

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/orgdyn](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/orgdyn)

# Team resilience: How teams flourish under pressure



George M. Alliger, Christopher P. Cerasoli, Scott I. Tannenbaum,  
William B. Vessey

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine sharing a very small living and work area with several people for 27 months, never being allowed to leave, with uncertain and lagged communication with “headquarters,” and where any damage to your work environment could be catastrophic. This is the scenario actively being planned by NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration): to send a team to Mars in a small capsule, with all the attendant communication lags and dangers. In our future-looking research with NASA on such Long Duration Space Mission teams, we have focused on a team-level quality that we believe to be crucial for such missions: *team resilience*. In this article we apply what we have learned from our work with NASA, and with other high-risk teams, to business teams.

Of course, most business teams do not operate under such extreme, confined conditions. Nonetheless, many teams in organizations undergo challenges where resilience is needed to maintain effectiveness and well-being. Certainly, this is true for teams where safety or urgency is key. For example, we’ve worked with firefighting and oil exploration teams; surgical and other medical teams; emergency response teams; and law enforcement and military teams. Team resilience is clearly essential in those settings.

But we have also worked with corporate leadership, project, manufacturing, technology, and customer service teams, and have come to recognize that resilience can be important for almost any business team, even when physical safety is not an issue. Challenges can diminish the ability to accomplish goals and tax the cohesion of virtually any team; so almost any team can benefit from greater resilience.

Operating from the conviction that team resilience is important in most settings, in this article we: define the construct, distinguishing it from individual resilience; discuss how stress and pressure affects teams and what a healthy, resilient team looks like; provide 40 specific behaviors that resilient teams demonstrate; and offer recommendations for building team resilience in any type of team.

## WHAT IS TEAM RESILIENCE?

In a general sense, resilience is the capacity to withstand and recover from challenges, pressure, or stressors. Observable only when challenges occur, resilience operates at both the individual and team level. Individual resilience, however, is not synonymous with team resilience.

### Individual Resilience

Extensive research shows that some people are able to recover from severe stress relatively quickly and completely. For example, some children come from very difficult environments but make the transition to adulthood without the lasting problems that seem to plague their peers. Some combat soldiers returning from the Vietnam and Gulf wars have not displayed the expected post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, despite having undergone traumatic experiences. Among your own acquaintances may be people who you feel have weathered deep or long-lasting challenges exceptionally well.

Such individual resilience has multiple sources. First, resilience is enabled by personal psychological characteristics, such as possessing a positive attitude, ability to forgive, internal sense of control, cognitive flexibility, emotional

“toughness,” realism, and the courage to face one’s own fears. These characteristics allow an individual to avoid being mired in a negative situation—instead, he or she is able to face the challenge, work to change it in adaptive ways, construct a positive understanding of it (e.g., frame the situation in a way that gives a sense of control over it), or simply “let it go.” Second, a person’s level of physical durability and fitness can influence the ability to cope with stress. This is because both physical and mental reserves shrink when we are tired; the less fit tire more easily and are simply more sensitive to stress. For example, blood serum corticosteroid levels are higher for the less fit following an intense, stressful event. Third, social support is determinative of individual resilience. Having ample, active sources of emotional and material support helps. These three factors (psychological, physical, and social) are closely related, which is why, for example, psychiatrists are more likely than ever before to seek to understand their patients’ support network.

Because each of the three foregoing enablers of resilience are malleable to different degrees, it is possible for individuals to become more resilient—as the increasing number of programs for training personal resilience demonstrates. This is good news! While we may not be able to change certain stable personality traits or environmental conditions easily, we can work to maximize our resilience within whatever natural psychological, physical and social limits we find ourselves.

## Team Resilience

Much less research attention has been paid to team level resilience than to individual resilience. But it is important also to turn the light of theory and research onto team resilience because:

- Teams are ubiquitous in the working world;
- Most teams will face challenges that can drain resources, adversely affect performance, and diminish team cohesion and team member well-being;
- In challenging environments, reliable and sustainable team performance and well-being is only possible when the team is resilient;
- A group of resilient individuals does not make a resilient team;

- Teams can be prepared in ways that augment their resilience.

The fact that teams are ubiquitous in the working world is fairly well known. Over the past three decades, the use of teams in organizations has steadily increased, and it seems this trend will continue for the foreseeable future, impelled as it is by a greater appreciation of the need for collaboration and by the increasing use of technology that supports such collaboration. In our work, we have seen teams in all business sectors face challenges; while these are rarely catastrophic, they are often serious enough to impair performance and cohesion. Many teams can make it through an initial challenge or two, but only resilient teams can sustain performance and morale over time.

It is very important to note that assembling a group of resilient individuals will not necessarily yield a resilient team. A team comprised of highly resilient individuals could still suffer communication breakdowns or disputes about leadership, lack a shared mental model about how to work together, or have members who are unwilling to monitor each other’s performance or back each other up when necessary. Indeed, team members who are high in both ability and psychological “hardiness” may, perhaps precisely because of their past solo successes, operate with less regard for other team members or the team.

Based on our research, we define team resilience as the capacity of a team to withstand and overcome stressors in a manner that enables sustained performance; it helps teams handle and bounce back from challenges that can endanger their cohesiveness and performance.

## TEAM CHALLENGES THAT REQUIRE RESILIENCE

Challenging events and circumstances place stress on individuals and on team processes. There are numerous challenges that can impact a team and test its resilience. [Table 1](#) below lists some of these.

Team challenges such as those noted above can be broadly distinguished as chronic or acute. Chronic challenges are difficult circumstances of an ongoing or long-lasting nature. Such challenges are damaging because their impact can accumulate over time, even when they are not particularly intense. Examples of chronic team challenges include a noisy

**Table 1** Some Common Team Challenges That Require Resilience.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult assignments</li> <li>• Time pressure</li> <li>• Insufficient resources</li> <li>• Conflict with people outside the team</li> <li>• High consequence work (e.g., safety, critical planning)</li> <li>• Challenging conditions (e.g., noise, lighting, proximity to others)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous work</li> <li>• Angry/upset customers</li> <li>• Interpersonal conflicts within team</li> <li>• Lack of control</li> <li>• “Missing” team members (e.g., vacation, ill)</li> <li>• Inadequate work output by one or more team members</li> <li>• Poor results</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Crisis” events</li> <li>• Constant pressure, even if low-level (e.g., work is never complete)</li> <li>• Changes in team membership</li> <li>• Unclear team roles</li> <li>• Ambiguity of direction/goals</li> <li>• Multiple simultaneous smaller challenges</li> </ul> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10440162>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10440162>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)