

AGILE RESILIENCE

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AGILE RESILIENCE

**The psychology of developing
resilience in the workplace**

**TOM DILLON
SERIES EDITOR: BOB THOMSON**

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Acknowledgements

A great many people have contributed to the writing of this book in a great many ways. Their contributions started long before the book was even a seed of an idea. In fact, they've been happening for over half a century. While this is a book about the subject of resilience and the psychology that sits behind the concept, it's also a very personal book that reflects a lifetime of learning about myself, about life and about the resilience of those around me.

For most of my life, I had little idea what resilience was all about and yet I was learning lessons from some marvellous teachers. Not that many of them would have thought of themselves as teachers, but they shared their wisdom of life and living anyway. Some of their thoughts are reflected in these pages. Some of those who taught me the valuable lessons I needed to learn are no longer here to see the fruits of their nurturing guidance, but I carry their memory with me. Others are no longer part of my life, but their teachings were just as valuable and I'm grateful for the time they shared on my journey with me.

I have now spent over a decade coaching different leaders in a variety of organisations and the conversations that we had have always provided me with new insights. They have inspired me and taught me about resilience in the ways that they have approached and overcome the challenges they were facing at the times that we were brought together. Many of their stories have been included in the pages of this book with their permission, but their names have been changed to provide them with anonymity. They will recognise themselves in their stories.

In the last couple of years, as I have trained new coaches, I have asked them to test their new skills out by coaching me in writing this book. For some time, it looked as though their coaching was in vain, but now it is written, and I would like to thank them all for their listening and the asking of their coaching questions. They inspired me to carry on writing.

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Finally, there are so many people that have contributed to my own resilience over the years, and this book is partly written in recognition of those people and their support. At

the end of the Frank Capra movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, there's the lovely realisation on the part of George Bailey that his life had touched so many people and had made their lives richer as a result. In writing this book I have had the opposite feeling; that my life has been touched by so many wonderful people who have made it infinitely richer. To all of them I offer my heartfelt thanks.

Tom Dillon

Dedication

Back in the summer of 2019, I was with my sister Louise at a concert in Hyde Park in London. As we sat in the sunshine, enjoying the day, she told me that her son, my nephew Fred who was 13, might possibly have glandular fever. He had not been his normal boisterous self for a few weeks. His father John was taking him to the doctors the following morning.

The next afternoon, Louise received a phone call that changed everything. She was asked to go straight to a hospital in the Midlands where Fred was to undergo tests. Later that day, it was confirmed that Fred had leukemia. What followed was months of gruelling chemotherapy and radiotherapy that is really not designed for a young fragile body. Fred spent long periods of time in hospital and his mum and dad and his younger brother had their lives turned upside down. Everyone hoped and prayed that all would be well eventually, but it wasn't to be. Fred died in the spring of 2020 at the age of 14, his body unable to deal with the ravages of his illness and the medical treatment he received.

What I saw in Fred during that time was a stoicism that I found hard to fathom. He accepted his condition, his treatment and the restrictions imposed on his life while in and out of hospital with incredible grace and fortitude. His spirit was undiminished by his illness, even as his body weakened. Fred was resilience personified. His parents and his brother demonstrated their own resilience during that time in different ways, but it was always present, along with their love, as they were going through the unimaginable.

Since Fred's death, Louise, John and Arthur have somehow remained resilient and have found a meaningful purpose in raising tens of thousands of pounds for charities supporting childhood leukemia. There is no bouncing back from such an experience, there is heart-break and there is endurance, but I constantly see resilience in the three of them as they continue to reach forward to their changed futures. They carry their love for Fred with them in everything they do and keep his memory alive in their charitable fundraising.

This book is for Fred, Arthur, Louse and John. The most resilient of people.

Meet the author



Tom Dillon

I am a transformational coach, trainer and speaker with a special interest in resilience. Having spent a decade engaged in resilience coaching with individuals from a variety of backgrounds and professions, I have a strong belief in the human capacity to demonstrate resilience. My extensive research into the subject over several years has cemented that belief.

