



# Becoming Bullet Proof and Resilient in an Uncertain World

**Philip Atkinson**

“As we move towards the start of the New Year, no one can guarantee how the economy and employment trends will recover after the COVID pandemic has finally run its course. Leaders of organisations are unsure how to adapt to change, and people dislike uncertainty in their personal lives. In times of unprecedented change, consider the positive impact on our lives if we could develop a degree of resiliency that can be installed at the personal and organisational levels. This is desirable compared to the current state of fear about dealing with the unpredictable changes that we will have to confront. Many people do not know how to develop the personal and organisational resilience to master an

uncertain future. Here, Philip Atkinson highlights the strategies and tactics you can apply to put yourself in the best possible shape personally and organisationally.”

All resilience building and change starts with self. Organisations that become resilient have been changed fundamentally by the deliberate intent and the behaviour of key players to make that change a reality. Organisational resilience cannot be built without a structured intervention and leadership. In most organisations, the ‘resilience change process’ is not hard-wired into the business. It does not happen by accident nor can it be implemented randomly. It must be a deliberate and a planned process and it exists only through

## What is a Resilient Organisation?

In general terms, resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune, to survive a crisis, and thrive in an uncertain world. Being resilient means it's not the nature of adversity that is most critical but is how we deal with it. When we face adversity, misfortune, or frustration, our resilience helps us bounce back. A resilient organisation has direction, strategy, structure and culture driven by leadership to overcome the shocks and disruptions of unprecedented events with minimal impact on service delivery. It is only possible to create a resilient organisation when you manage and shape change with honest leadership.

consultative and intelligent design. Installation is achieved through a shared positive attitude, and demonstrating precise behaviours focused on specific business outcomes.

Likewise, developing personal resilience does not happen without thoughtful, personal reflection and intention, planning before committing to act and seeing whether that action moves you closer or further away from your goals. New habits must be reinforced and practised daily to bring about that resilience.

## All Change Comes About from Within

If you want to change how an organisation operates to become more resilient, it must come from the people leading it. That means that people guiding and giving direction to the organisations must be sure that they know what they are doing, and commit to building a culture of self-renewal and change.

Knowing that organisational resilience is not a magical or mystical process, but requires strategic, creative thinking. Constant action should be occupying the minds of business leaders and their teams.


## How Big is the Change We Must Make?

I am not sure whether senior management teams understand the variety and depth of change that must happen. To build resilience, you must want it profoundly and commit 100% to bring that about. Some sectors and industries with 'fixed mindsets' will have to commit to wholesale change. In contrast, others will adapt quickly and quietly without a fuss because they have fostered their natural business 'growth' cultures. Others will have to radically review their relevance, identity, mission and strategies. Here, we are thinking of the larger organisations; and many state-owned, whose 'mechanistic' style needs to be reshaped into a more organic model of change resiliency.

## Post-COVID

We are only now starting to fully realise the potential consequences of COVID, and the impact on our physical, emotional, economic and spiritual wellbeing. Currently, we are surrounded by doom and gloom; with the media pushing the most pessimistic stories to an attentive and curious audience. We can still take a degree of personal action to control and influence our world, our future and the organisations in which we work.

In this article, we concentrate on actions we can take where we have some degree of control. It is not just about having a Pollyanna attitude that everything is rosy characterised by irrepressible optimism and a tendency to find good in



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everything. It is about stepping back and exploring options rather than jumping to quick-fix solutions. How can we develop a more optimistic approach to changes we must make to come out of this individually and collectively, much more robust? We will be drawing on research in the applied behavioural sciences on mastering individual and collective change and looking at how neuroscience can support us in shaping a robust future.

We will focus on the following:

- Resiliency – current situation and public policy to post-COVID
- Fixed and growth mindsets
- Until behaviour changes, nothing changes
- The success cycle
- The change or transition curve
- Dealing with stress and pressure
- Becoming resilient: characteristics of dealing with pressure moments
- How can we build resilience in business organisations?

### Resilience – Current Situation – Post-COVID

Long-term unemployment is now a significant issue that many people have encountered in recent months and years. When the current British Government support, including the furlough scheme, finally ended in Autumn 2021, many more people became seriously anxious, not knowing whether they would ever work again. Their ability to seek and gain work or pursue their chosen career will become a severe phobic response for many.

