THE AWARIS RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

By Chris Tamdjidi Published on 15.02.2023 17 Min.

(THE 12-FOUR-THREE FRAMEWORK)

- There's a lot of confusion about how to build resilient organisations, and which resilience skills actually work.
- At Awaris, we've identified 12 key resilience skills and four key resilience competencies, which can help individuals understand their own resilience profiles.
- Our in-house research has helped us create a unified and actionable resilience framework, to help firms become truly WE-silient.

WE'VE DEVELOPED AN ACTIONABLE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

In the last blog post, we suggested two key shifts for organisations: Developing resilience as a skill and shifting from individual resilience to WE-silience. In this post, we outline an actionable framework for doing this on an individual level.

Many organisations have wellbeing initiatives in place. But they often lack a framework to integrate them. This is what we've created. Our Resilience framework encompasses 12 evidence-based resilience skills. Three levels at which they're trainable. And four meta skills or competencies that arise from this. This integration could serve as a basis for firms to work out how effective their wellbeing programmes are. And ultimately, to help them flourish.

UNPACKING THE CONFUSION AROUND RESILIENCE

Current thinking about personal resilience in organisations is muddled. There are four reasons why.

1. **Some incorrectly equate resilience with endurance.** This outdated view comes from materials science. A metal is considered 'resilient' when it endures lots of pressure. For humans, this doesn't apply. We believe resilience isn't about enduring stress. It's about being able to shift our internal states quickly.
2. **Wellbeing and resilience are often lumped in together.** Really, they're two distinct constructs. People can show resilience in phases of their lives that are marked by low wellbeing, during hardship.
3. **There are so many approaches to choose from.** There are hundreds of ways to help people become more resilient. We think we've located the most effective ones. And suggest an integrated framework for them to be taught and trained.
4. **A lack of understanding of what drives change.** Decision-makers like to understand the return on investment for any business decision. But they currently lack these insights when it comes to resilience. To make informed decisions, they need clearer insights on the effectiveness, dosage, and duration of different interventions that could accelerate personal change.

TOWARDS A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF RESILIENCE

We've spent the last two years digging into the science of resilience. To develop a deeper and systematic understanding of it. A number of clues guided our research.

- **We see resilience as a skill.** Or a series of skills, which are trainable.
- **We looked at how these skills impact the body.** We're biophysiological beings. Our bodies have 30 trillion cells. And need to regenerate around 200-400 billion cells daily. For each resilience skill, we checked whether it had a measurable impact on our biophysiology.
- **We categorised the impact of these resilience interventions.** Into behavioural, psychological, or neuro-physiological interventions (see chart below). This helped us assess their effectiveness on our biophysiology.

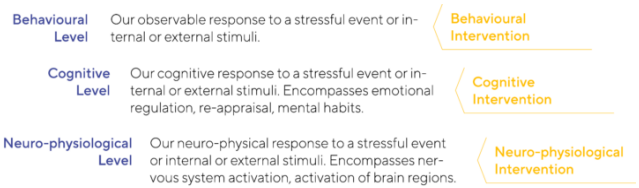


Fig. 1: Skills encompass and are trainable at three levels

An example. Someone struggles with ongoing anxiety. They have an excessive workload and Zoom fatigue. They receive a rude e-mail. Angry, they almost send back a nasty response. But before they respond, they stop. Calm themselves. And eventually, realise it would be unwise to respond angrily.

This sort of emotional regulation could look different for different people.

- **One person** might find they feel better after a brisk 15-minute walk.
- A **second person** might shift their perspective to calm down. They remember the person that emailed them has just lost their mother and is going through a tough time. They realise it's not about them.
- A **third person** applies breathing exercises and mindfulness practices.
- A **fourth person** drinks alcohol to calm down. It works at the time, but they feel hungover the next day.

The first three examples are resilience skills in action. Using emotional regulation to get from a stress state to a neutral or regenerative state. The fourth example is a sub-optimal way to do this.

Emotions are how the body's energy changes in relation to the challenges we're facing. They activate the limbic system. This leads to bodily changes, including to muscles, blood flow, and pain sensitivity. Strong emotions usually include activation of both of the nervous system (sympathetic arousal) and the endocrine system (hormones such as cortisol or dopamine). Skilful emotional regulation has to impact both systems. So how did emotional regulation work in the earlier examples?

