

# What is Resilience?

## Update Research Paper.

Introducing The Resilience Dynamic® ; an extension of the definition of Resilience from the original I 2009 research insights.



The Resilience Engine believes that everyone deserves to perform well without compromising their wellbeing.

Resilience delivers both.

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### What Is Resilience

Resilience is your ability to adapt.

The measure of your resilience is your capacity for change. Resilience is all about creating options. It's about deliberate investment into that adaptability rather than a singular focus on efficiency as a means of becoming more productive.

Since the capability of adapting is needed in both good times and during times of challenge and adversity, resilience is key to success in all situations.

**‘Optimists are not afraid to frame the world as it actually is – they are confident that they can manage its challenges and move their teams quickly to action’**

**McKinsey’s article on Centred Leadership<sup>8</sup>**

**‘The impact of lack of resilience is ineffectiveness.’**

**Other aspects include innovation, creativity. This in survival mode is the first thing to go’**

**Heather Jack**

## **What Is Resilience?**

Resilience is our ability to reshape. Or we might say it’s our capacity for change or adapting to change. It underpins sustainable high performance, and it’s inherent in innovation.

It’s an unusual definition. Most of what is talked about on resilience is about either Coping or about Bounceback. Both of these are elements within resilience, but they do not capture all of what resilience is, or indeed can offer. Both come in fact from a deficit way of thinking.

## **Coping, Bounceback and Beyond**

Both Coping and Bounceback are normalised states within organisations.

Coping is about not breaking down. If coping strategies are successfully stopping a breakdown, Coping is a great place to be. It is however inherently rigid. Coping is a state where things are held as much as possible at status quo. Those coping will seek a high level of control so things don’t get out of control. If old habits and patterns provide stability, these are rigidly maintained. Behaviours at Coping include rigidly holding onto tasks so they don’t slip; performance is ok but no higher.

Bounceback is recovery from setback or trauma. Punching through challenge is rewarded highly within organisations, and often this state is the destination for that seeking career progression. Bouncing back is a state of high performance but involves riding the highs and lows, with a cost of recovery each time. Too many challenges and there is a slip back to Coping.

There is another level of resilience where deficit didn’t play a part. This is where there is a high level of energy, performance and wellbeing all the time. It’s called Breakthrough.

## **Breakthrough Resilience**

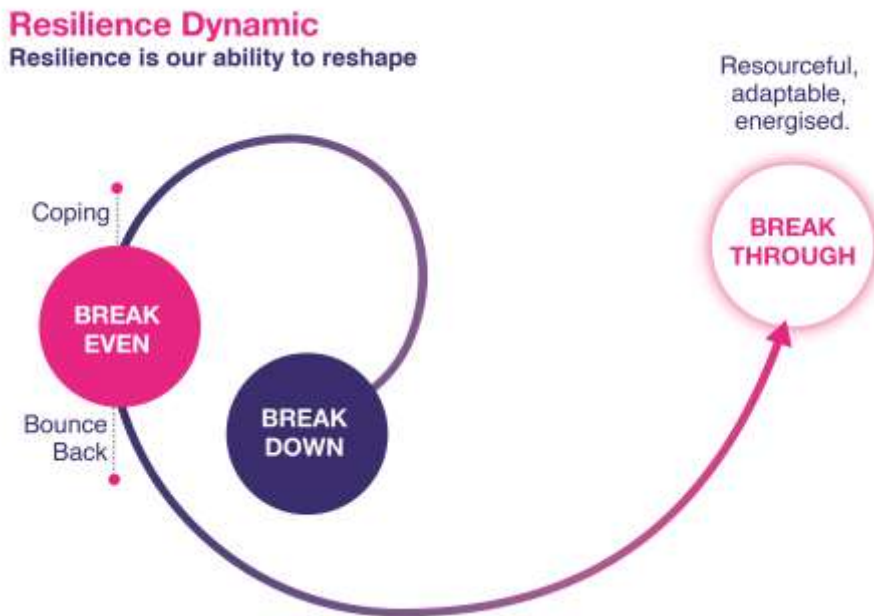
At Breakthrough resilience, you remain resourceful, adaptable and energised no matter the context. It enables the highest level of sustainable performance without compromise to wellbeing; indeed wellbeing needs to be entirely embraced to achieve this performance level. Resilience of this level is the full ability to reshape. A Breakthrough resilience involves undoing/re-doing solutions all the time. This is part of the norm, it is as a result of their adaptability, and it leads to innovation and excellence in leading change.