Back in 2015, I took on the challenge of writing a resilience blog post every day for a year. The project tested my own resilience at the time but afforded me the opportunity to deep dive into personal resilience and all that it means for people.

At the same time as writing my blog, I was conducting research for my dissertation, which was to conclude my academic study for a Coaching Masters (MA). My research explored what people understood resilience to be, how their resilience presented itself and what factors contributed to their own resilience.

That year of immersion into the subject of resilience merely whetted my appetite for further exploration and it has formed a consistent element of my coaching and training work ever since. I am astounded by the ability of people to practise resilience in a variety of ways in the face of adversity.

Introduction

It is really wonderful how much resilience there is in human nature.

Dracula, Bram Stoker

BOUNCING BACK

Back in 2015, long before the greatest peacetime test of collective human resilience in living memory, I attended a seminar on the subject of resilience. I had very little understanding of the subject, but I did have a great deal of interest in how resilience related to my role as an executive coach. I work within a variety of organisations, helping individuals and teams navigate the complexities of their working lives. At a certain point in the presentation, the lecturer displayed an image of Tigger, the irrepressible character from the Winnie-the-Pooh stories, alongside the word *bouncebackability*. I like to think of myself as generally positive, optimistic and bouncy and found the image and the phrase to be an appealing representation of resilience.

What was being suggested by the presenter was that resilient people, when knocked down by an adverse event, just bounce back up again and are fine.

However, after some reflection, I recognised that my own reaction to adverse events hadn't always looked like this. Despite my general optimism, there were times when people may well have viewed me as something more akin to Eeyore, the melancholy donkey, than Tigger. I have had my moments of morose wallowing. This epiphany prompted the curiosity that fuelled a whole year of exploration into resilience and led me to believe that there is more to the concept than just *bouncebackability*.

If you are attempting to embody resilience in adverse times, you may well find that life is a little more challenging than it is in the 100 Acre Wood. Events are not always easily bounced back from. The persona of an unbearably bouncy, garishly stripy and altogether far too chipper character from a children's book might well jar with you on occasion. When you have depleted resilience, you may wonder how you'll ever get back to feeling as though you're adequately functioning, let alone flourishing.

At these times, it's useful to have a concept of resilience that you can relate to, and which offers a more nuanced approach than something that is '*fun, fun, fun, fun, fun*'. Your personality will have some bearing on how you are resilient. Telling Eeyore that he needs to be more like Tigger is probably not going to end well. You are unique and so is your resilience. *Bouncebackability* may have its place in the resilience glossary, but there are other words that might better describe how you experience resilience.

I would imagine that if you're reading this text, it is not because you bounce straight back whenever you're knocked down. There will be times, and maybe this is one of them, when you don't feel particularly resilient. Times when you struggle to find a way through all of the challenges and pressures that life brings. What you're probably looking for are some realistic answers to the question of how to retain, or restore, your resilience.

365 DAYS OF RESILIENCE

Following on from that seminar back in 2015, I made a commitment to better understand resilience as a concept and embarked on an ever-expanding exploration of the subject. I wanted to know how people who had experienced life-changing events, or challenging periods in their lives, dealt with the depletion of their resilience. I also wanted to uncover how those who are struggling, feeling that they're not resilient, might find ways to bolster their resilience.

As part of my commitment to improving my understanding, I started to write a daily blog, entitled '*365 Days of Resilience*'. Just to ensure that I had some skin in the game, I publicly announced on social media that I was committing to writing the blog every day for a whole year. I was rather dismayed when, on Day 25, I sat at my computer, staring at a blank page with nothing new to say about resilience. I felt that I had thoroughly exhausted my bank of knowledge on the subject. That day I wrote about what it felt like to be staring at a blank page with nothing to say, and in doing so I managed to push through my writer's block. I continued writing for a total of 366 days, as 2016 was a leap year and presented me with another day to write on.

