# Resilience 3.0: Multi-Level Approaches are Essential

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This article offers guidelines for resilience initiatives and encourages collaboration among allied professionals to implement those initiatives. Before COVID-19, the world was already facing a mental health crisis.[1] Conditions that hurt employees-depression, anxiety, and substance abuse-either stem from or are exacerbated by fatigue, sleep, and eating-related disorders. Add in racial injustice, family stressors, and pressures inside the workplace. Stress due to COVID-19, having further worsened these risks, requires a new collaboration and dynamic response to that stress.

Resilience (see definition in call-out box) lies in that "sweet-spot" between mental health practice (EAP), human resources (HR), and wellness practitioners. Members of these groups understand the importance of a growth-oriented mind-set. They can and should collaborate to improve the work environment, enhance health life-styles, and provide coaching or counseling for mental health risks and conditions.

These efforts include interventions; such as critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), Employee Assistance counseling, and access to treatment. Such approaches are essential. Employees need to know that help is available when they need it. However, research shows that employees who need support typically do not access it.[2] One silver lining from COVID-19 is the indication that attitudes toward and actual help-seeking may be improving.[3] Now may be the prime opportunity to start working together.

Fortunately, human resource or related professionals are increasingly willing to admit three things: (1) the workplace itself harbors risks[4] (e.g., toxic bosses, unhealthy work climate, workaholic social norms, and heavy workloads) as well as protective factors[5] (e.g., positive leadership, psychological safety, presence of a wellness and EAP program); (2) those protective factors, at least in their current state, do not offset the risks; and (3) COVID-19 has upset the balance even further.

In his 2018 book "Dying for a Paycheck," Stanford organizational scientist Dr. Jeffrey Pfeffer documented work factors that damage employee mental well-being… to the tune of $300 Billion in the U.S. alone. Researchers have known these negative impacts for years,[6] but Pfeffer and colleagues made a defensible economic case for the costs of workplace stress. Despite all this, and evidence that EAPs can be effective,[7] employers still often view mental-health as a "check-the-box" benefit; rather than a cultural strategy.

## Solution: Aspirational Resilience

A significant body of research suggests resilience:[8]

- Entails individual-level outcomes as well as team-level and organizational process.
- Requires ongoing agility across team and organizational levels.
- Requires identifying stressors and sensitivity to the level of organizational readiness (agility, access, control, resources) to address those stressors.
- Requires trans-disciplinary collaboration and listening to employee needs.

### Aspirational Resilience: Beyond the Bounce

Most definitions include the "ability to bounce back or adequately recover from adversity or stress." It is essential to add "the ability to learn and grow from the stress." Resilient employees and organizations not only adapt and overcome, they also learn to lean in, take on stress, and thrive.

Otherwise, who really wants to only keep bouncing back? Resilience can be a launching pad for thriving, not only a landing pad from stress.

**Organizational Stressor Assessment Grid (AUDIT)**

| | (1) Identify Stressor Types | | (2) What is Nature of Stressor | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stressor | Examples | Single Incident | Occasional | Chronic Problem | Critical Level |
| | (3) Rate how much: (a) Control you have over the stress, and (b) your Resources as well (accessibility and agility)* | | | | | |
| PERSONAL | Intra-Psychic | relapse, life adjustment, PTSD, burn-out, fatigue, addiction | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] |
| | Life-Event | family, accident, loss, grief, relation change, trauma, crisis, failure | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] |
| ENVIRONMENTAL | Job Role | ambiguity, overload, conflict, isolation, emotional labor | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] |
| | Job Design | effort-reward imbalance, pace, intensity, flow, safety, low resources | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] |
| | Toxic Climate | harassment, bullying, incivility, discrimination, micro-aggression | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] |
| | Socio-Economic | Job insecurity, layoff, salary cuts, mergers, pandemic, polarization | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] | ☐ C: [L] [M] [H] R: [L] [M] [H] |

Steps: (1) Identify any and all current stressors (first column); (2) Identify whether the stressor is a single incident, occasional (infrequent), a chronic problem, and/or has reached a critical level (check all that apply); (3) Using a 3-point scale (Low, Medium, High) assess how much control you (your team) has over the stressor and also your access to resources and agility to use them. *Agility is a core resilience quality and can be defined by how quickly, efficiently, and effectively your team can respond to the stressor.



From this research, we have developed 14 guidelines. Certainly, stress management approaches can be helpful.[9] At the same time, let's aspire to new levels. Let's strengthen resiliency within teams and the workplace as a whole.

## Levels of Resilience Initiatives

One can implement resilience initiatives at three levels. Each can be effective. A more advanced level helps when chronic risks have reached a critical level. But even a solid "nudge" with a 1.0 program can help. Knowing these three levels can help you craft the right solution. The first step is often an honest stress or resilient culture audit. In the example provided, we suggest that a team work together to identify stressors (Steps 1 and 2) and then determine which stressors can be controlled and the resources needed to address them (Step 3).

### Resilience 1.0 (Individual Level Programs)

These are time-limited programs for individual resilience skills. Multi-session programs can be very effective if they include self-guided and self-tailoring aspects, multimedia, and cognitive-behavioral training. If level 1.0 is continually used in an otherwise toxic work climate, employees may disengage. Employees receive a token message: "Learn resilience skills so you can push through the toxicity."

