# Is Resilience Suffering an Identity Crisis?
By Matt Smeed

Sickness absence on the rise in your organisation? Let's build resilience.

Hearing more about mental health on breakfast TV? Resilience might help?

Competitor mentioned resilience in a recent newsletter? Let's definitely do resilience…

Let's be honest, resilience has become a buzz word over the last few years. A quick look at Google Trends shows how the search term for 'resilience' has blown up recently, with the average number of searches having quadrupled since 2010 and showing no signs of slowing down.
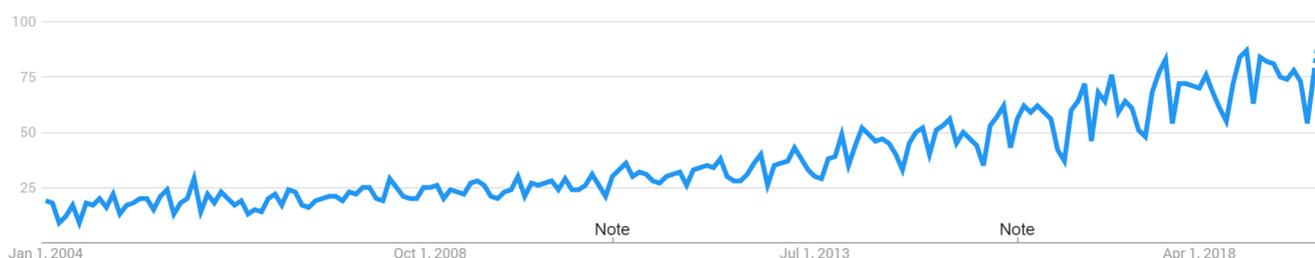
The problem is, I'm not sure people are clear about what resilience means and why you might want to build it in your organisation. This isn't just a throwaway comment, I do have some evidence for this claim, having delivered hundreds of resilience workshops over the past ten years to what must be thousands of people (I wasn't sad enough to keep count). I regularly ask people in my training sessions to define what resilience means to them. The most common answers?…

- Bounce-back-ability.
- Adaptability.
- Calmness.
- Experience.
- Perspective.
- Perseverance.
- Coping.
- Arrogance.
- Emotional detachment.

Plus, lots more besides!
The thing that strikes me when I'm frantically trying to capture these on a flipchart? The sheer variety! And that's where to problem lies, in the fact that I'm not sure organisations always know what resilience means for them and why it matters.

For what it's worth, I actually think that resilience is poorly defined in the literature and therefore it's no surprise that people don't agree when they are sitting in a training room. But there are a few common threads that I think can be helpful to get resilience right.

❶ It needs to be a positive and proactive term. Despite the fact that the two words are often used synonymously, resilience is not the same as coping. Coping can be a very powerful tool, especially if you are facing a temporary setback. However, the thought of a whole workforce learning to cope strikes me as a bit defeatist. It's almost giving up and accepting that pressures are excessive and that there's nothing we can do about it other than drag ourselves through. Instead we want people to move upstream when it comes to resilience – to proactively build their resources (physically, psychologically and socially) and influence their demands (pressures inside and outside of work).

In a nutshell, resilience should be about thriving, not surviving!

❷ Active rather than passive. One area that the research is conclusive on is that resilience isn't set in stone. It's not something you are born with and fixed traits like personality do not define it. Instead it helps to see resilience as a dynamic state – because let's be honest, our resilience can fluctuate based on the quality of parking space we get in the morning! There are things we can all do though to make sure we are giving ourselves the best chance of feeling resilient when faced with a setback, and these things are active. Unfortunately, you can't simply 'think yourself resilient', I genuinely believe it comes from active strategies such as journaling thoughts and feelings, practicing mindfulness, physical exercise and even making healthy choices for lunch and taking regular breaks. If we form habits around things like this, we can positively rewire our brains over time.

❸ View it as a systemic challenge. It's not enough to simply deliver resilience training to your front-line employees. The best-case scenario is that it becomes a sticking plaster for a problem and worst-case it's simply seen as a tick-box exercise. To truly embed resilience in your organisation is needs to be reflected in how your leaders behave, how your teams operate and how people feel on a day-to-day basis.

All three of the above are useful – but they need to be underpinned by a clear and concise definition of resilience. The final bit of advice would be to customise this for your organisation. Create something that resonates with people at all levels and that has clear benefits if you can get it right.

You need to create a culture, not a buzz word.