

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE

Guidance for line
managers

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 160,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Guide

Supporting employee resilience: guidance for line managers

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Introduction to the line manager support materials

Managers play a vital role in determining the health, wellbeing and engagement of their team. They also play an essential part in managing particular people management issues that arise in their team, such as bereavement, conflict, sickness absence and mental health problems, which can have a negative impact on employee health, wellbeing and engagement if not well managed.

CIPD research identified five key behavioural areas that are important for line managers to support the health, wellbeing and engagement of those who work for them:



Being open, fair and consistent



Handling conflict and people management issues



Providing knowledge, clarity and guidance



Building and sustaining relationships



Supporting development

A line manager's behaviour and the culture they create in their team is the biggest influence on an employee's work experience. Capability in these five behavioural areas, underpinned by an attitude of care, respect, compassion, wisdom and kindness, is vital for line managers to manage the health, wellbeing and engagement of their employees. Such capability will also provide the foundation for line managers to manage particular people management issues and will enable managers to take a positive approach, recognise employee needs in these situations and manage them in ways that are sensitive, supportive and inclusive.

The CIPD has created a range of support materials to help you adopt a management approach that supports good health, wellbeing and engagement in your team. Designed for anyone who manages people, the guidance and exercises are quick and easy to use. They can help you save time and get better results by managing people well – all of which is good for your own wellbeing as well as that of your team.

To build on these resources, the CIPD has also created a series of guides focusing on specific areas of people management that aim to support managers in dealing with particular people management issues. Each of these guides provides practical information and advice relevant to that particular people management issue, as well as linking it to the approach covered in the support materials. The intention is that managers use the five key behavioural areas as the basis for managing all the issues, and draw on specific relevant behaviours from within the framework to help with the particular issue in question. Look out for the icons to understand which of the behaviours is particularly relevant to the issues being discussed.

1 Introduction to this guide

Resilience is described as an individual's ability to recover from or stay well in the face of adversity. In a work setting, this translates into an employee having *'the capacity to thrive, rather than just survive, in high-stress environments'*. So, resilience helps employees adapt, cope, and respond positively to stressors in the workplace.

Resilience is a mixture of a relatively stable personal attribute and a variable psychological state that is affected by the situation someone is in. Some people will naturally be more resilient than others, but the onus must not simply be put on employees to 'toughen up' and 'be' resilient. The context in which people are working, their colleagues, work content, working environment, and organisational factors will all affect their resilience. As a line manager, you play a crucial role in influencing how resilient your team members are, both because your behaviour affects employees' resilience and because you can influence a range of factors that affect your team members' resilience levels.

In the context of the challenging world of work, the ability of employees to cope with adversity and display resilience is essential to individual, team and organisational success and even survival. Resilience helps employees protect and regain their personal resources at work, which in turn protects them from problems like psychological distress, emotional exhaustion and burnout. Research shows that resilience is linked not just to people's wellbeing and ability to deal with stress, but also their capacity to be proactive and creative at work, their performance on work tasks and the role they play in the organisation. It also affects their engagement with and commitment to their work and employer. As a line manager, you will reap considerable benefits from supporting your team to be resilient, both through having fewer people management issues to deal with and through having a better-performing, more creative and thriving team.

This guide is designed to help you, as a line manager, support your team members to be as resilient as possible. It will look at two ways in which you can fulfil this important aspect of your people management role:

- 1 How your behaviour as a manager directly affects your team members – the top priority is for you to develop high-quality relationships with all team members. In addition, there are a number of other behaviours that are important, including how you set goals, celebrate success, coach your team, help create a supportive environment and ensure that people know what to expect.
- 2 The range of other factors that are linked to resilience – such as employees' confidence, optimism, sense of coherence and level of social support (identified in the CIPD evidence review) – and the key role you can play in creating the conditions that support employees with these.

Both these aspects link closely with all the behavioural areas identified by CIPD research as important to support team health, wellbeing and engagement:



Building and sustaining relationships is a central part of building resilience, reducing stress and helping your team members to cope.



Providing knowledge, clarity and guidance ensures that people know what to expect, feel that their work is manageable and access the resources they need.



Being open, fair and consistent – particularly being positive and appreciative – will help people with confidence and optimism.



Supporting development will help people gain confidence and access resources.



Handling conflict and people management issues will prevent interpersonal conflict from getting in the way of team members providing support for one another.

These links are explored in more detail below and the exercises listed offer advice on how to develop these behaviours.

Of course, managing resilience is not just down to you: you need your senior managers and HR professionals to provide you with support and ensure that the organisation as a whole takes responsibility for supporting resilience and reducing risks to mental health.