Even in a stable environment, people are always worried about their employability, but now this is real. Times have changed significantly, and many industrial sectors are under threat. What makes things worse is that these changes challenge our thinking on what we considered as stable and secure jobs, occupations, and careers.

### Public Policy Must Change

The risk of large-scale unemployment is a significant issue for the younger, unskilled, non-professional group. Those middle-aged or nearing retirement are at risk, as are the young school leavers and graduates leaving tertiary education.

The following two decades will confront us with many organisational and personal challenges. What follows is focused on developing and implementing strategies to put oneself in the best shape possible to master individual potential.

### Develop a ‘Can Do’ Mindset

Success comes from having the right mindset, rather than talent, abilities, education, and IQ. Attaining a high degree of emotional intelligence (EQ) is essential to make any plans work. When looking at personal change we should assess how well we can manage our mindset. There is a viewpoint that the key to any personal change is effectively controlling one’s mindset. Carol Dweck proposed the idea of a ‘fixed’ or ‘growth’ mindset. People with the ‘fixed’ mindset believe they only have a certain level of limited skills. A ‘fixed’ mindset starts with believing that your intelligence, talents, and abilities are defined as finite in some way and are difficult to change, or indeed that you cannot change them at all. A fixed mindset does not serve us well. Whereas a growth mindset suggests learning new things,

skills and intelligence are not fixed, but expansive. With effort, momentum, motivation and discipline, we develop our abilities and adapt and change when we see a need to do so.

The fixed mindset tends to be prevalent in orthodox commerce and business. It is often due to the reliance on rationality, risk aversion, sticking to the transactional model, adhering to the tried and tested rather than experimenting with the new and innovative. The ‘growth’ mindset is much more spontaneous and usually adopted by the more transformational types, who perhaps are more focused on creativity, innovation, and change, and are more attracted to taking thoughtful risks in their personal and organisational growth behaviour. A leadership culture reflecting the ‘growth’ mindset existing in Tesla, SpaceX, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft comes to mind.

Characteristics	Fixed Mindset Culture	Growth Mindset Culture
Dominant Culture	Mechanistic, command and control	Expansive, consultative
What is valued?	Command and control	Initiative and enterprise
Speed of Change Implementation	Reactive and slow	Proactive, strategic and speedy
Attitude towards Risk	Risk-averse	Calculated thoughtful risks
Career Aspirations	Orthodox functional hierarchy	Project driven by multi-functional teams
Management Style	Transactional	Transformational
Structure – relationships	Bureaucratic	Matrix
Communication	Top-down	Multi- directional

### Bringing about Change: Until Behaviour Changes, Nothing Changes

Whether it is in the context of organisational or personal change, we need to go through a process that delivers positive outcomes. Generally, we have to navigate through distinct personal changes such as our feelings and emotions for change to happen. This is based on the work of Elizabeth Kubler Ross and subsequent research and ideas on the Change or Transition Curve. Ostensibly, we are looking at improving how people and organisations can change how people come to terms with change. This work has been applied across a whole raft of studies, from overcoming serious illness, coming to terms with death, divorce and separation, change in career, managing complex change in organisations, post-acquisition integration etc. This model of how behaviour change regaining resilience happens, holds up well when relating it to situations where behaviour change is the desired outcome.

Most importantly, before we explore the change curve, it is necessary to show that everybody experiences the emotions displayed on the Change Curve diagram as a normal process and how we react over time. The key message of the Change Curve is that we can positively influence our future in changing our behaviour, by anticipating and accepting the emotions



we will encounter. If we recognise that we have ownership of the change, and have a role to play, we generally accept the change and move through the steps more quickly and with less disruption. We can build inner resilience and make our organisations more effective and better equipped to deal with adversity by compressing the changes in the Change Curve into a short time frame.