My big mistake, or stroke of genius as it transpired, was to entitle the blog *365 Days of Resilience*, as it meant I couldn't take a day off. Everyone had seen the title and friends and loved ones had even told me that I would never have the resilience to complete the task ahead. Friends and loved ones can be supportive like that. There were times during that year when I felt ensnared by the title and had to demonstrate some resilience in order to carry on. There were also times when I wished that I'd called the blog '*365 Days of Procrastination*', so at least I could have skipped the odd day here and there.

The blank page incident caused me to dig deeper and start researching more widely on the subject, until I became very familiar with resilience in all its forms. Resilience started showing up in the most remarkable places. In my second week of blogging, on a weekend trip to Liverpool, resilience was throwing itself at me. I took a ride on the Mersey Ferry and a recorded audio guide to the ferry's history talked of the character of Liverpoolians as being resilient. Later that day, as I was walking towards the Albert Dock, I paused before crossing the road to let a taxi pass by. Emblazoned on the side of the black cab was a poster, advertising a new movie called *Southpaw*, a gritty boxing drama starring Jake Gyllenhaal. The legend on the movie poster read, '*Resilience just got back on its feet*'. The next morning, as I sat gazing out of the window of the Maritime Museum, I noticed a small boat with the name '*Resilient Liverpool*', painted on the side of it.

I began seeing and hearing resilience in the people I was working with, in the stories I was being told, and in the people who were responding to my blogs. Some people suggested

that they were naturally resilient, and it was their determination that saw them through while others said that it was their innate positivity that made them resilient. Some said that they adapted quickly to challenges and some that they had learned from adversity. My focus was very much on resilience at that time, and I was psychologically primed to notice any reference to resilience that presented itself. However, it did feel as though the universe was conspiring to bring resilience to me.

My year of writing led me to the conclusion that *bouncebackability* as a definition of resilience is too easy. It sits at the surface level of resilience like a buoy out on the sea, dipping under the water, but popping back up. That's not to say that for some people, some of the time, that's exactly what resilience might look like, but for many of those experiencing times of difficulty, resilience goes much deeper.

VARIATIONS IN RESILIENCE

The variety of ways in which people might choose to approach adversity makes resilience difficult to pin down. It also provides some inherent problems with viewing it in a specific, static way. Resilience in the form of a buoy, bobbing on the water, allows us to be forever buoyant, until suddenly we're sinking. Resilience in the shape of an oak tree allows us to be perpetually standing strong, until eventually we're knocked down. Resilience that is like a reed bending in the wind allows us to adapt until there comes a time when we're completely bent out of shape. The enigmatic nature of resilience provides a barrier to a one-size-fits-all approach to each of us being resilient. This book is written in a way that allows you to better understand your own resilience and encourages you to develop your own unique strategy for being resilient.

The more you learn about yourself and how versatile you really are, the more you will feel equipped to engage with your own resilience. You will learn how to develop as a person, adapting your thoughts, managing your emotions and choosing behaviours that will better prepare you for the next time adversity comes knocking.

THE GOOD NEWS

My journey of discovery in researching and writing about resilience has led me to the conclusion that resilience is part of the human condition. We are the most resilient creatures on the planet and while our bodies are incredibly fragile, we have evolved to make our world a relatively safe place in which to live. We are fortunate enough to live at a time when the threat to human life from other species, and even from each other, is incredibly low.

The cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker (2011) argues that human violence is declining, in both the short and long terms, and is following an arc towards a more peaceful way to interact with each other. There are times when the reporting of world events appears to portray a different human trajectory. This may make Pinker's assertions seem counter-intuitive to us, but the statistics bear out his views.

The threat to us from disease is generally much lower than it has ever been and life expectancy for humans is on an upward curve, with the number of centenarians worldwide

standing at over 300,000. Of course, the natural world will keep throwing new diseases at us, as if to demonstrate that, despite our apparent mastery of our planet, we are not really in control. Covid-19 had the power to humble us in a way that many of us had probably never thought possible. In an age of technological medical advances that have the capacity to sustain life, a simple virus came along that brought us to a standstill for a time. We witnessed even the most advanced societies struggling to adapt and counter the threat that this particular pandemic posed.

