ARE YOU RESILIENT?

Introduction

A new buzz word – "resilience" – is coming into common parlance amongst HR professionals and is being promoted by organisations like CIPD and IOSH whilst being sold as training packages by consultants wishing to promote their particular brands as a way to improve resilience in the work place – and make some money.

For several years the TUC and others have been warning about this new trend which attempts to introduce resilience into the workplace so that people are better equipped to deal with stress rather than the employer trying to remove or reduce it. As Hugh Robertson, head of health and safety at the TUC has commented, "In other words changing the worker, not the job."

Writing in the latest edition of "Labour Research,"[i] Robertson said the problem was that an approach based on developing people's ability to cope better with the demands placed on them in order to bounce back from adversity or change "is looking at completely the wrong solution to the problem. We do not want to see workers moulded into robots that can

'bounce back' regardless of what is thrown at them. We want to see workers protected by their employer, reducing and managing stress that they face."

What is resilience?

According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) resilience can be seen at both an individual and organisational level:

- At an individual level there are a range of definitions but "a consistent theme…of resilience is a sense of adaptation, recovery and bounce back despite adversity or change." In the CIPD's "Developing resilience: An evidence-based guide for practitioners,"[ii] the essence of the "huge diversity and complexity of definitions, concepts and approaches" to resilience is that of "the successful adaptation to life tasks in the face of social disadvantage or highly adverse conditions" (Windle, 1999, p163).

The CIPD report goes onto note that "resilience is also contextual in many ways and is

therefore best understood as multidimensional and variable across time and circumstance."

- At the <u>organisational level</u>, resilience has a different focus but is defined in the same way as it is for individuals. As such, it includes "the individuals within the organisation, but also the processes and culture those individuals work with on a daily basis." It also looks at the adaptability of the organisation and how stretched its resources are.

In the CIPD's research, the question is asked about what approaches are taken to resilience which it then goes onto answer from an individual and organisational perspective.

Approaches to individual resilience

The approaches taken to individual resilience are described as:

1. <u>Personality/individual characteristics.</u> Resilience is seen as internal to the individual and amounts to "an innate ability that forms part of their personality" which "might include…control over one's life, perseverance, emotional management and awareness, optimism, perspective, sense of humour, belief in own capabilities and the ability to problem-solve;"
2. <u>Environment</u> – in this approach, resilience "is wholly dependent on the experiences that a person has with their environment" which means that "factors external to the individual will determine how resilient a person is, such as how much social support they receive. The person's personality is not seen as relevant;"
3. <u>A combination of Person and Environment.</u> Drawing the previous approaches together, resilience is described as "a product of a person's personality in combination with environmental influences" which could include "family, peers and social environment."

Approaches to organisational resilience

Approaches to organisational resilience are listed as:

1. <u>Job design.</u> Resilience is, therefore, "dependent on the features of a person's job role, that is, how demanding the person's job is, how much control they have in their job, what type of motivators or rewards (internal and external) are associated with a particular job;"
2. <u>Organisational culture and structure.</u> Seen as central to resilience, the culture of the organisation, the way it works, how it "adopts work processes and procedures" all determine how resilient the company will be. CIPD use the example of a

bureaucratic organisation that utilises a command and control culture which may be detrimental to the extent to which the "people within the organisation are able to respond and adapt to challenges;"

3. <u>Leadership.</u> Types of leadership will inspire or demoralise workers. Leaders who are seen as engaging and supportive "may heavily influence the ability of employees to be resilient to adverse events;"

4. <u>Systemic/external environment</u> The external environment and social relationships are seen as key to resilience. Employees and organisations may not be able to adapt to change successfully in the absence of trustworthy relationships. Similarly, social and institutional support is seen as essential at every level, "dependent on the resilience of stakeholders, competitors and the industry in which it operates."

Despite the research...
What will be noticed from the CIPD research is the recognition of how the employer can have such an impact on the resilience of its workers by the way that jobs have been designed, how the culture and company structure has been developed, whether trustworthy relationships exist, not to mention the positive or negative effects created by the style of leadership at all levels of the organisation.

Despite this recognition, however, the TUC and the trade unions have reported that too often workers are made to feel that their lack of resilience is what causes their stress.

What often causes the stress, however, is the behaviour of the employer who refuses to address the issue in the interests of cost cutting and profit enhancement which puts more pressure on already overworked staff by cutting jobs and creating a climate of fear, whilst changing cultures to be more target focused.

Presenteeism
Defined by the Work Foundation as "sickness presence," presenteeism relates to those workers who turn up for work but are sick and often have more of an impact on productivity than if they were "sickness absence".