If resilience at this level is under challenge because of context, the Breakthrough person will have real confidence in their ability to return to higher levels; the slip will not dominate. When Breakthrough resilience is experienced, capacity is immense, as is clarity of purpose. Motivation and alignment all increase, our ability to generate options for solving problems improves, our speed of decision making and action increases. It’s a great place to be.

Breakthrough is strategic for business and it is strategic in our personal lives. It is about achieved through making resilience a habit.

## The Resilience Dynamic® Model Overview

There are indeed several states of resilience. Coping, Bounce Back and Breakthrough are included as follows. The research shows in fact that there are three principle states of resilience:



Breakdown where you are not resilient

Breakeven where you're either coping, or in bounce back, or somewhere in between, or indeed oscillating between the two. It's where you plod along, churn the usual business, where performance is 'okay' but difficult to shift to anything higher, where you'd rather resist change

Breakthrough is where you have the highest resilience; you embrace change, when you are resourceful, adaptable and energised. This is where performance is sustainably high.

We call the line between Break Even and BreakThrough the 'Whoosh'.

### Resilience is Dynamic

One of the keys to understand about resilience is that it goes up and down. This is completely normal.

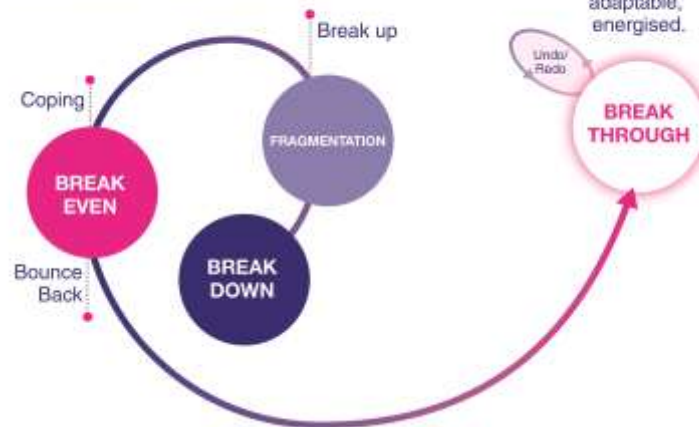
The drivers for whether going up or down depend on context.

Resilience depends on how you are managing the day-to-day conditions that support your resilience. You may notice if you haven't rested, you're more prone to emotional reactions. If you haven't had time with friends, you will notice perhaps that you become locked into a particular perspective. If you haven't connected with what's important to you, you can feel frustrated and demotivated. Many factors, those named in The Resilience Engine®, are at play. Each person's set of resilience conditions is personal; The Resilience Engine® can help you discover what matters to your resilience.

**'Resilience is an outcome'**  
**John Leary Joyce**

**'The point of inflection towards resilience is where the personal cost is minimal'**  
**Paul Dickens**

### Resilience Dynamic Resilience is our ability to reshape



The last state in The Resilience Dynamic<sup>®</sup> shows a state called Fragmentation, in between Coping and Breakdown. This is when someone or indeed a team or organisation begins to break up,. It is often hidden to the person experiencing Fragmentation, but very apparent to others. There is dysfunction or signs of real (unhealthy) stress. If someone is in Fragmentation, it is the time to act quickly and clearly to enable someone to get back to coping.

### Summary of the Characteristics of Different Resilience States

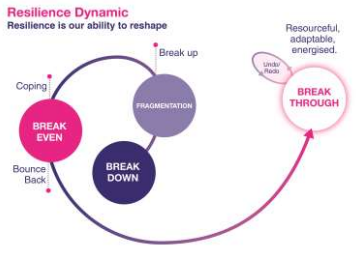
This is where resilience and stress really show up inversely together.

#### **Breakdown – where the resilience demand is acutely greater than the potential**

This is an acute, time-limited psychiatric disorder that manifests primarily as a severe *stress-induced* depression, anxiety or dissociation. The broken down person is no longer able to function on a day-to-day basis until the disorder is resolved. A mental breakdown is defined by its temporary nature, and often closely tied to psychological burnout, severe overwork, sleep deprivation and similar stressors, which combine to temporarily overwhelm an individual with otherwise sound mental faculties. A mental breakdown also shares many symptoms with the acute phase of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The major symptom of a mental breakdown is depression. When someone is depressed they may experience weight gain, suicidal thoughts, or loss of interest in social, family, or work life. Another symptom of a breakdown is anxiety, which can produce an increase in blood pressure, dizziness, trembling, or feeling sick to the stomach. Panic attacks are very similar to mental breakdowns but can also be a symptom in some cases. Having a hard time breathing and extreme fear may occur in those who are experiencing a panic attack.