But, even in that scenario, we were able to use the resilience of our evolved species to cooperate and lessen the impact of the pandemic. In 1918, Spanish flu, or to give it its official name *H1N1*, killed at least 17 million people worldwide and infected a quarter of the planet's population. A century on, we demonstrated resilience as a global community in more effectively managing a new viral pandemic. We have to imagine that we will be even more prepared the next time a pandemic emerges. We have created a new resilience in our learning from the adversity that Covid-19 presented.

The threat to humans from a lack of individual psychological resilience is ever present, with around 10 people out of every 100,000 in the global population taking their own lives each year. For those driven to take such action, and for the families and friends left behind, this is a devastating and tragic event, but the numbers are very small. For the most part, people demonstrate great resilience in continuing to contribute their verse as the powerful play of our human existence goes on.

THE NOT SO GOOD NEWS

A far greater threat to our personal resilience comes from our thoughts, our emotions and our behaviours. We cause ourselves stress through the way we think. We allow our emotions to derail us and control our actions and we choose to behave in ways that are self-destructive. We are more likely to die from heart failure than from any other cause because of the way we eat, drink and refrain from exercise. For many of us death will come far too soon because of the way we choose to live our lives, something that is generally within our control.

Our own decisions have far more impact on our resilience than just the question of whether we live a long life. Our choices around diet, sleep and exercise have an impact on the energy that we are able to summon up to face adverse events. We need to be well resourced in order to think clearly, manage our emotions, make good decisions and act in a way that supports our resilience. Making positive choices around our basic needs is something that we could all be taking more personal responsibility for.

In the long term, our behaviours are also going to be the key determinants of whether we survive, as a species, for centuries to come. We might just as easily end up destroying the delicate eco-structure that has served us well for hundreds of thousands of years. We have the knowledge, and we have the technology, to make changes to the way we organise our lives. We are capable of ensuring that future generations continue to enjoy the abundance of our planet in the way that we have been able to. We just have to find the collective will, as a species, to change our behaviours. We certainly have the ingenuity to make it so.

RESILIENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Our workplaces are environments where many of us see our resilience most frequently challenged. This is often because we are having to interact daily with other people and those interactions can be delicately balanced. Any relationship that you have with another adult will provide scope for misunderstanding, for emotions to run high and for there to be conflict. The two of you are likely to have some competing goals that will require some compromise. There will be times when you feel that you are being impacted by the behaviour of the other person. Within an organisation, whether there are six people involved or 600, the social interactions become more complex, and the communication issues are multiplied. The capacity for your resilience to be challenged by those you work with is enormous. Add into the equation the possibility that the organisation itself may have goals that are very different from your own, and your resilience is guaranteed to be challenged occasionally.

There will be times when the behaviours of colleagues, suppliers or customers can seem like enemy action. Whether their ill-intent towards you is real or imagined, your natural defence strategies may well be triggered and your resilience may be tested. There will also be times when projects, plans or simple tasks don't go to plan and the pressures of time constraints, lack of resources and other operational issues will challenge your resilience. If you're faced with organisational change, whether planned or enforced by a pandemic, your levels of stress could escalate dramatically. This could result in your resilience being further depleted by what is happening around you. If you then have a home or social life that makes demands of your time and energy too, your resilience may end up running on empty.

That all sounds a little bleak, but there is positive news for you as an individual. It is possible for you to navigate the systems that you work and live in and for you to remain resilient. There are ways to bolster your resilience when it is challenged, protect it when it is under threat, enhance it when it is depleted and replenish it when it is drained.

There is also positive news on the organisational front too. In the past few years, the well-being movement has made great inroads in penetrating the culture of some organisations. There's more recognition than ever of the need to take the well-being of employees seriously. Some employers are being proactive in adapting working patterns and offering some flexibility in how people work to support their well-being.