- **Person one shifts their behaviour.** They leave the difficult situation and go for a walk. Crucially, movement is a **physical resilience skill** that shifts the body's energy state. The brain receives more energy in the body, and the magnitude of the problem in relation to our emotions declines. This in turn leads to a down-regulation of the nervous and endocrine systems. The rhythmic movement of the body while walking loosens tight muscles. The fresh air and nature help with general relaxation. The change in behaviours leads to shifts in the person's thinking and neurophysiological state

- **Person two shifts their perspective.** They empathise with the person who's just lost their mother. By doing so, they use **emotional and mental skills** in order to reappraise the problem as less important. This in turn leads to a down-regulation of the nervous and endocrine system as intensely. They don't bother to respond to the nasty e-mail. A change in perspective leads to behavioural and neurophysiological shifts.

- **Person three shifts their nervous system's response using breathing and mindfulness practices.** They slow their breathing, drop negative thinking patterns, and notice unease in their bodies, simply letting it be. Calmer nervous and endocrine systems help them choose not to send a nasty email back. They apply a **physical skill** leading to shifts in thinking and behaviour.

- **Person four drinks alcohol.** This is a direct behavioural intervention with impact on the neuro-chemical level. Alcohol leads to some degree of relaxation and drowsiness, and slows anxious thinking. But this isn't a sustainable long-term behaviour.

By applying the first three lenses – shifts in behaviour, mindset/perspective, and physiological activation – we searched for the most impactful resilience skills. We reviewed the literature to find skills that were:

- Measurable – With a quantifiable impact at the neurophysiological level.
- Trainable – That could be adopted and showed improvement through training.
- Impactful – Which exhibited a statistical significance across research groups.
- Relevant and actionable – Skills that were relevant and actionable in working life.

Based on these assumptions, we identified 12 resilience skills (see chart below). They're divided into the physical, mental & emotional, and social domains.

Fig. 2: Awaris identified 12 core resilience skills that can be grouped in three domains

The table below gives a brief explanation of these skills.

Skills	Neurophysiological level (how it impacts our physiology)	Behavioural level (what we do that strengthens this)
Physical Exercise	Exercise and the activation of cardio-vascular and muscular systems. This leads to improved processing of nutrients and oxygen flow. Over time, regular exercise reduces the risk of numerous cardio-vascular diseases, diseases related to chronic stress, and mental health issues.	Regular and varied activity (for cardio, strength, or flexibility). This could entail running, yoga, fitness, or team sports.
Recovery and Sleep	The ability to rest and sleep in a way that contributes to mental and physical recovery. Reduction in heart and breathing rate, and activation of multiple regenerative processes. These including muscle and cell repair, tissue growth, cognitive refreshment, down-regulation of stress, and replenishment of hormone system.	Regular and sufficient sleep. Can be supported by sleep hygiene, routine, sleep diaries, or sleep trackers.

Skills	Neurophysiological level (how it impacts our physiology)	Behavioural level (what we do that strengthens this)
Healthy Eating	Choosing healthy diet options and in appropriate quantities. This leads to better overall health, improved cardio-vascular and brain functioning, and a strengthened immune system.	Regular, healthy, balanced, and moderate eating, with some understanding of nutrition, and the adoption of healthy eathing behaviours such as interval fasting or mindful eating.
Conscious Breathing	Breathing to down-regulate the nervous system, relax muscles, strengthen vagus nerve tone, improving energy, and immune system function.	Regular, deep, slow breathing, primarily through the nose, supported by mindfulness, breathing exercises, or yoga.
Relaxation	Shifting of autonomic nervous system from sympathetic to parasympathetic activation leads to improvements in health, immune system function, energy, and mood.	Regular and frequent moments of relaxation – even in the midst of activities. Reading, being in nature, doing something peaceful, digital detoxing, mindfulness practices, or compassion practices.
Self Awareness	The ability to notice internal bodily states (interoception) including awareness of nervous system states, neurophysiological state/limbic system activation, and valence of that activation.	Reflecting, writing a diary, receiving coaching, reflecting on own life story, or mindfulness practices.
Focus	The ability to maintain cognitive focus on an activity with high stability and low effort. Contributes to the training of attention-regulation networks.	Single-Tasking, Ablenkungen reduzieren, Digital Detox, in ruhigen Räumen arbeiten, nicht zu viel auf einmal tun oder Achtsamkeitsübungen.

