

# EMOTIONAL SMARTS

THE RECESSION MAY BE BEHIND US, BUT WORKING LIFE STILL DELIVERS CHALLENGES. GEETU BHARWANAY EXPLAINS HOW PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS DEPENDS ON STAYING POISED UNDER PRESSURE

With the implications of the financial crisis still playing out, many organisations have been engaging in development programmes that focus on cultivating emotional resilience. This comes from a recognition that everyday challenges will only continue and that individuals need to operate at their full potential. M&As are back on the agenda and corporate governance is still very much front of mind, so there is no longer much certainty about where one's organisation will end up in terms of scale, scope of business activities and reach in the face of ambitious growth plans. Negotiating this environment requires a certain agility and ability to tune into emotional input and response.

This article examines what emotional resilience is and how treasury professionals can use an understanding of this topic to not only survive, but to thrive.

## What exactly is emotional resilience?

The term emotional resilience has become more familiar in the workplace, but what does it mean and how does one become emotionally resilient?

I define emotional resilience as the ability to choose thoughts, actions and feelings that enable you to function at your best at individual, team and organisational levels. This is critical for finance and treasury professionals, who often carry governance responsibility for a business operating both profitably and ethically.



In addition to being technically strong in specialist knowledge and technical skill, treasury professionals need to master the emotional dimension of their interactions – that is, they need to understand the role emotions play in themselves and in others when working in teams. They also need a good sense of the emotional states in teams that support high performance and how they can be generated.

## Emotional resilience in the workplace

More and more organisations and their leaders are grasping

the positive effect emotional resilience can have not only on their teams, but also on their own overall effectiveness as leaders, and the success of their organisations as businesses. Emotionally resilient people have the flexibility and know-how to deal with ongoing situations rather than one-off problems or crises and are the most consistently productive professionals.

Research has shown that by developing these skills, individuals are able to manage themselves and be resilient when working in teams, resulting in higher

## SCENARIOS THAT REQUIRE EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

- 1 Constructing a deal – being able to accurately read the people and the businesses involved.
- 2 Assembling a project team, while keeping in mind the need to identify accurately strengths and weaknesses of people involved.
- 3 Leading a team through a difficult and unexpected restructuring process.
- 4 Supporting a company to venture into new markets and advising executives of how to balance commercial ambition with solid due diligence.
- 5 Influencing a senior executive towards a different point of view while listening to their perspective.
- 6 Surviving a merger or deal that involves redundancies affecting team members, while continuing to work with existing and new staff.

performance. They are more likely to be visible as good work colleagues, effective managers and skilled personnel.

Organisations that ignore this vital ingredient will fail

to get the best out of their employees and their teams, which in turn has a negative effect on their bottom line.

To become emotionally resilient requires a combination of self-understanding and action. These are to be used not only in times of stress, but every day, to boost productivity and performance. It is not enough to just be 'resilient' and to bounce back, as many daily issues at work involve emotion, and many people do not have the strategies for overcoming more intractable problems. It is not solely about working on yourself – but understanding and building relationships with others.

### How to develop your emotional resilience

The approach to developing and sustaining emotional resilience relies on developing an awareness of how we operate and cultivating the skills needed to negotiate difficult and emotionally charged situations.

#### Being self-aware

There are six aspects of emotion-related self-awareness that I believe influence what you think about and focus on, how you handle your emotions and those of others, and how you operate when working in a team.

- **Self-worth** – determines how you feel about yourself and how you function at work. Healthy self-worth enables you to connect well with others and to have good relationships.
- **Self-control** – is a matter of being able to keep your feelings under control in response to everyday work events. The steady stream of triggers that can cause reactions at work is endless – with emails, calls, texts and meetings being just a few. Our ability to deal with these distractions, our impulses, feelings and reactions depend on our self-control.

- **Mood** – is a reflection of our emotional state in any given moment. It's the atmosphere we create through our actions and inflict on others when in their company. Mood influences our choices about how we communicate, act and think. It affects those in our company and, when we are in a positive mood, it has a multiplier effect.
- **Empathy** – the ability to tune into other people's feelings so that we can take them on board when making decisions. It might involve taking a step back and understanding a different viewpoint, how another person might be feeling and responding appropriately.
- **Understanding** – being able to tune into what colleagues need in order for them to be effective at work. This is about knowing the working styles of others, understanding their personal context fully, so as to work together more effectively.
- **Caring** – showing that other people matter so that colleagues are able to make their best efforts at work; creating a feeling of compassion between individuals that surpasses empathy and understanding; doing what is right by people in the situation, not what is easiest.

By understanding these six essentials and reflecting on our approach to each of them, we can start to focus on the skills needed to build results in personal and team resilience.

#### Harnessing emotion

There are a number of practical skills that can be developed to enable us to take action, no matter what challenges are faced.

- **Shifting** – being able to recognise when our current emotional state is detrimental to the task in hand and that the situation requires a shift in mindset

## CASE STUDY OF A DISENFRANCHISED PROFESSIONAL

### Context

In the period after a merger, an outgoing CFO finds she needs to apply the framework of emotional resilience to manage herself through a difficult transition, as she works alongside an incoming CFO.

### Reflecting on the essentials

In this example, the concept of **high self-worth** could be counterproductive, as it might distract the outgoing CFO's attention away from the task of establishing a new role for herself. She might instead find herself becoming unproductively competitive with the incoming CFO, for instance. She might also find that **low self-control** inclines her to react impulsively to unwelcome actions from the incoming CFO. **Low mood** could make her appear less than constructive in terms of assisting with the integration of the two finance teams. She might also find herself **low on empathy**, which is also a natural reaction. In this kind of situation, feelings of low self-worth, low self-confidence and a sense of being disengaged from work are entirely natural. In an ideal situation, the outgoing CFO would conduct a self-assessment against the emotional resilience framework to identify valuable self-management strategies.

### Actively applying emotional resilience: mindset and skill set

Important here is the skill of **shifting** – moving away from feeling annoyed and rejected, towards building the necessary confidence to deal with the immediate situation and beyond. The ideal scenario would be to use this time to reflect on her own values and aspirations and affirm what will be most important her in her next role. When it comes to helping others, facilitating **group dialogue** is a useful means of supporting other team members. **Expressing** innermost feelings about the changes, on the other hand, may not be useful in this scenario; it is important the outgoing CFO remains very conscious of what she is communicating.

### Using emotional resilience to deliver results

Now is the time to optimise personal and business **connections** to identify opportunities for herself and to make sure she is using her influence in a way that inclines others to refer her within their networks. Understanding and maintaining **energy** levels and focus, meanwhile, will help her to move on.

and approach to deal with it and improve the outcome.

- **Expressing** – being able to speak up appropriately when it matters.
- **Problem-solving** – being able to notice emotion and how to channel it appropriately.
- **Group dialogue** – being able to initiate difficult conversations when needed.
- **Group empathy** – tuning into and shifting emotions at group level to stay on track with work goals.

Once you have learnt how to identify the situation and actively apply your understanding of emotional resilience, you are able to start fine-tuning the key result

areas: connection, influence, energy and thriving (see case study above).

It is time to bring the skills and practices of emotional resilience into a much wider arena to influence changes in the workplace. As Charles Darwin discovered: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

Those who understand the role that emotional resilience plays in the workplace also understand that by embracing it and learning how to continually harness it to their advantage, they can operate successfully with those who are well-equipped to work towards their organisation's goals. ♡

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