Organisations may not always get it right, and some of them may be paying lip service to the concept of well-being. Others may not even entertain the idea of well-being forming part of the responsibility of an employer, but the needle is definitely being moved in the right direction on this front. This means that it is reasonable for you to expect your resilience and that of your colleagues, to be front and centre, in terms of your organisation's strategic planning. It makes a lot of sense for employers to have a resilient workforce that is going to be willing and capable of working towards achieving their objectives.

There is still an awful lot of work to be done on this front, and we are unlikely to ever see a time when all employers consider employee well-being to be a consistent consideration. In my work, I am still encountering far too many organisations who allow toxic cultures to

persist despite the evidence of the detrimental impact that working in such an environment has on employees.

The leaders of some organisations seem to interpret resilience as the ability of their employees to do more work with less resources. Anything that keeps the wheels turning. That philosophy will generally mean tougher times for everyone and, in the long run, a burnt out and less resilient workforce.

So, it would be naive to blindly assume that your organisation is enlightened enough to see the benefit of fostering your resilience. You may have to be proactive in establishing your own workplace boundaries in order to remain resilient. You may also wish to have meaningful conversations in your workplace about how well-being might be improved for everyone.

OWNING YOUR OWN RESILIENCE

Throughout the book, I will be asking you to focus on your own resilience; to explore what supports it and what depletes it; to reflect on times in the past where you have been at your most resilient and times when your resilience has ebbed away. I'll be asking you to take ownership of your resilience and not leave it in the hands of the people running organisations. They might well have different ideas to you about how resilience is supported.

I believe that we are all capable of being resilient and that resilience is part of what makes us human. In order to maximise your resilience and keep it optimised, it is beneficial to understand the DNA of your own resilient nature. To do this you have to look deep inside yourself and trace the invisible strands that hold your resilience together. You then have to make a conscious effort to understand how your unique brand of resilience is assembled. Finally, you need to do what you can to ensure that your inner circuitries, your physical, emotional and psychological systems, are kept in a good working order. This will provide the best opportunity for your resilience levels to serve you well.

AIMS OF THE BOOK

This book has been written to accomplish two things.

1. Firstly, this allow you to increase your understanding of the subtleties of resilience and to look beyond bouncebackability as the only definition available. This will be achieved by taking you on a journey through some of the psychological research that has been conducted in the name of resilience.
2. Secondly, the book will provide you with a guide to understanding and managing your own resilience, so that you may enhance it during good times, maintain it as much as possible through adversity and replenish it when it is depleted.

You'll be encouraged to create resilience practices when you are feeling resilient and to utilise tools and techniques to manage adversity when it appears. This way you'll be able to emerge on the other side of challenging times, feeling more able to move towards a period of flourishing. If you are facing a time of struggle and low resilience right now, you

may well feel like you're sinking, or just treading water and making little headway. This book will help you see your resilience differently, to offer you a lifeline and then some stepping stones to move forward on your resilience journey.

By the time you've finished reading the book, you will no longer be asking the question, '*How resilient am I?*' Instead, you will have your own answers to the question, '*How am I resilient?*'

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1

What is resilience?

Resilience not simply bouncing back from stress; it is both recovering and deepening as a consequence of encountering stress in the right way with adequate inner strength.

Robert Wicks and Tina Buck

Ask a hundred people to draw a picture of what the word resilience means to them and you're likely to get a hundred very different images. I know because I've tried it. In resilience workshops that I've run all around the country, people have found all sorts of ways to express what the concept conjures up for them. I have seen oak trees standing strong and I've seen springs uncoiling; I've seen reeds bending in the wind and flowers bursting through concrete. I've seen a suit of armour and a superhero; I've seen it all and then some, and what that tells me is that when we have conversations about resilience, we cannot be certain that we are sharing a common understanding. It's therefore worth exploring what your own meaning of resilience is and what others might be describing when they bring resilience into a conversation. It's also useful to understand the origins of resilience as a concept and how we have come to have different definitions of the term.

