

Employee resilience isn't the magic bullet solution to adversity that organizations think it is, says researcher

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The combination of [supply chain issues, rising inflation and labor challenges](#) has had wide-ranging impacts on businesses. In order to deal with these obstacles, many organizations have turned to employee resilience to the weather the storm.

Studies have found that [managers respond to business turbulence by emphasizing employee resilience in the workplace](#). [Employee resilience](#) is an individual's ability to adapt to and cope with stressors and challenges in the workplace. The better an individual is at bouncing back from adversity, the more resilient they are.

Employee resilience can be cultivated in two ways. First, [businesses can recruit for resilience](#) by asking potential employees questions about overcoming obstacles in the interview process. Second, resilience is a skill that can be [shaped through resilience development programs at work](#).

While employee resilience seems appealing—especially in [such uncertain and unpredictable times](#)—it isn't a cure-all for adversity. Rather than being beneficial, the overuse of employee resilience can actually jeopardize an organization's effectiveness.

My research on employee resilience in the wake of the pandemic reveals three serious issues that organizations need to be aware of when it comes to resilience.

The hurdle of discordance

The first issue is what I have called the hurdle of discordance. This occurs when employee resilience is presented as a substitute for other important workplace-related outcomes, like well-being.

While employee resilience [can help individuals cope with stress and adversity](#), it cannot heal well-being issues on its own.

Organizations need to ensure resilience isn't used as a substitute for other types of support by [offering employee resilience programs separately from employee well-being interventions](#).

Employers [play an essential role in supporting employee well-being](#). They should foster employee decision-making, provide [social support](#) at work, make sure employees' voices are heard and listened to, provide well-being resources and offer health management programs.

There is another benefit to doing this: by prioritizing employee well-being, organizations could also end up cultivating employee resilience as a side-effect. Research has found that introducing well-being interventions can actually [improve employee resilience](#).

The hurdle of incompatibility

Employee resilience has recently become a [must-have employee characteristic](#) in our current era of volatility and rapid change.

But there is a dissonance between how organizations *expect* their employees to react to adversity and how employees *actually* react to adversity. This is what I have called the hurdle of incompatibility.

In a post-pandemic world, it's normal for employers to want employees to demonstrate a certain level of resilience at work. The issue arises when there is a gap between expectations and reality.

Individuals [react differently to stressful situations in the workplace](#). Some employees become fearless and unemotional, while others become volatile and unstable.

Organizations are often not prepared to help employees that don't react predictably to adversity. When this happens, [employee turnover](#) and [incidences of burnout](#) increase and negatively affect the employee-organization relationship. To mitigate this, organizations need to be prepared to meet employees where they're at.

The hurdle of glut

The last hurdle—known as the hurdle of glut—cautions organizations against over-relying on employee resilience. Too much of a good thing can have [negative consequences](#), as [one study about management processes demonstrated](#).

The study found that too much conscientiousness—another desirable trait at work—is negatively related to job performance. The same study also found that too much job enrichment (a source of employee motivation) was negatively related to psychological outcomes, like decreased motivation and increased emotional exhaustion.

Moderation and balance are crucial for ensuring that useful job traits, like resilience, aren't used to the point of detriment. When resilience is overused, it can lead to what organizational psychology experts Tomas Chamorro-Premuzik and Derek Lusk call [the dark side of employee resilience](#).

An organization that relies excessively on resilience for daily operations [wastes valuable resources that should be reserved for actual threats](#).

Organizations that spend too much time and energy adapting to challenges that don't really exist can lead to a decline in an organizations capacity to maintain crucial operations.

Best practices in employee resilience

For resilience to be effective, it must be used intelligently. Managers must separate themselves from the discourse around resilience and offer more practical solutions to tackle organizational difficulties.

If employers do want to cultivate resilience in their employees, they need

to realize that it's a learned skill and, like any skill, it must be taught. It's contradictory for organizations to demand resilience from their employees without teaching it or creating an environment that cultivates resilience.

Best practices in [employee](#) resilience require organizations to play an active role in the resilience process. Organizations must not only encourage, but also help employees withstand hardship and bounce back from adversity).

As argued by [Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy](#), [who have written extensively](#) about [managing emotions at work](#), using one-on-one meetings, ensuring employees feel emotionally supported and taking the time to reflect on successes with your team are [best practices](#) for preparing employees to meet challenges head-on.

Another way organizations can build resilience in their employees is by [helping them effectively manage stress and anxiety](#). Encouraging employees to get regular physical exercise, and teaching them relaxation techniques and effective coping mechanisms are all effective ways to decrease stress and build long-term [resilience](#).

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