Presenteeism is a growing problem across UK industry and is often caused by more punitive sickness monitoring policies that effectively mean workers are regarded as weak, lacking resilience and commitment if they take a day off sick.

TSSA's Reps Bulletin H&S 102 on the Office of Rail and Road's Health and Wellbeing Programme for 2014-19 noted how the Railway Safety Standards Board had estimated that each year presenteeism cost Britain's railways £480 million.

In the railway industry, the ORR and RSSB have identified stress as one of three major occupational health issues

and are seeking to address it through a health and wellbeing programme that includes working with trade unions (see TSSA Reps Bulletins H&S 102 and 103).[iii]

Only the resilient need apply...
One of the most concerning aspects of the resilience agenda is that it is now becoming one of the selection criteria for an increasing number of job interviews.

Hugh Robertson from the TUC, writing in the Hazards Magazine[iv] has reported that whilst "we all have different coping mechanisms and may react differently to stress, many employers have exploited that by seeking to recruit people who they think will be better able to cope. They deliberately promote a macho and competitive culture and their recruitment process seeks to identify people who will respond best in that environment. Those who react badly by becoming depressed or anxious are portrayed as having an "eggshell personality" or simply being weak."

Robertson continues: "In reality, there are very few people who will not be made ill in the long run by stress being piled on them. The answer is not to recruit the "right" staff or to improve their resilience, it is to assess the risk of stress and then manage it."

Reps Action: where you can find guidance
Some employers refuse to treat the causes of stress but prefer to only address the symptoms through

schemes to improve employee resilience.

In this way they attempt to make the workers think that the problem is theirs when in reality it is really the employer refusing to accept any responsibility for how they have failed to manage situations, perhaps through better job design, improved processes or just more staff (see, for instance, the research from the CIPD quoted above). In these circumstances, reps can be left asking where they can find guidance and what they can do about it.

The legal position is that all employers have legal responsibility under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. The Health & Safety Executive's (HSE) website clearly states that this includes minimising the risk of stress-related illness or injury to employees. This is done through carrying out risk assessments which union reps should be involved with through providing feedback as part of a consultation exercise.

To assist in this process, the HSE has developed a set of Management Standards for dealing with stress.[v]

The TUC has also produced an online Safety Reps Guide to the HSE Stress Management Standards.[vi]

Reps are encouraged to familiarise themselves with these guides and to

read some of the articles about resilience.

Reps Action: Stress Campaign

But in addition – and by working with other reps as well as TSSA full time officers – consideration should be given to launching a campaign to address the root causes of stress in the workplace.

Such campaigns would start with surveying members about the issue, including whether they had been put on resilience training, whilst also asking the employer whether they have a stress management strategy. That strategy could be compared against the survey results, whilst taking on board the considerations of the ORR's Health and Wellbeing initiative which is supposed to promote dialogue with trade unions and their reps on the issue of stress.

Campaigns with an employer could then seek to update and improve the strategy – may be as part of a joint initiative with the company – before going onto ensure it was put into practice.

Acknowledgments

This article was prepared using the following material:

"Buzz word rears its ugly head," Labour Research, September 2015

available at:
http://www.lrdpublications.org.uk/publications.php?pub=LR&iss=1787&id=idp268752

"Stress at work: "Resilience" gets nastier" by Hugh Robertson (23rd May 2014) available at:
http://strongerunions.org/2014/05/23/resilience-gets-nastier/

CIPD: "Developing resilience: An evidence-based guide for practitioners" (see link in notes below)

TSSA Reps Bulletins H&S 102 and 103

HSE and TUC Websites in connection with stress management guides (see links in notes)

Additional reading

Additional reading from a trade union perspective can be found at:

Hazards Magazine:
http://www.hazards.org/workandhealth/wellthen.htm#resiliencewarning

http://www.hazards.org/stress/distressingfailure.htm

Members may also wish to look at the ORR and RSSB websites about the Health and Wellbeing initiatives that have involved the trade unions.

[i] "Labour Research," September 2015, Volume 104, Number 9, published by LRD available at: http://www.lrdpublications.org.uk/publications.php?pub=LR&iss=1787&id=idp268752

[ii] Published in May 2011 and available at: http://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/developing-resilience_2011-evidence-based.pdf

[iii] Reps Bulletins available at https://www.tssa.org.uk/en/reps-area/reps-bulletins/health--safety/index.cfm

[iv] Hazards Magazine, Number 123, July-September 2013 available at:
http://www.hazards.org/stress/resilience.htm

[v] HSE Stress Management Standards available at:
http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/

[vi] Safety Reps Guide to the HSE Stress Management Standards available at:
https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/health-and-safety/guides-and-reports-reps/stress/safety-reps-guide-hse-stress