In this chapter, we explore:

- the history of resilience;
- four themes of resilience;
- resilience as a trait, an ability or an attitude;
- a moveable feast;
- a new definition;
- creating your own resilience.

But let's wind back a little and think about the word itself for a moment.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RESILIENCE

While its etymology lies with the Latin word *resilire*, meaning to 'bounce back', its use in Roman times was varied and much changed over time. Cicero used *resilire* to describe rebounding. Some years later, it came to mean 'to leap' for the philosopher Seneca; it was used as 'to shrink' by the poet Ovid and later 'to avoid' by the orator Quintilian. This variation in Roman usage can, to some extent, be explained by the fact that each of these noble men lived through different times, spanning more than 200 years. As we often find today,

language acquires different meanings as words pass through generations. In this regard, the Romans, as well as giving us the roads, the aqueducts, viniculture and sanitation, may well have provided us with a precedent that we've since followed for the multi-purpose nature of the term resilience.

Resilience can be found throughout written English since the time of Henry VIII in the sixteenth century with a meaning of '*to rebound*'. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the term had also begun to be used in the sense of being able to recover from adversity. The Americans, forever looking for ways to corrupt the English language, used it to describe the resourceful and industrious people of Tokyo, and the way they recovered following earthquakes. Not rebounding, but slowly and painstakingly recovering.

Meanwhile, back in England, during the industrial revolution, resilience was also used in the field of mechanics to describe materials that could both withstand pressure and bend without breaking. Not rebounding or bouncing back, just not breaking.

So, before we even approach the modern usages of the word, we have four different meanings:

- rebounding;
- recovering from adversity;
- withstanding pressure;
- bending without breaking.

RESEARCH

Early resilience research

It wasn't until the second half of the twentieth century that resilience became really interesting from a people perspective. It began to be used in both psychology and sociology, starting with the work of Emmy Werner in the 1950s in Hawaii and then Norman Garmezy in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States. Both Werner (2012) and Garmezy (1991) conducted separate long-term studies of children in chronically adverse situations. For both researchers, children who exceeded their expectations, based on the pressures of their environment, were categorised as being resilient; thus followed a greater body of research around psychological resilience.

At the same time as the psychologists were making headway in their studies, other scientists were focusing their attention on resilience too. Within the disciplines of physics, anthropology, ecology and sociology, the subject started being explored extensively. Each discipline had their own unique way of viewing resilience and evolved their own interpretations of the concept. Even among the psychologists, different views on resilience started to emerge. There were different perspectives from sports psychology, occupational psychology, social psychology, educational psychology, child psychology and positive psychology. This interest across a variety of disciplines did little to help psychologists agree on a particular definition of the term, with each realm supporting its own view and finding research to back up their interpretation.

Four resilience themes

So that brings us to the modern day and to contemporary interpretations of the word, which again are many and varied. Sticking with the psychological definitions, some common themes start to emerge and, in some senses, they haven't strayed too far from the historical interpretations.

The identifiable themes are:

1. bouncing back;
2. standing strong;
3. being flexible;
4. reaching forward.

Bouncing back

Bouncing back from adversity was always going to be present as a common theme, especially as this usage has existed for several hundred years.

Exploring resilience within organisations, the author Fred Luthans came at resilience from a positive psychology perspective. He saw the need to widen engagement with the concept to include those that are not necessarily in struggle, but just going through a period of change. Luthans observed that some events that result in what we might think of as a beneficial change required resilience too. He suggested that resilience as a concept involves the '*capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure, or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility*' (Luthans, 2002a). Here is the idea that even positive change, such as a promotion, can lead to a period of stress or challenge that an individual might need to overcome quickly to be seen as resilient.

To add further weight to the '*bouncing back*' narrative, psychologists Bruce Smith, Erin Tooley, Paul Christopher and Virginia Kay defined resilience quite simply, as '*the ability to bounce back from stress*' (Smith et al., 2010).

