This research paper explores what makes up personal resilience and how it is built and maintained, plus its links to organisational resilience. It is based on 25 interviews with leaders and 2 interviews with psychologists.

The Definition of Resilience

Resilience is the ability to overcome setbacks and absorb any learning offered by those setbacks, quickly, and at the minimum cost. There are increasing levels of resilience: those that describe their ability to bounce back; those who describe this plus absorbing the learning from the setback; those who describe this learning, and on top, their speed of response and minimum cost. There is an even further level of resilience, where a person transforms an extreme challenge into an opportunity and achieves good outcomes from the setback even in the face of extreme loss.

The Resilience Engine®
The most significant finding of the research is the concept of the Resilience Engine®:

The Internal Resources ‘2+7+1’
The first component is a set of specific Internal Resources - 2 Beliefs, 7 Attitudes and the ability to Self-Accept that form the internal source for an individual’s resilience.

The ‘2’
1. A belief in one’s purpose in life
2. A belief is one’s own judgement

The ‘7’
There are seven attitudes whose combination is critical for the highest level of resilience
1. Takes full responsibility for self, own actions and reactions
2. Doesn’t dwell, forgives when necessary, moves on
4. Optimistic
5. Grounded, feet on the ground, pragmatic
6. High level of independence and independent judgement
7. Values others and their opinions

The 4 latter attitudes make for an interesting paradox – they are 2 pairs of countering mindsets: a both optimistic and pragmatic person will believe in the possibility of creating options and solutions and will also consider and cater for all barriers. Plus the extremely independent person who values other people’s inputs will achieve a fully counterbalancing set of arguments in any situation.

The ‘1’
This refers to Self Acceptance. It is the findings of this research that leaders who are resilient do not necessarily have Self Esteem but Self Acceptance. They know themselves deeply, and they accept themselves - all strengths, all gremlins, all blind spots.

External Goal Focus
The second component of the Resilience Engine® is an extreme focus on an outwardly facing goal. The key for this to play a part of the Resilience Engine® is that there is a continued and almost ruthless focus on the goal. This focus is so clear that the individual will do anything – including generating somehow all creative options available to them – to solve any problems in the way of succeeding in their goal. The real mindset here is the openness to solutions coming from unexpected places, and keeping a wide compass map. This mindset is enhanced via the Adaptive Capacity.

The Adaptive Capacity
The third component of the Resilience Engine® is an individual’s Adaptive Capacity. This is a sophisticated mix of skills that connect the Internal Resources and External Goal Focus in continuous motion, and helps move the individual towards their goal(s) congruently. It is the moving part of the Resilience Engine®. The Adaptive Capacity is made up of three components:

1. Firstly, Perspective – the ability to grasp context. Being able to step back from a situation immediately in order to better see and understand. This implies an ability to weigh up a welter of factors, ranging from how very different groups of people will interpret a gesture, to being able to put a situation in perspective.
2. The second is Supporting Oneself so that the individual is refreshed continuously.
3. The last component is a Pacing Cycle – an advanced skill where an individual manages their load accordingly to their capacity on a continuous basis. Most significantly pacing results in a steady state use of energy at around 60-65% usage, rather than high peaks and troughs. Dependencies are ruthless prioritisation and saying no often.

Further Information
The full Resilience Insight Series includes more on The Resilience Engine© and its component parts; Organisational Resilience; how to sustain resilience; 10 Reasons for Resilience Engine breakdown; Sector and Gender differences; 10 Implications for Coaches.

To obtain a copy of the full Resilience Insight Series, or to discuss more about your own and your organisation’s resilience capabilities, please contact Jenny Campbell, Director lifetimeswork at jenny.campbell@lifetimeswork.com/ 0131 332 7512.