to have their own 'emotional vaccine' and help their teams to develop theirs.

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### Resilience Factor 3: Physical intelligence

Body as a medium to balance the chemicals in the brain and adjust mood

Although psychological health is an important resilience factor, endurance and 'bouncebackability' are not only a mind game. Biohacking is an emerging and constantly evolving concept, rooted in the idea that it is possible to modify one's brain and physiology to function optimally. The body is an amazing, underutilised 'resource'; understanding internal chemistry is fundamental to resolving many of the issues relating to stress, anxiety and burnout.

In their book, Claire Dale and Patricia Peyton describe physical intelligence as the "ability to detect and actively manage the balance of the brain's chemicals using breathing techniques, movements, thought processes and ways of communicating". They outline a 'cocktail' of eight chemicals that, if balanced correctly, can alter mood, emotional responses, confidence and happiness levels. For example: around 95% of the serotonin in our body is produced in the gut and changes can affect our gut and brain health so managing our chemical balance can be key for boosting resilience. This awareness of our key internal chemicals has been utilised for decades by professional athletes and artists and is well evidenced by neuroscience. Following suit, Bank of Ireland have rolled out a 'Stay Healthy Together' campaign, bringing together psychological health and physical intelligence tools for 2,500 employees.

As well as implementing lifestyle and dietary changes to energise and enhance the body, biohacking also encompasses the use of genetic engineering and technology to observe and regulate physiological data. NuCalm is one such example of innovative and revolutionary technology - already trialled by the US military and FBI - which is *"clinically proven to naturally relax the brain and body within minutes, without drugs"* by addressing the brain's circuitry in the stress response activation 'zones'.



### Q5's box of tricks for leaders



**Set boundaries to build resilience** - be explicit on your and your team's working hours (consider including them within your email signature). Lead by example; stick to the times you stated you will be logging on and off. This is especially crucial at the moment while "people aren't working from home, rather living at work". Maintain optimal cortisol levels by blocking out time each week for REST (retreat, eat [healthy], sleep and treat). Write the word 'REST' in your calendar and guard those windows. Downtime and the 'right to power down' is just as valuable.

**Get moving** - the negative impact of not moving for six hours a day is reduced life expectancy! Perfect your posture, twist, stretch to release tension 'hot spots' and shake out your arms and legs.

Setup some 'walking meetings' - as well as being active, which can help to spark creativity. Establish a monthly virtual physical challenge - this could include step count, distance covered to encourage healthy competition.

**Breathe** - download a breath-pacer app and spend 10 mins every day doing paced breathing. Regulating breath, slowing it down, and making the breaths deeper trigger a relaxation response. Block this out in your calendar for others to see.

**Stay positive and connected** - as a team share things that you have enjoyed and appreciated each week outside of work. Create a gratitude list. If possible, organise social distanced 'touchpoints' to get together outdoors.

**Provide resources** - information on eating and sleeping habits, relaxation hints, desk equipment for correct posture. Remember looking after the basics - sleeping well, eating well, and exercising - bolsters the immune system and supports a healthy gut-brain connection.

### Resilience Factor 4: Support suite

Measures in place to enhance wellbeing

The fourth resilience factor - infrastructure to enrich wellbeing - has traditionally been the area of focus with the majority of organisations having an offering in place. Unfortunately some businesses simply view this as a 'tick box' to declare that provisions are available for employees and, despite the often high expenditure, the assistance typically comes into effect once people are at the 'distress' end of the spectrum.

To be most effective, a best practice support suite needs to encompass both remedial *and* preventative wellness measures, with a range of programmes. Crucially this must also reflect the implications of increased working from home and helping people have productive environments where they still feel connected and a sense of belonging.

### Q5's box of tricks for leaders



**Create a framework** - this is a statement of intent, detailing your (or the firm's) commitment to different aspects of team members' wellbeing. Try to gather input from colleagues to understand what they value; it will help to identify what is already in situ and highlight any gaps. The framework should cover how staff will enjoy fulfilling careers, from pathways, future skills development and personal growth.

**Physical work environment is powerful** - where we work can have a profound impact on *how* we work. With many of us now working from home think carefully about the space, for example somewhere quiet with natural light. Encourage your team to share their 'stay at home' setup along with tips and recommendations to support physical/occupational health. Consider supplying passes for flexible workspaces so that people can have a change of scenery to stimulate fresh thinking.

**Policies and procedures** - HR should produce and implement well defined job descriptions, risk assessments, stress policies along with other operating procedures (including home working) to safeguard, regulate and clarify employee's rights. Make sure you are aware of the company's position so that you can provide clear guidance and direct staff to the appropriate document(s).



**It's good to talk** - ensure staff know the names and contact details of those who can assist in difficult situations, such as childcare issues, remote IT problems, financial concerns. Champion mentoring and coaching alongside wider company communities. Within your team continue engagement events.

**Holistic benefits package** - advocate for training and professional development, fair remuneration and medical services such as access to counselling. Remember that there isn't a 'one size fits all' answer. That's why it's essential to have a range of options.

In summary, by investing in the first three resilience factors, leaders will better understand the nuances of how their team members function as individuals, and consequently how best to keep them well. When this is supplemented by the right mix of support tools, the foundations are laid for a thriving workforce. 2021 has to be the year that wellbeing and workforce resilience become mainstream.

**How can we help?** Q5 are award-winning experts in organisation change. We work with leaders and teams to support them through change and transformation. We help our clients to integrate these important resilience factors into their approach to change, organisation and individual development. If you would like any more information, please get in touch.