Social psychologists Fran Norris, Melissa Tracy and Sandro Galea carried out a large-scale study of people affected by floods in Mexico in 1999 and also people impacted by the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001. They defined resilience as '*a process of bouncing back from harm rather than immunity from harm*' (Norris et al., 2009).

So, those that view resilience as a Tigger-like *bouncebackability* have some support from these three experts.

However, there are other perspectives on resilience, and the next theme to emerge is concerned with not having to recover in the first place.

Standing strong

Standing strong or maintaining stability is promoted as a definition of resilience by several psychologists who offer a different view to the '*bouncing back*' theory.

Defence scientists Jennifer Lee, Kerry Sudom and Donald McCreary studied the resilience of newly recruited Canadian forces personnel and concluded that resilience is a '*personality trait or a set of individual level variables that protect wellbeing under stressful circumstances*' (Lee, Sudom and McCreary, 2011).

While seeing resilience as an ability rather than a trait, Professor George Bonanno, a clinical psychologist specialising in bereavement and trauma, defines resilience as the

ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances, who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event, such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation, to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning.

(Bonanno, 2008)

It's not a particularly punchy definition but does offer a fresh perspective on the subject.

So, standing strong and resisting the pressure that adversity imposes on us would seem to be justified as a way of describing resilience. But standing strong leaves us where we were before the adversity presented itself and doesn't seem to provide us with any adaptability to change, when change is what is called for. This leads us neatly on to our third theme.

Being flexible

Freddie Barrett, an executive coach and researcher, defines resilience as '*the ability to demonstrate both strength and flexibility in the face of frightening disorder*' (Barrett, 2004). Barrett's definition suggests not a bouncing back but an adaptation, which perhaps involves some degree of change in the individuals themselves.

Psychologist Dr Suniya Luthar agrees that resilience involves positive adaptation and sees it as, '*A dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*' (Luthar, 2006).

Educationalists Sarah Huisman, Nancy Robb Singer and Susan Catapano conducted research into teacher resilience and suggest that resilience is '*the ability to adjust to situations that require adaptation and to view the situations as opportunities to continue learning, even under the most adverse of conditions*' (Huisman, Robb Singer and Catapano, 2010). So, here we have Sarah Huisman and her colleagues starting to combine adaptability with continuing to learn, which merges with our fourth theme.

Reaching forward

Even though resilience is often associated with adverse events, there is the suggestion that it could also be viewed as a resource to provide the impetus for positive change.

An optimistic approach to resilience is taken by Dr Kathryn Connor and Professor Jonathon Davidson who see resilience as the '*personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity*' (Connor and Davidson, 2003). So, suddenly Connor and Davidson are talking about thriving rather than just bouncing back to where we were.

Conclusion

Resilience: the ability to choose whether to maintain or adapt your thoughts, feelings and behaviours while encountering challenges and periods of adversity, equipping yourself with new insights to support your continuing life journey.

Tom Dillon (2021)

This was the definition of resilience that I carved out in Chapter 1 and one that I hope you have had in mind as you have continued reading. We've come on quite a journey since then and covered a lot of ground as we've explored resilience and all that's involved with it.

Back in Chapter 1, I invited you to draw resilience as you envision it for yourself. Hopefully, you accepted the invitation and your artwork is now adorning your fridge as a reminder of how resilient you are. Having had the opportunity to read the book and expand your awareness of the complexities of resilience you may have a different view. So, I thought it would be interesting for you to try the exercise again and incorporate any new learning that you've taken from your exploration of resilience. If you didn't feel sufficiently resourced to try the exercise at the beginning of the book, don't let that stop you from having a go now and engaging with the artist within you.

ACTIVITY

Creating your own resilience

As I said in Chapter 1, sometimes, it's difficult to put our ideas into words and engaging the right side of our brain to access the creative part of us is the only way to express our thoughts.

So, once again I'd invite you to take an A4 sheet of paper and some pencils, pens or crayons and spend a couple of minutes drawing your version of resilience. It's your image for your own amusement and interest and it doesn't have to be anything too intricate. Just pour out what comes to mind. You're just capturing your ideas rather than proving your credentials as a serious artist.