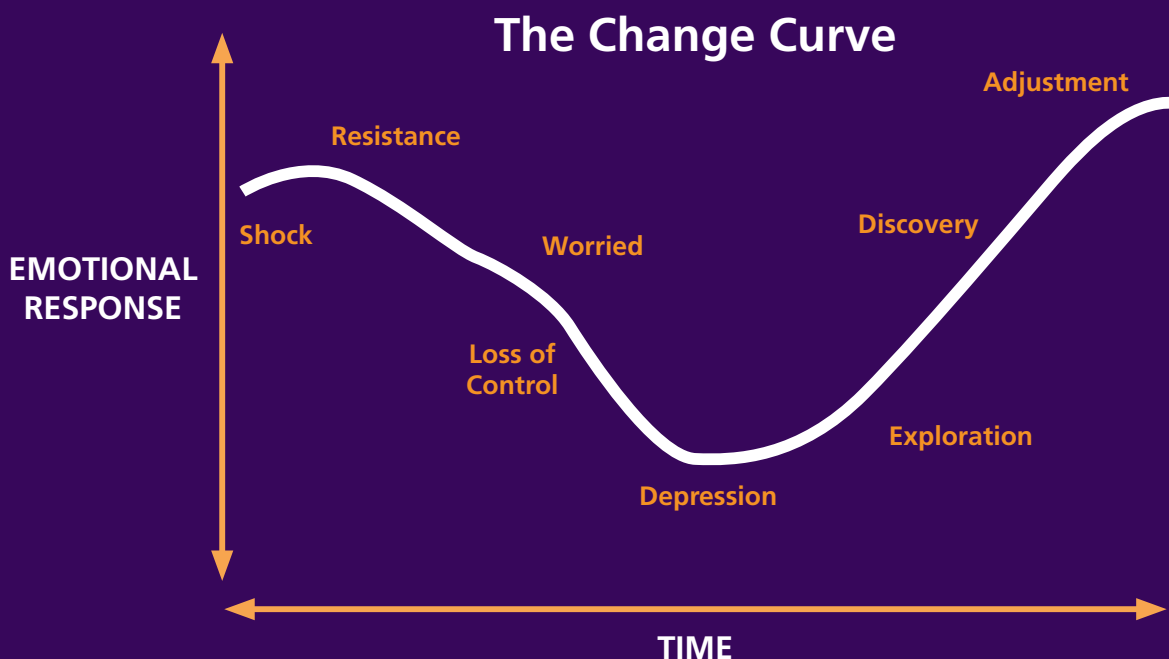
### How the Change Curve Works

Generally speaking, most people can adapt if they know what is expected of them. Some people can do it quickly – others are much slower. What usually makes the difference between a slow and fast response to change is when people can influence the process and share in the ownership of the change. When people feel they do not have a personal license or control of things, this can lead to a state of emotional avoidance.

For instance, the ramifications of COVID will have had severe consequences for people’s lives, careers and futures. The intensity of this event is more significant than what most people call normal and may initially create a shock to their wellbeing. Additionally, people may not take the potential consequences seriously enough. They may deny their emotional disruption and display some form of resistance to the idea that things will play out as the media and politicians predict. This denial stage only lasts for a short period, where this temporary state of shock will deepen into a state of worry and concern about their future. If this continues, they may experience a loss of control or even become depressed in the longer-term about the change.

The Change Curve works when positive ways out of the crisis flourish (such as Vaccines becoming available and an inoculation programme is published), and people can explore, learn, discover, and adjust to the new normal.

The key is to help people move along the curve as quickly as possible, which means using our people and influence skills to



build resilience. Unfortunately, the average person or manager does not always possess these skills. Knowing where you and others are located on the curve enables us to help others move on to the following stages.

### **Moving Beyond Shock and Resistance**

You will note from the Change Curve that we can quickly turn things around if we can pick up resistance at an early stage and deal with it. If you avoid dealing with resistance, you create problems for yourself in the future. The main issue is to recognise resistance and denial in their many forms, and strive to remove those creating resistance. Often it is just a case of tackling the fear of not knowing how to change.

### **Knowing How to Develop Resilience and Change with the Success Cycle**

This leads us to understand the process whereby people can and do change. I use a well-known process called the 'success cycle' focused on four critical stages in sequence. Personal change depends on us running our mind through what enables and limits us in what we do. We call these our personal beliefs. Whether we think we can or cannot, we are right. Our empowering beliefs push us forward, and our limiting beliefs stop us from taking action.

The success cycle is a natural flow. It all starts with our beliefs and perceptions about the potential that resides within each of us. What we choose to believe about ourselves and how we see things operating in the world determines whether we act according to our potential. Many never achieve their potential and accept their role in business, relationships and life as their fate and do not take action and responsibility for shaping and creating their future.

