

# RESILIENCE AT WORK AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE

## What exactly is resilience?

**Resilience is a strength that enables us to overcome difficult phases. It means the ability to adapt to and learn from change, to find opportunities for growth in the face of challenges and to cope no matter what has happened. According to a commonly used definition, a person is considered to have resilience when they can cope well with a very stressful difficulty or trauma.**

Resilience is strengthened when you experience your skills, learning and abilities in practice. It is beneficial to note that you can influence things with your own actions. A good example of this is hobbies. When practising a particular sport, your skills grow after initial difficulties and gaining more experiences of success. This way, you dare to face bigger challenges in the sport. The acquired experiences of success and skill will bear fruit in the challenges ahead.

Experience in one area of life often applies to other areas as well. When a person has experienced learning and being able to in-



fluence things through their skills, they will have the courage to face new challenges. This is the feeling of control and the belief in one's ability.

## Resilience is variable

Resilience is needed in both private and professional life. Life serves up change and challenging situations to everyone in turn. It is often the case that an individual is more resilient in one area of life than in another. At work, we may be able to withstand a lot of pressure, but in private life, our ability to function is hampered in challenging situations. In such situations, you can, for example, consider what skills you use to cope at work and whether they could be used in private life. And vice versa.

When life situations change, resilience changes with them. It manifests itself in different ways in different environments and at different times. Other pressures will affect the extent to which you can invest in the challenge at hand. Many people are familiar with a situation where the pressures of both family and working life



accumulate and their ability to cope weakens. If one area of life is more peaceful, there is more strength left for the challenges of another area.

### Experiences help growth

In everyday life, resilience is a process that changes according to situations, the environment and life experiences. Studies have

shown that age increases resilience. The older we are, the more difficult phases we have had to deal with. Through these experiences, we learn about our own strengths by which we can overcome difficulties. At the same time, we dare to trust that the next challenge will be overcome somehow, because we have done it before. The sense of our own capability is strengthened.

### To ask for help is a strength

In Finnish culture, the importance of asking for help and receiving support is a particular issue. Resilience, i.e. the ability to overcome difficulties, does not mean coping alone, but rather it is essential to know how to find resources in the environment as well. Many of us may feel weak if we

have to seek help from a colleague, supervisor or occupational health care provider. In fact, it is actually a strength, an essential element of resilience: making use of the environment's resources. Seeking out support is an important step in coping, a key part of the resilience process.



## The importance of strengths

Vital to an individual's resilience are the kinds of strengths which get them to explore the possibilities offered by both the physical and social environment. For example, through the joy of learning, curiosity and creativity, contacts are made with other people. They can help us find the resources to deal with the situation.

Studies show that coping well with stress at work seems to combine the joy of learning, judgment, curiosity and creativity. These strengths of character also feed the emergence of new ideas and problem-solving – skills which are needed in challenging situations.

## Impact of the environment and society on resilience

In Western countries, and especially in the media, resilience is most often defined as an individual's ability. Culture is interested in heroic performances in challenging conditions, in working heroes who can stand intense pressure. These stories are about highly resilient individuals, their exceptionally tenacious actions, resources and beliefs in their cause. In these stories, the importance of the environment often does not come into the spotlight.



However, the ability to cope with difficulties and hardship comes from a combination of the characteristics of the individual, the surrounding community and society. An individual's resilience is strong if they have a community around them that helps both in practice and emotionally in the event of a crisis, and they live in a just society that offers a variety of

services. "Preserving an optimistic perspective and coping with big difficulties using your own resources can be easy for some exceptional individuals, but coping is possible for almost everyone if the local environment and society allow for it with their structures and processes," says Professor Michael Ungar, a Canadian long-term researcher on resilience. This is

structural resilience, in which the community's structures support the survival of its members.

## Working life and resilience

In working life, resilience is a key factor. Changes and pressures in work require the resilience of the individual, the group and the community. In order for an organisation to remain operational even in unexpected situations, it must be able to support the resilience of individuals and groups.

Every employee has their individual ability to withstand pressure and change. Because of their uniqueness, people need different kinds of leadership to cope with situations. In studies, resilience was strengthened in groups where the employees felt they were managed in a motivating manner. Such leadership provides encouragement, appropriate challenges and a personal, caring relationship.

The importance of the supervisor's actions becomes central to coping in crisis situations. The trust they express and the belief in the competence of the group and its members strengthen the resilience of the group. It creates a shared vision of the future, and strengthens common values

and the spirit of coping together. In difficult situations, a motivating supervisor allows the negative emotions caused by the situation to be dealt with in the group and strengthens the experience of positive emotions. By strengthening positive feelings, the supervisor reduces the group's fear of the future and increases their faith in their ability to cope.

### **The blood vessels of the organisation**

Researchers of organisational resilience say that workplace relationships are like an organisation's blood vessels. When these blood vessels are strong and healthy, they flow with information, skill and support. Through strong blood vessels, i.e. relationships, individual employees can overcome challenges and the entire organisation becomes resilient.

When an organisation wants to prepare for coping with challenging situations, it must constantly enable the existence and growth of good cooperative relationships

in the workplace. For the resilience of the group, it is essential how the members of the group support each other and share their own skills for common use. If a co-worker is familiar and the interaction is positive, it is easy to come together to think about difficult situations and come up with solutions to them.




### **A resilient operating culture of the work community includes**

- ways of talking about the great moments of success together. This creates a history of joint success and belief in capability, perseverance and knowledge that the group is able to overcome difficulties on its own and with the resources of the environment.
- ways of talking about overcoming the difficulties of the past. This creates the knowledge that, in the past, it has been possible to cope, find the necessary skills and keep going. This strengthens the sense of agency and the team's ability to respond to new challenges.

- ways of looking to the future through diverse stories: these stories generate energy and hope for the future. Resilience is always coping with an eye toward the future.

### **Further information**

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