2 Manager behaviours that impact resilience

A key finding from the [CIPD evidence review](#) was that when managers build positive relationships with their team, they positively affect team members' resilience. By having high-quality relationships with your employees, you help them be more resilient, reduce work-related stress and enable better coping. This is even more important during challenging times, when your team will look to you for reassurance, direction and support.

[CIPD research](#) on line manager behaviour that supports employee health, wellbeing and engagement highlighted building and sustaining relationships as one of the significant behavioural areas. It points to a range of specific behaviours you can show that will help build the high-quality relationships that are important for resilience:

- **concern for wellbeing:** showing empathy, concern and consideration for employees
- **interest in individuals:** taking an interest in employees as individuals
- **sociability:** interacting with employees in a friendly and sociable way
- **availability:** providing opportunities for employees to speak one-to-one.

Good relationships depend on an underlying attitude of care, compassion and kindness. Compassion, care and kindness are not about being soft or even liking everyone. You can be a professional manager and care. This is about compassionate and relational leadership.



See the line manager [support materials](#) for more information on **Building and sustaining relationships**. In particular, [Exercise 5](#) offers advice on how to develop these behaviours.

In addition to building positive relationships, there are other behaviours you can adopt that will help your team be more resilient. The [CIPD evidence review](#) says: *'If managers set goals that are motivating (that is, stretching but achievable), celebrate successes in the team and coach their people to be ambitious, foster supportive work environments, and communicate and manage work and resources in such a way that people know what to expect, they can expect their people to become more resilient.'*

Let's look at each of these behaviours in turn:

Setting motivating goals

To set motivating goals, it is important to understand what motivates your team, where their strengths lie and what is stretching but achievable for them. Conversations with individual team members in which you explore these questions, listen carefully to their views, and engage in shared goal-setting are essential to gaining this understanding.

Celebrating success

Find ways to highlight when your team or individuals within the team have done well, achieved success, reached key milestones and so on. This might be about organising a celebration event, sending a congratulatory message, raising successes at team meetings, or simply giving positive feedback and praise.

Coaching team members for ambition

Similar to setting motivating goals, coaching for ambition involves understanding your team members and having meaningful conversations about what they want their work and career to achieve. Helping individuals understand and develop their strengths and aspire to move forward in whatever way best fits with their interests and values can help them be ambitious.

Creating supportive work environments

As well as providing direct support, advice and guidance, you can also enable your employees to access support from each other and from your organisation. This might be about signposting resources that are available, helping people access the guidance and development they need, encouraging team members to help and support one another, role-modelling and emphasising the importance of mutual support, and/or putting individuals in touch with people who can support them.

Communicating and managing work and resources

Maintaining good communication with your team and managing their work and resources are essential parts of being a people manager that also contribute to resilience. This includes ensuring people are clear what work they are expected to do, what their role is, what your own role is, what your expectations are, and how they can access the resources they need to do their job; it also includes giving clear feedback on how individuals are doing, what is going well and what you would like them to do differently.



These relate to the behavioural areas of **Being open, fair and consistent**, **Providing knowledge, clarity and guidance**, and **Supporting development**. Look at [Exercise 1](#), [Exercise 4](#) and [Exercise 6](#) for advice on how to develop in these areas.

Creating the conditions that support resilience

In addition to highlighting the importance of high-quality, positive relationships between managers and those who work for them, the [CIPD evidence review](#) identified four other factors that research shows support employee resilience:

- self-efficacy
- positive moods and optimism
- sense of coherence
- social support.

Each of these is considered below, together with an indication of what you, as a line manager, can do to boost each one and thereby create the conditions to enhance your team's resilience.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is described as an employee's '*confidence in their ability to accomplish a task, achieve a goal or demonstrate behaviour required to attain a certain outcome*' and '*a task-specific version of self-esteem*'. Employees with high levels of self-efficacy have been found to have higher resilience and a greater ability to cope with organisational change. So, supporting your team members to increase their self-efficacy is a good way to enhance resilience in the team.

Some of the behaviours mentioned in the previous section can contribute to self-efficacy: for example, setting suitable, motivating goals, celebrating success and providing coaching. Broader coaching, learning and development can also help build employees' belief in their capabilities, so it would be helpful to consider how you support team members to access opportunities to develop skills and personal development. You should also consider learning directly related to resilience, wellbeing and emotion management. Celebrating successes within the team, for example at team meetings, is also a way of ensuring that members of your team see each other succeed, which can increase people's confidence in their own capacity to do the same.



This relates to the behavioural areas of **Being open, fair and consistent**, and **Supporting development**. Look at [Exercise 1](#) and [Exercise 6](#) for advice on how to develop in these areas.