However, when we act and do something, we will get results. Whether those results are favourable or not, it is still

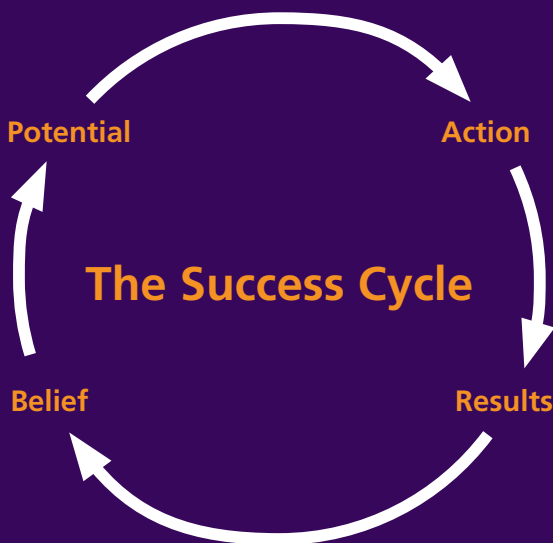
an outcome. It may not be the positive outcome we want, but taking action gives us feedback on what works and what does not, enabling us to appraise things and start to work at the process until we get the outcome we want. The success cycle is driven by how we respond to feedback, which prompts the continuance of the cycle again. If we don't get the result we want, we need to start the process again, do something new, and continue until we get what we want.

It is interesting that if most people don't get what they want, they give up. I have heard people say, "I have applied for three middle manager jobs in my department and never get further than the shortlist – looks like I need to find something else then", or "I failed to get into the fast-track programme, so I am thinking of going back to my old job". Most people give up too quickly. Tip: it would help to reflect on this process and aim to act time and again until we get what we want.

### **Resilience: Dealing with Stress and Pressure**

Nowadays, we have a strange relationship with the word 'stress'. It is pervasive and appears to be all around us. Talk to any colleague or friend, and they will expose you to their latest stressor. They may refer to overwork, low moods, fatigue. It appears to be everywhere and affect everyone. Stress is a much over-used term. Stress became a popular term in the 1950s and has now become the number one item of conversation with most people. Still, it was initially identified in 1936 when Hans Selye coined and defined it as 'the nonspecific response of the body to any demand for change'.

Stress is the hinterland in which you operate in terms of busyness, tight time constraints, noise, the general environment, how people respond or look at you in a certain way. You could experience it by overthinking, worrying about inconsequential things. Unfortunately, we are continually bombarded with being in a state of 'readiness arousal', always ready for the next



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stressor. These reactions inevitably drain you, distract you, and derail you from doing your best.

Stress is your negative interpretation of things that you are exposed to that make you feel uncomfortable.

Dealing with stress is a lifestyle issue – dealing with pressure, however, is very different. Becoming resilient is dealing with pressure points or moments in your life – not the general busyness of life itself.

Becoming resilient is about identifying pressure moments in our lives, and preparing to inoculate ourselves with strategies to deal with these pressure moments better. We will talk about four leading attitudes and behaviours that will help people cope with this pressure shortly. Just now, focus on those events that create pressure for you.

You will find they include situations where you have little or no control of circumstances and how they play out. In many cases, you will probably inadvertently put pressure on yourself and be the creator of your pressure moments. This is a significant problem experienced by various teams, and it is not so surprising to find that pressure management strategies are lacking in many organisations. When rectified, it allows individuals to maximise their creative and intellectual resources, rather than have them diminished.

Addressing the critical learning issues and assessment of the difference between background stress and pressure points enable us to think about how we each personally can reflect on our pressure points.

Research suggests that it is desirable and possible to develop L&D strategies to equip organisations to become more resilient. This has to be led from the top by a team committed to developing the right behaviours to instil a culture of resiliency and incorporate it into their leadership model.

## **Becoming Resilient: Characteristics of Dealing with Pressure Moments**

We have always been keen users of psychometrics to assess the capability of leaders at different levels within an organisation. We use them in various settings, from personal and team coaching to leadership training, career development, assessment centres and recruitment. We only use those tests that the various licensing authorities have approved, such as the British Psychological Society (BPS). Profiling as a process has to be evaluated and assessed, and verified, unless you want people administering testing regimes without a behavioural background and credentials. Our arsenal of profiling includes a variety of ability tests and personality profiling such as 16PF, OPQ, MBTI and Fibo B, which are well known, well researched and quoted in research and behaviour studies reporting.