### Resilience 2.0 (Organizational Level & Initiatives)

Here, Level 1.0 skills training aligns with efforts to reduce stress exposure: restricting layoffs, implementing fatigue risk management, building participatory management, offering on-site health care, and creating a psychologically safe team environment. Employer's genuinely communicate "I care about you and I want you to care for yourself." Employees respond to this message with increased engagement.

### Resilience 3.0 (Systems Level & Integral Approach)

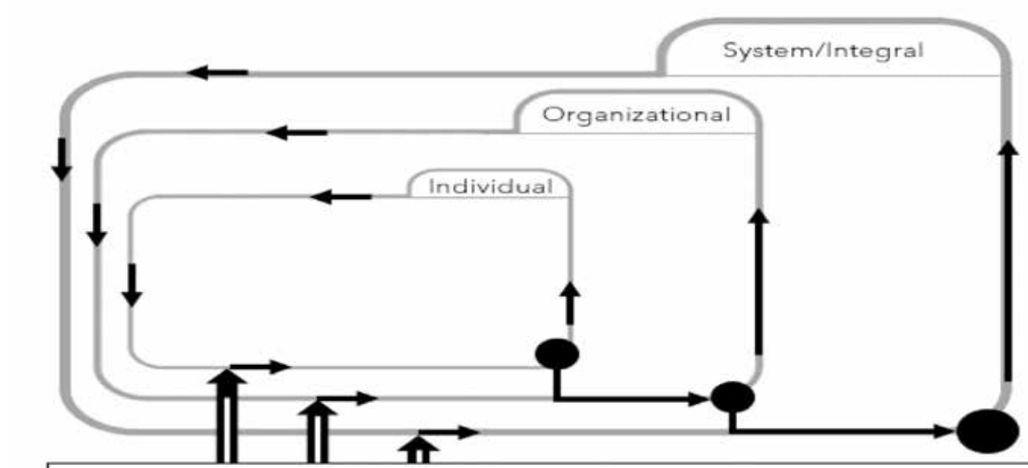
An integral approach considers social determinants and incorporates individual-level, social, and systemic initiatives, while drawing from group-level strengths.[10] Employees feel they are part of a story: "Our organization is strong, we bounce back from adversity, and our team effort works." A 3.0 approach is much like a comprehensive wellness program,[11] or a high-systems or systemic stress initiative,[12] or an integrated mental health approach.[13] It includes programs (training and development), policies (e.g., adequate

stress leave, constraints on overtime), and environmental (e.g., breaks, access to attractive space) components. Social connections are emphasized. Resilience is in our history. How we respond to stress now depends on exposure and response to previous adversity.[14]

Team-work matters across all levels. I have had the privilege of working with Native Americans who have suffered generations of oppression; military service members returning from deployment; ex-offenders re-integrating into society; and emerging adults entering the world of work for the first time in their lives. These experiences have taught me that there is great power in the resilience of entire groups of people, a power significantly overlooked by businesses.

## Some Guidelines

Real change lies in what you do AFTER any stress audit. It is essential to apply iterative solutions required for to sustain a resilience strategy. The following guidelines will help you prepare for and implement a resilience initiative at any level. The more guidelines you use, the more likely your approach will work. These guides activate or catalyze movement from 1.0 to 2.0 to 3.0 (see image).




Guidelines below catalyze or activate movement within and from one level to another

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Use aspirational measures, iterate, and adapt | 5. Make capacity building essential to any initiative | 10. Consider NUDGE training (peer ambassadors) |
| 2. Treat resilience as a way-station between stress and thriving | 6. Attune to the real personal meanings of resilience | 11. Encourage multi-cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness |
| 3. Appreciate the influence of context, childhood, and trauma | 7. Be prepared for a dynamic and non-linear response | 12. Adopt blended or hybrid learning when possible |
| 4. Define resilience at multiple levels | 8. Think intentionally about awards and recognition | 13. Place resilience in the context of a fully integrated approach |
| | 9. Make team resilience essential | 14. Enhance proactive human resource benefits |



1. USE ASPIRATIONAL MEASURES, ITERATE, AND ADAPT. Dr. Pfeffer outlines five steps for "fixing the problem" of toxic work stress. Leaders must set aspirational sights on human health, and measure and modify as they reach these goals: (i) measure health and well-being; (ii) put social pressure on unhealthy workplaces to do better; (iii) make companies share costs of the decisions that bring ill-health; (iv) confront the trade-off of emphasizing productivity while ignoring health; and (v) insist that leaders make human health a priority.

2. TREAT RESILIENCE AS A WAY-STATION BETWEEN STRESS AND THRIVING. Resilience holds the seeds of transformation. It shows we have an innate ability to tap into an inner strength that not only drives us to return to a state of health but, because it is an innate drive, we can aspire to even higher states of well-being.