Positive moods and optimism

Positive moods (referred to as 'positive affect' in the [research](#)) include joy, cheerfulness, enthusiasm and alertness, while optimism is the belief that you will generally experience good outcomes. Employees who possess both of these are more likely to behave in ways that reduce the effects of negative events or even prevent such events in the first place.

While people will naturally have different tendencies to have these positive moods and beliefs, as a line manager, you can help highlight the positive, reinforce evidence for good outcomes, and role-model positive states. Being able to manage your own emotions is a key part of this, as is good communication around what is working well.



This relates to the behavioural area **Being open, fair and consistent**, which includes both being positive and appreciative of your employees, and managing your own emotions. Look at [Exercise 1](#) and [Exercise 2](#) for advice on how to develop in these areas.

Sense of coherence

Sense of coherence is the belief that what happens in our life is comprehensible (rational, predictable, understandable), manageable (adequate and sufficient resources are available) and meaningful. Having this set of beliefs enables individuals to engage internal and external resources that can help them cope with difficult events, for example time, budget and relationships. This includes their relationship with you, other team members and people beyond the team.

While your team members will obviously have their own perceptions of life, you can help make their working life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful as possible. This is partly about clear communication of roles and expectations, and about what is happening in the team, organisation, and context in which you are working. It is also about providing access to guidance, advice and resources when needed, and making explicit the purpose and meaning of the work they and the team are delivering. Where possible, it is helpful to find connections between people's work and their values – for example, the contribution that particular projects are making to higher aims such as improving society, reducing injustice, caring for people, and so on.



This relates to the behavioural area **Providing knowledge, clarity and guidance**. Look at [Exercise 4](#) for advice on how to develop in this area.

Social support

Feeling supported, through help and advice from their manager and/or co-workers, is a strong predictor of employee resilience: support from colleagues is especially beneficial for resilience. As a line manager, you have a role to play not only in providing support yourself, but also creating a team culture in which your employees support one another.

To create a supportive team culture, you will need to build trust and mutual understanding between team members and ensure that any interpersonal problems within the team are addressed at an early stage. Team-building is not just about off-site events and exercises, although such activities can be helpful in giving team members new perspectives on one another. It is also about regular communication within the team through meetings and other communication mechanisms, building a shared sense of purpose, understanding each other's roles, encouraging team members to help one another, and having them collaborate and work together. The level of mutual support and respect in your team will also be influenced by the way you role-model respect, kindness and openness to other perspectives, by how you build relationships, and by the fairness, impartiality, integrity and consistency with which you manage people.

To protect positive team relationships and within-team support, it will be important that you identify and deal with any conflicts that arise early, effectively and impartially. You also need to follow up to ensure that any issues have been resolved for the long term. The CIPD has produced a [guide](#) on dealing with conflict at work that you may find helpful. It may also be helpful to seek support from your own manager, your HR team and/or others, and to access appropriate organisational resources for dealing with conflict.



This relates to the behavioural areas of **Being open, fair and consistent**, **Handling conflict and people management issues** and **Building and sustaining relationships**. Look at [Exercise 1](#), [Exercise 3](#) and [Exercise 5](#) for advice on how to develop in these areas.

3 Conclusion

As a line manager, you have a vital role in supporting resilience in your team. The top priority for enhancing employee resilience is for you to build and sustain good relationships with each member of your team, with an underlying attitude of care, compassion and kindness.

Other aspects of your management style will also be important for enhancing resilience: for example, setting motivating goals, celebrating success, coaching team members, creating supportive work environments and communicating and managing work and resources. In addition, you have a role to play in fostering the other factors that research has identified are linked to resilience (self-efficacy, positive moods and optimism, sense of coherence and social support). The behavioural areas covered by the CIPD's line manager support materials are all highly relevant in this context and the exercises mentioned can support you to identify and develop the capabilities you need.

4 Useful resources

Resilience:

[CIPD podcast](#)

[CIPD evidence review](#)

[BITC report](#)

[Mind guidance](#)

Dealing with conflict at work: [CIPD guide for line managers](#)

Preventing and reducing stress at work: [CIPD guide for line managers](#)

Consider using the full range of support materials if you haven't already done so

If reading this guide has highlighted areas of people management capability that you would like to develop, why not use the full range of support materials to help you adopt a management approach that supports good health, wellbeing and engagement in your team?

You can get insight into your management capability across all five behavioural areas by completing the quiz and then use the step-by-step guidance to help you get feedback, identify strengths and areas to develop, and plan the action you will take. There is also an action plan sheet, which can be used to note down and track your actions; a quiz to help you identify potential barriers and develop strategies to overcome them; and a series of exercises to provide ideas and inspiration relevant to each of the behavioural areas, some of which have already been highlighted above.





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