

Is Resilience the same as mental fitness?

So Friday (17 April) saw us delivering the first of our resilience webinars with Matt Smeed. Resilience is a topic that comes up often when teams, organisations and now the country are facing a crisis. For us, this was a key topic identified through our weekly HR webinars which are geared towards supporting staff working across local government. One of the early insights from Matt was around how little is understood about the psychological impact of a pandemic. We explored how our attendees were feeling and explored the different definitions of resilience. One of the definitions used during the webinar for resilience was "the ability to bounce back" or "[bouncebackability](#)". This phrase was famously coined by Iain Dowie to describe the ability of his then football team to come from behind. We also have the famous Mike Tyson quote which is "everyone has a plan 'till they get punched in the mouth" - this is again linked to the innate human ability to face adversity and come back stronger.

Matt and I likened the frame of "[mental fitness](#)" vs [resilience](#) - because it is something that can be trained and built, using mindfulness, meditation, journaling and a whole host of other "mental fitness drills".

The recent COVID crisis has indeed created a high degree of uncertainty and we discuss how society as a whole has responded to similar events in the past. The difference this time has to be that we have so much access to information and the validity and accuracy of that information can cause adverse stress and affect our resilience. As employers it's important that we are mindful about this and put in place support systems to create high levels of psychological safety within our teams.

The [SCARF](#) model is a useful way to understand what influences our behaviour in social situations and at the moment, certainty and autonomy are the two factors that are compromised - therefore, people will react differently. This was certainly seen following the SARS crisis and is likely to leave some residual behaviours once COVID has been and gone.

Another useful insight was highlighted through how we speak to ourselves during a stressful or uncertain situation. A few colleagues participating spoke up around how this is a technique used with children to ask them what their superhero would do. For us adults, there is a really useful podcast called "[The Happiness Lab](#)" (episode 16) where this is explored in more detail.

Matt also gave us some examples of practical things we can do (such as move paper clips from one jar to another) to measure when we are moving in the right direction. Examples include connecting and engaging with family and friends through technology, learning a new skill or participating in an exercise.

Ultimately, having resilience and building mental fitness is something that is a choice for us all to do - very similar to physical fitness, it takes time, practice and patience.

This is likely going to be one of many such webinars and support sessions that we run to support the public sector. We are already looking to offer some further support to you around managing your energy and productivity during this uncertain time. We have also listened to your feedback on helping leaders create psychological safety and supportive environments for their teams and therefore will be looking into running a webinar on this too.

Finally, we have also created a "printable" [Mental Fitness Workbook](#) to support you and your teams that connect to the above and a number of interactive [Mental Fitness and Resilience Digital Workshops](#). Do get in contact with us via [Pat Wilson](#) (patw@nwemployers.org.uk) if you would like more information.

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