If you were adventurous at the beginning of the book, you will be able to compare your earlier version of resilience with your current drawing and reflect on the differences.

If you haven't engaged with either of my artistic invitations, there is still a chance for some final reflections on the subject of resilience. We've explored the concept of resilience being like an internal energy source that hums away, unextinguished by all the challenges and adversity that life presents you with. I likened it to E.T.'s heartlight that may be dimmed but not completely extinguished. Some of the difficult times you face will drain the power from your internal resilience until you feel depleted. However, it is important to remember that you are still resilient. That inner core of resilience, that heartlight of yours, still has an energy reserve that will keep you ticking along albeit at a low level. As you tackle challenges at work and face adversity, you will be able to tap into any of the TELEGRAM Power Packs of Resilience. Each of them will be able to provide a boost to your resilience. If you continue to make agile choices about your situation you will hopefully find your resilience replenished to levels what will see you thriving in the future.

As a final reflection, just consider where your resilience level is now by following the exercise below.

ACTIVITY

A final check on your level of resilience



Back in Chapter 4, I suggested that your resilience levels could be measured like a needle on a gauge registering levels between 1 and 10. If the needle is pointing to 1 on the scale, then you're likely to be crumpled in a heap on the floor and just not functioning at all. If the needle is at level 10 then you will be feeling as though you can cope with any challenge or adversity that comes your way. In Chapter 4 you calibrated your own resilience levels for both good times and challenging times, so you probably have a good sense of your own resilience levels now.

- 1) With that resilience gauge in mind take some time to answer these final resilience questions for how you're feeling currently.
 - On a scale of 1 to 10, where does the needle sit on your resilience gauge today?
 - How might you think differently to enhance your resilience?
 - What could you be doing to better manage your emotions?

- What steps are you taking to find time for yourself?
- What could you do to increase your energy levels?
- What learning could you take from your current situation to continue to grow?
- Who could you be talking to currently to support your resilience?
- What attitude is going to best support your resilience at the moment?
- How can you increase your sense of meaningful purpose to boost your resilience?

Give some careful thought to how you answer the questions and then take the time to implement some of your new thinking into actions. Be proactive with your resilience and set about making a difference to how resilient you feel. Use the TELEGRAM Power Packs of Resilience to support you in reaching forward. Remember my advice in Chapter 4 that if your resilience is depleted to the point that it's down at the level of 1 to 3 on the gauge, then it's probably time to seek some support. I would suggest that help beyond your family and friends, in the form of a health professional would be a good step to take.

If your resilience score is currently at a low level but between a 4 and a 7 then you will be able to recognise the danger signs of unhelpful thoughts and behaviours. This is your cue to change the way you're thinking and behaving and to put a plan in place to take action that is going to support you through this difficult time.

If your score is between an 8 and a 10, this would suggest that you are in a good place and currently flourishing. Using this time to really understand the internal and external resources that are supporting your resilience would be a good plan. It would also be useful to create some resilience strategies to support you in the future.

Now, as I leave you with a better understanding of agile resilience, the rest is down to you. Knowing that you are resilient to some extent and that you have it within you to take the steps necessary to enhance your agile resilience is a great place to start. Understanding that the 8 TELEGRAM Power Packs of Resilience are able to support you in being resilient in the workplace is a great new insight that you will be able to carry with you. But knowing isn't half the battle. Awareness will take you some of the way, but you have to take action for your resilience to be enhanced and for you to flourish.

You have to be agile in your thinking and in the management of your emotions. You have to manage your energy and take time to sharpen the saw. You have to take what learning you can from whatever situation you are facing. You have to take care of the important relationships in your life and nurture them. You have to select the appropriate attitude to best support you and your resilience through what is happening for you right now. And you also have to find meaningful purpose in the way that you're living your life. If you can find a way to work with all 8 of the TELEGRAM Power Packs, then your agile resilience will stand a better chance of shining through and you will be well prepared for challenges that come your way.

I wish you well.