Skills	Neurophysiological level (how it impacts our physiology)	Behavioural level (what we do that strengthens this)
Emotional Regulation	Being able to down- or up-regulate our limbic system activation and to regain conscious control of our actions.	Going for a walk, cognitive control or reframing, breathing deeply, keeping an emotional diary, or mindfulness practices.
Positive Outlook	Maintaining a positive activation in the left prefrontal hemisphere. This relates to approach behaviours, leading to improvements in awareness, attention, memory retention, and health outcomes.	Appreciating little things, gratitude journaling, savouring experiences, taking time for things, mindfulness practices, or compassion practices.
Sense Purpose & Meaning	The neurophysiological level of purpose and meaning is not yet well understood.	Reflection, keeping a diary, life coaching, mindfulness, or contemplation practices.
Connecting to Others	The ability to mirror others experience in our own brain, and thus have a felt sense of their experience.	Spending time with friends and family, pets, social evenings with friends, listening well, or deep dialogues
Compassion	The ability to activate our care/oxytocin system. This can down-regulate sympathetic activation and up-regulate in multiple dimensions (mood, cognitive control). Being able to activate both care and direct experience networks and down-regulate stress networks.	Compassion practices, perspective shifts, conflict resolution, mentoring, or helping people.

All of the above skills have a direct neurophysiological correlate. They're trainable. Either at the neurophysiological, psychological, or behavioural levels. Below, we outline how.

RESILIENCE SKILLS LEAD TO COMPETENCIES

Once we have trained individual or multiple resilience skills, they show up at the level of resilience competencies. These are:

- **Self-regulation** – Being able to shift our mental/emotional state. This usually requires skills in self-awareness, focus, and emotional regulation, as well as the ability to cultivate a positive outlook. This can help us function well in stressful situations.

- **Energy management** – Having enough energy to do what we want to. This comes mainly from the body. Sleep, exercise, and diet, as well as conscious breathing and sufficient relaxation. Self-awareness and a positive outlook also contribute. This is also connected to our ability to regenerate.

- **Adaptability and growth** – Our ability to learn and grow. This comes in part from having sufficient energy, but also on our ability to relax, reflect, and connect to our purpose.

- **Social and relationship management** – Connecting, supporting, and collaborating well with others. This is based on empathy, emotional regulation, and compassion. Being stressed can make people less sociable, but less so for those with resilience skills.

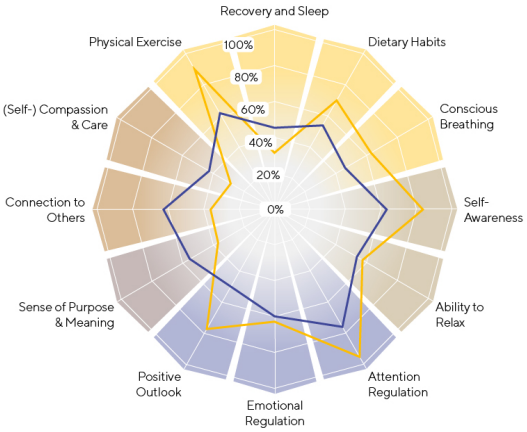
We've grouped these meta skills and competencies into four areas below.

SKILLS & BEHAVIOURS	COMPETENCIES			
	1. Self-Regulation	2. Energy Management	3. Adaptability & Growth	4. Social Integratio Relationship Management
Physical Exercise		●	●	
Recovery & Sleep		●	●	
Dietary Habits		●		
Conscious Breathing		●		
Ability to Relax		●	●	
Self-Awareness	●	●	●	
Attention Regulation	●			
Emotional Regulation	●			●
Positive outlook	●		●	●
Sense of Purpose & Meaning			●	●
Connection to Others				●
(Self-)Compassion & Care				●

Fig. 3: Awaris focuses on developing four core resilience competences

Understanding our own resilience profiles. We're each unique in how we face challenges. It's important individuals have a personal understanding of which skill areas they should work on. Awaris's unique understanding of resilience competencies can help individuals understand their own resilience profiles. The chart below shows an example of one.

Fig. 4: Sample Skill Profile of an individual mapped onto the three domains



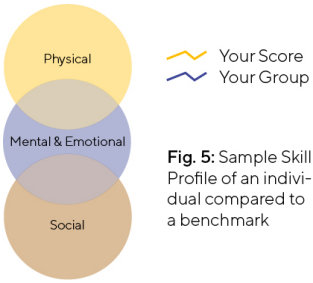


Fig. 5: Sample Skill Profile of an individual compared to a benchmark

So what can Awaris's resilience framework do for organisations?

- It offers a unified and actionable resilience framework.
- The framework links resilience skills to outcomes through correlative analyses.
- It helps build personal resilience profiles.
- It can identify specific skills necessary for those exposed to stress.
- Ultimately, it can help businesses function much more effectively, with happier, flourishing employees.

Previous and upcoming blogs:

Blog 1 – From Resilience to We-Silience: a multi-level view of resilience

Blog 2 – How to build individual resilience: the 12 key resilience skills

Blog 3 – How to build We-silience: building team and organisational habits

Blog 4 – Leading with We-silience: building leaders' resilience intelligence

Blog 5 – Discuss the role of mindfulness in building resilience.

Blog 6 – Resilience profiles