WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Individual and organisational resilience is crucial to how employees respond to challenges and changes at work.

A resilient individual is more likely to recognise and respond positively to change, and know what support they may require to 'bounce back'. In the workplace context, this may include increased support from colleagues or workplace adjustments.

Building a resilient work team is an important part of creating a healthy and productive work environment. Resilient teams are based on mutual trust, social norms, participation and social networks. They are more likely to be productive and high-performing teams.

EVIDENCE

Employees with lower levels of resilience are four times more likely to experience depression and nearly three times more likely to experience anxiety.

Conversely, employees with higher levels of resilience report better wellbeing and lower levels of perceived stress.

Across the Comcare scheme, there are 0.9 psychological claims per 1,000 FTE employees in Commonwealth agencies, compared with 0.5 for self-insured licensees.

Fostering resilience can serve to protect individuals in high-stress workplaces from psychological disorders, reducing the number of psychological claims made. Resilience building programs not only reduce stress, but also prevent stress from impacting employee physical and psychological health, and organisational effectiveness.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is defined as the process of adapting well when faced with adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other significant sources of stress or change. This process also involves the capacity for a person to recover from difficult experiences. Resilience has largely been portrayed as being on a continuum, that can range from low (poor ability to "bounce back") to high (strong capacity to recover), and extremely high (ability to thrive following an adverse event).

Resilience is multi-faceted. It can be affected by many individual, social and environmental factors that emerge across a person's lifetime. Some factors found to be associated with high levels of resilience include high levels of self-efficacy, having a strong social support system and being in a learning-oriented organisation.

Employee resilience is more than the dispositional factors that underlie individual resilience, as it can also manifest at the team and organisation level. This is because individuals who identify with their team (or organisation) tend to internalise the values and norms of the team, which consequently results in homogenous attitudes and behaviours.

APPROACH AND BEST PRACTICE

The evidence suggests that resilience can be developed in the workplace by equipping employees with skills that foster their ability to reduce the negative impact of potential workplace stressors. Typical body stressors are often manual handling such as lifting, holding and carrying, but can also include working in awkward postures or repetitive work like overtyping or assembly.

Risks to psychological health at work may arise from organisational or personal factors, with the major factors being poor design of work and jobs, poor communication and interpersonal relationships, bullying, occupational violence and fatigue. Building resilience can help individuals cope with negative life events and strengthen workplace performance by preventing absenteeism, counterproductive work behaviour and work-related stress. Some ways to build resilience in the workplace include:

Provide empowering and transformational leadership

Good managers develop a range of leadership styles to suit different situations, consistent with the Australian Public Service Values and the Integrated Leadership System. Empowering leadership can encourage and promote autonomy of work, which in turn builds resilience against adversity in the workplace. Transformational leadership can also reduce reactivity to stress and burn-out, building resilience in employees.

Encourage a supportive and cohesive team culture

A resilient team is one in which people have a shared sense of purpose and connectedness. Team cohesion can also be built through team social activities and regular informal team catch ups. Provide role clarity to employees and reinforce the links between their work and the objectives of the organisation.

Supportive and positive relationships are key to resilience. Build a team culture characterised by mutual support through modelling trust and inclusivity. Discuss simple ways that employees can support their team members, such as, 'checking in' with each other on a regular basis and becoming aware of the early signs that may indicate a colleague is struggling with their work.

Recognise progress

A sense of achievement at work is important. We all like to feel we are making progress, so recognise the gains as well as the setbacks. Job satisfaction comes from the experience of progress and accomplishment.

Promote personal skills

Problem solving and autonomy are skills that promote resilience. Delegate responsibility to your employees and let them do their job using their own imagination and creativity. Instead of always coming up with solutions you can help prompt others to think critically and reflectively to develop alternative approaches to workplace issues. This helps people to develop, learn and be ready to adapt to new situations that they may face.

Balance work with other life activities

Encourage a balanced approach to work. Ensure work is undertaken in a safe, healthy and productive manner. A balance of effort and recovery (including time for rest, exercise and adequate nutrition) has been recognised as important to the maintenance of resilience.

Provide skills and resources to help build resilience

Counselling, relaxation and stress management training can assist employees to develop greater resilience to work-related stress. Equipping employees with these skills has demonstrated promising outcomes, with evidence from interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction or online modules shown to effectively build resilience in the workplace.

RESOURCES

To access: *Working Well: An organisational approach to preventing psychological injury and Working together: Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work,* please visit www.comcare.gov.au.

For supporting references, please email research@comcare.gov.au.

Comcare provides specialised courses on a range of topics aligned to the Commonwealth *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act), and the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRC Act). If your organisation requires tailored training, please email education@comcare.gov.au.

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