If there person is mildly depressed, many of the above symptoms will be felt. Confusion, erratic behaviour, loss of judgement, lack of sleep, low self-esteem, ill health and a break down of relationships are all common.



## Fragmentation - where the level of stress is no longer viable

This is a fluctuating state between near Breakdown and just about Coping. Executive burnout falls into this state. A person suffering from Fragmentation will be suffering from very high stress. Things in their life will be breaking up, whether relationships, their performance, or their health. Health issues may be the most major clear sign of Fragmentation.

Standard stress bustors often won't work in this state - especially if the person can't get away from the source of stress. It could be a familial issue for example, or the stressor could be a bullying boss. If a person is in Fragmentation, it is difficult to get any sense of perspective that you can change the situation. And perspective is critical for improving the person's coping mechanisms.

Stepping away from the sources of stress is critical here:

- Accept that you're stressed and that you need to change something in order to get perspective
- Get rest. Go to a place that is restful and calm. Breathe. Sleep.
- Talk to someone about how you're feeling, friends and/or family.
- Aim to exercise; even gentle exercise will help

## Coping - where things are just manageable.

This is the last main state of resilience which is stress-dominated. When a person is Coping, they are able to absorb the level of stress sufficiently, but they have no capacity for anything else. Their resources are all being used up coping. They are likely to feel exhausted, demotivated and sometimes disconnected. They will not feel content or happy.

Energy is the key here. Getting enough energy is critical. Everyone gets energy in a different way. Ideas include

- Exercise
- Invest in your sleep. Make sure you are in the right environment for sleeping, make sure your eating and drinking habits support the best sleep possible for yourself
- Have a laugh with friends
- Connect with friends to feel better about yourself, and give yourself a different perspective
- Get time to breathe and just switch off. Take time out of normal activities, even 15 minutes of quality time to yourself will help.

**'It's linked to energy; you need to maximise this. People who aren't resilient are too tired – hunger has worn off and success has taken its toll; people have lost their spark.'**

**Charlie Dawson**

**'Actively managing energy levels is crucial to leaders. Self – awareness lets you deliberately incorporate restorative elements into your day.'**

**McKinsey's Article on Centred Leadership<sup>8</sup>**



## The Middle of Break Even. The 'ok' state.

Being at Breakeven is alright. You have an ok life. Nothing will massively change, and there won't be a lot of capacity for high performance or success, but things will tick along. You'll feel stress quite often, not acutely or dangerously, but you will experience it. Your coping mechanisms will have to kick in to help manage the stress. That will drain energy, and leave you tired. Then you're likely to recover at some point, maybe with lower energy than normal, and get back to just ticking along.

Energy and learning are the keys to change here. Firstly you need to boost your energy so you have *an excess*. That will feel unusual. And that excess needs to be applied to shifting from just ticking along, to learning how to recover from setback more quickly and more successfully. Paying attention to your energy is helpful here, in the middle of setbacks.

Next is the need to extend your learning capability. This may be a mindset change for you, seeking to learn and learn well. Knowing that mistakes are good. Looking for opportunities to move outside of your comfort zone. This will feel like a challenge, and without enough energy you will not set up the conditions for this to go well. So concentrate on increasing energy. Then you can turn your awareness to moments of stress and start noticing

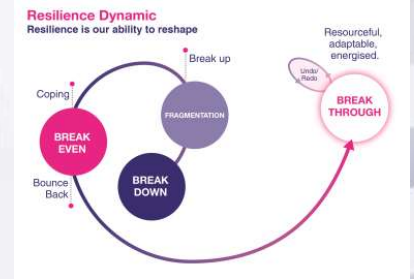
- What is causing the stress?
- Do I ruminate?
- Am I resenting something or someone?
- Do I ignore when things are going wrong?
- Do I blame others when things go wrong?

These questions will initiate learning about your own resilience.

## Bounce Back.

When you're in Bounceback, you already understand how to recover from setbacks. You will still experience stress - and you have learnt how to handle it pretty well. You may have massive persistence to get through the issue, but come out at the other end exhausted. Overall, you expect to return to some kind of normal.

You are likely to know yourself quite well in order to Bounceback. This knowledge will form part of the strategy for Bounceback. For example, if you know that you can 'lose the plot' sometimes and get angry, especially when you're tired, you'll be figuring out ways to increase your energies. That might mean pacing your work better, delegating more, switching off at weekends. You'll do these things because you *know them to work*. And that means your ability to absorb pressure will be higher, and that means your tipping point into stress will be further away than for others.