There are several traits, types and behaviours that would indicate that there are critical markers associated with those who demonstrate a strong core of inner resilience. The Institute of Health and Potential have a valued contribution to make in addition to our research in psychometrics. Broadly, they identify four core sets of behaviours, whether these are traits or types that typify individuals with superior resilience. There include confidence, optimism, tenacity and enthusiasm.

## **How Can We Build Resilience?**

We need direction to make any change happen. We need

### **Rethinking the nature of pressure moments**

In a moment of pressure, you have to deliver on behaviour to counteract that pressure, or you are going nowhere

- Just to be clear, everything at work becomes equally essential – you'll have to assess real priorities as there are only 24 hours in the day
- You probably are not a member of special forces, a Marine or an air traffic controller, so you don't need to be as resilient as their standards dictate
- Wrongly confusing background stress with pressure moments reduces our abilities needlessly
- We know there is pressure on you to perform, but how can you change your thinking to support what is realistic?
- Are you over-reacting to pressure moments? Ask yourself: Does the situation call for my reaction, or am I wearing myself out needlessly when I don't need to?
- When we confuse daily background stress for pressure moments, we react physically, emotionally, and behaviourally in an unhelpful manner.
- Have you thought of reframing the pressure points to take them into perspective?
- Are your reactions appropriate for the nature of the pressure points?
- Are you experiencing any distorted thinking?

<b>Confidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seen as an antidote to the negative effects of pressure</li> <li>• See pressure situations as challenges to be overcome, not avoided</li> <li>• Work harder, show more determination and grit</li> <li>• Are in control, centred and emotionally stronger?</li> <li>• Master their verbal and non-verbal presence</li> </ul>
<b>Optimism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are positive about the future – no matter what</li> <li>• Tend to progress faster, earn more and work hard</li> <li>• Participate and immerse themselves in their work</li> <li>• Work better with teams and harmonise any conflict</li> <li>• Are excited by rather than fearing change</li> </ul>
<b>Tenacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know and express the need to prepare, plan and exert effort</li> <li>• Tend to persevere and have stickability</li> <li>• Developed a psychological edge to perform better</li> <li>• Remain engaged over the long haul</li> <li>• Persistence is a greater asset than talent</li> <li>• Are fast rather than slow thinking</li> </ul>
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display enlightened arousal for change</li> <li>• Know they can do this, and win others to their cause</li> <li>• Display winner behaviour and encourage others</li> <li>• Full of energy, always can find a way</li> <li>• Communicates excitement, engagement and positivity to all</li> </ul>

leadership from the top of our organisations. This leadership needs to focus on our business missions and identity and equip our people with the best skills and behaviour.

We have four strategies that will work to build inner resilience within people and organisations. We believe that you should always work from the inside and build a strong core with a group of leaders who can act as facilitators at senior levels. This thinking and subsequent team development need to roll out via crucial strategic projects. Work on core projects that will dictate 80% of the results to have the most impact on the business.

There is a combination of approaches that are integrated into one strategic thrust for building organisational resilience.

The work of growth mindset starts the ball rolling and gets people to reject the orthodoxy of silo thinking and think creativity outside their functional responsibilities. Built onto this is working using the action learning model of the success cycle to install core beliefs and this should guide the work of the change and resilience using the Change Curve. The Change Curve is useful in highlighting where all the various organisational players are positioned emotionally. It allows you to assess where resistance to change is highest and where you need to work on building resilience into the culture of the business. You can also plan the tactics to take to support moving people and teams faster along the curve or compressing the curve so your outcome is quickly achieved.

Then you need to differentiate between background stress noise and real pressure moments when people feel most at risk. This should enable you to start the process of learning and development to equip actors with the tools to roll out the four key behaviours of confidence, optimism, resilience and enthusiasm.

## References

1. Carol Dweck – author of many books on emotional intelligence including *Mindset - Updated Edition: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential*
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3. *The Success Cycle* – attributed to Tony Robbins of Robbins Research International and used extensively on his training programmes and literature.
4. *The Institute of Health and Human Potential – Managing Performance under Pressure : The Science of Doing Your Best When It Matters Most*, Hendrie Weisinger, J. P. Pawliw-Fry

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