3. APPRECIATE CONTEXT, CHILDHOOD, AND TRAUMA. The workplace itself can be a significant stressor. It can also be a "trigger" for employees who have unresolved trauma from past or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). We need to appreciate the broad context of human development across the lifespan. The workplace can be a key arena where adults can overcome their own psychological risks. Resilience programmers can better utilize EAPs to: (i) relentlessly promote assistance through individual counseling; and (ii) provide managerial consulting when "triggers" are themselves due to cultural toxicity (e.g., bullying, harassment, abusive supervision).

4. DEFINE RESILIENCE AT MULTIPLE LEVELS. Studies on resilience indicate it emerges across all social levels. Individuals, families, teams, managers, organizations, communities, and urban infrastructure all vary in resilience. In fact, they co-vary in resilience: the more that a community is resilient, the more likely a family is resilient, the more likely an employee is resilient, and so on. Organizations should recognize the role they play in shaping community resilience. The Rockefeller Foundation has made strong efforts in assisting cities in their resilience strategies.[16]

5. MAKE CAPACITY BUILDING ESSENTIAL. Hallmarks of effective prevention are readiness assessment,[17]ongoing relationship building, and meeting workplaces where they are at. Building capacity means you take the time to listen, get to know, and empower employees. Even if you are only working at a Resilience 1.0 level, capacity building can, potentially, make your intervention as effective as a 3.0 strategy.

6. ATTUNE TO THE REAL MEANING OF RESILIENCE. Having coached others, I know resilience takes on profound meaning within a life or business journey (including in business).[18] It can mean redemption for those previously involved in immoral, illegal, or abusive acts; recovery for those suffering from addiction, depression, loss, divorce, etc.; reconciliation for those estranged from others (or even coworkers!); and revival for those who've been hiding, down-trodden, or forgotten (... by coworkers!). A robust initiative embraces the very personal 'meaning-making' aspects of resilience.

7. BE PREPARED FOR DYNAMIC RESPONSE. Above, I mentioned different groups: military; emerging adults; and ex-offenders. Each group responds to stress in dynamic ways. Some take longer to work through past harm, some move quickly to thriving, but most go through an up-down-up cycle. There is no straight or linear "bounce back." Hence, it helps to pay attention to – and respond – to where people at in the stress > resilience > thriving cycle.

8. THINK INTENTIONALLY ABOUT AWARDS (E.G., APA, WELCOA, HERO, KOOP). In keeping with an aspirational view of resilience, consider criteria associated with applying for a healthy workplace award. Among these, I recommend the American Psychological Associations' Psychologically Healthy Workplace Awards because the focus is explicitly on mental well-being.[19] Previous PHWA award winners provide numerous examples of how the work environment can foster resilience.

9. MAKE TEAM RESILIENCE ESSENTIAL. There is growing research on team or social resilience.[20] Using an evidence-based team resilience model, including an online version,[21] we asked employees two questions: "How do your strengths contribute to the team and the well-being of its members?" and "How do the strengths of your coworkers – individually and as the team – contribute to your own well-being?" These questions help see the workplace in a more positive light.

10. CONSIDER NUDGE TRAINING. Compassion training can promote mental well-being. You can train peer ambassadors on how to N.U.D.G.E. their coworkers: Notice someone with problems; Understand if you have a role to play; Decide if and how you should approach them; if you do, utilize specific Guidelines (we train them in); and then Encourage. This approach destigmatizes mental health and leads to greater help-seeking.

11. ENCOURAGE MULTI-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND INCLUSIVENESS. Diverse groups benefit from the shared experience of drawing on strengths together. This extends to all types of racial, ethnic, and "minority" groups across all spectrums of society, especial-

ly whose experience of trauma or adversity is linked to their culture or race.[22] The concept of multi-cultural wellness,[23] developed through the National Wellness Institute, provides a working model for how to appreciate and promote the strengths of different groups.

12. ADOPT BLENDED LEARNING. With a growing tendency to utilize Internet-based and mobile or Smartphone-based approaches to mental health and resilience,[24] organizations should be aware that these may not be as effective as an approach that involves capacity building and also embeds team-based, interpersonal, and more Level 3.0 features. Electronic methods can be effective nudges. However, their success is greater when coworkers go back into the work environment and interact with each other to share and use what they learned from the online lesson.

13. PUT RESILIENCE IN CONTEXT OF A FULLY INTEGRATED APPROACH. In our model of Integral Organizational Wellness™,[25] resilience is one leg of a three-legged stool for building a health workplace. Positive organizational behavior (POB) refers to organizational development practices that foster employee's personal growth,[26] learning, and productivity. Wholeness refers to the next wave of wellness and well-being initiatives that,[27] from the get go, focus all dimensions of health: physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual. Together, resilience, POB, and wholeness make a truly robust and highly impactful strategy.

14. ENHANCE PROACTIVE BENEFITS. The preceding suggestions each have some basis in evidence. Awareness of one's level and matching HR benefits for the right risks is also evidence-based. HR managers especially need to know emerging research on HR practices and organizational resilience.[28] Fundamentally, the more that benefits managers "nudge" themselves and work with allies in wellness and EAP to use the above guidelines, the more they will build resilience for their organization, teams, and employees. Try one guideline at a time to drive thriving internally.

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