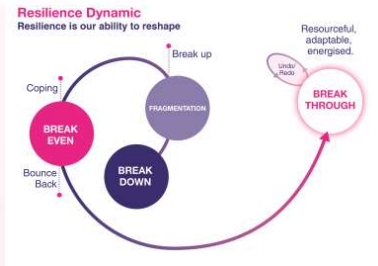


**Resilience is a buffer to stress.**

**Those with the highest resilience operate on a 65/35 rule. That's not 80/20, but 65/35!**

**The 35% is spent on investment in their Adaptive Capacity, checking, sensing, refreshing.**

**Give it a go, even for a day, and see the difference.**



**'I think my resilience is going down; I take less risks'**

**Lewis Lyell**

**'There are no mistakes, only opportunities. Resilient people always reframe mistakes.'**

**John Leary Joyce**

The trouble with Bounce Back is that if there are too many setbacks close together, you lose the energy to deal with them successfully. And so you move backwards to Coping. Bounceback is inherently unstable because of the ups and downs involved. The key for resilience development in Bounceback is to first aim for stabilisation, then for better learning. This means going deeper into some of harder areas of yourself to explore. How are you at leaning on others, asking for help? Do you need to please others and therefore end up taking too much on? High performers will explore these aspects to further their resilience.

Learning is key.

### **Going Round The Whoosh – purpose drives choices**

Going round the Whoosh feels great. It's freeing. You have enough capacity for doing many more of the things you want to do. You have sorted a lot of your relationships out. You perform well. And you are living in a more balanced and integrated way. Stress doesn't really play such a big part at the higher levels of resilience. Instead of stress, you have enough capacity to absorb pressure.

To get firmly onto the Whoosh takes paying attention to Purpose, and to what we call 'Adaptive Capacity', a strategic capability that involves perspective, pacing, energy including the integration of self-care.

The key for shifting your resilience again is to consider yourself integratively. You will consider balance. You'll consider health and diet. You may consider how you can increase your flexibility. You may seek more just to 'be'. You might have to set about forgiving in the areas, or with the people, in which you feel still caught or held hostage. All this work can be done in a timely, paced and successful way, according to the resilience capacity you have available.

### **Breakthrough – high performance and wellbeing**

Breakthrough is the highest level of resilience possible. Here you feel really calm, contented, good, and healthy. You perform well. You can live abundantly, sharing and loving well. Stress isn't really felt negatively at all here; instead you have an enormous capacity for what you do, and the pressure that it places you under.

In unexpectedly difficult circumstances you will need to relearn how to get to Breakthrough. There may be new contexts with completely new stressors that need to be learnt about. That will mean that your resilience, which is dynamic, will go back down the whoosh towards Breakeven.

Knowing yourself however, and what has brought you to Breakthrough before, is immensely helpful in enabling you to learn fast about how to achieve it in a new context. Fundamentally, Breakthrough means being fully confidence in your ability to learn what you need to do in any circumstance.

## In the end, how can we think easily of resilience?



Consider resilience is like a river.

When the river is high, the water whooshes over the rocks, not taken off course, and where the rocks need to be respected but are not dominant.

When the river is low, it's the opposite. Rocks are felt much more, everything is out of perspective, and the river can be pushed off course. There is tremendous effort in getting a good flow, of moving towards where the river needs to go.

Knowing where your own resilience is at any one moment helps you understand the capacity you have for what you have to do. It defines your performance. It defines your ability to drive towards a set of goals, or whether you can be taken off course. It defines the pace you can enact on. It defines whether you feel good or not good.

Your resilience river underpins all your sustainable success in life.

### Bottom Line for your Personal Resilience

1. Consider where you are on The Resilience Dynamic®
2. Consider the advice given in this paper, depending on which resilience state(s) you experience.
3. Consider the three fundamentals of Resilience:
  - Being Present
  - Energy
  - Learning

These are a good start.

Further resources are available including our monthly Being Resilient publication via [www.resilienceengine.com](http://www.resilienceengine.com).

**Services**

Managers Leaders Sponsors Coaches

Face to Face				
Leadership Programme	●	●	●	
Masterclass Series	●	●	●	●
Resilience Coaching		●	●	
<b>Blended</b>				
Resilience Evaluation		●	●	●
Resilience Ready Simple	●		●	
Build Resilience Habits	●		●	
Assessment Programme			●	●

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