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## Resilience in a hybrid workspace



**Knowledge Institute**  
on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions



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For more information about this resource, please contact Amanda Davis at

[adavis@cymha.ca](mailto:adavis@cymha.ca)

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## Background

As we cautiously emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, agencies in the child and youth mental health and addictions sector are moving from crisis response to recovery planning.

The pandemic has brought many challenges to organizations in our sector, particularly the rapid shifts to hybrid care models that support client services. As leaders and teams learn how to navigate the “new normal” in hybrid workspaces, resilience is top of mind. However, resilience is not just “dealing with it” in the short term. Resilience also includes a longer term commitment to maintaining stability. So, what is resilience and how can organizations achieve it? We searched the literature for emerging practices and strategies for developing resilient workforces in a pandemic-recovery state. Our search included general guidance to improve organizations’ ability to support workforces through unexpected events or changes.

Most evidence on this topic addresses workplace well-being and resilience when teams are experiencing and responding to crises or unexpected challenges. Less is known about building and maintaining resilient workforces over the longer term, especially in hybrid mental health and addictions organizations.

This document provides guiding principles, tips and examples from the sector to help organizations navigate the hybrid workspace and build organizational resilience. We identify what resilience means and provide key considerations for sustaining it in hybrid workspaces.

This resource is based on a rapid scan of academic literature, grey literature, industry articles and first-hand examples from Ontario agencies navigating transitions to a hybrid workspace .



**Want to hear more from the experts?** The tips in this resource are put into practice by sector leaders and industry experts in our webinar: [Building routines, rituals and resilience in a hybrid workspace](#).

# Understanding resilience

## What is resilience?

Current evidence suggests that resilience is the ability to adapt to difficulty and maintain a sense of control over one's environment in order to move forward positively.<sup>1,2</sup> However, resilience is not a one-time reaction or response to adversity; it is about maintaining stability over time.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of resilience is different from the concept of wellness.<sup>3</sup> Wellness is associated with emotional well-being or finding positive meaning in work in the absence of adversity. Resilience considers the tension between feelings of wellness and the flexibility required to manage it over time despite adverse circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Resilience models recognize stressors and offer strategies to overcome adversity and cope with uncertainty.<sup>3</sup>

## Organizational resilience

### **What is organizational resilience?**

Organizational resilience is the ability of an organization to prepare, react or respond to adversity and maintain performance and stability across time and challenges. Organizational resilience functions as a trait, process and outcome in the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Leaders can influence resilience through social, cultural, political, economic, occupational or technical factors.<sup>2,5</sup>

Resilience as a trait of an organization includes cognitive, behavioural and contextual factors that enable individuals to adapt to their circumstances.

- Cognitive resilience is being able to identify and respond to challenges beyond survival.
- Behavioural resilience is building resilience through habits and routines.
- Contextual resilience is the unique setting for cognitive and behavioural resilience to function. It is the combination of interpersonal relationships and resources that enable quick action in unexpected situations.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

Resilience as a process is the ongoing surveillance of changes an organization can manage. Resilience as an outcome indicates what an organization does to adjust to changes and challenges.<sup>4,5</sup>

To build resilience among workforces, leaders need to consider how policies and protocols support an organization's capacity to prepare for, respond to, and adapt to rapid and incremental changes.<sup>7</sup> Policies and protocols should account for factors such as strategy planning, resource capacity, and situation monitoring and reporting. This approach will help enable resilience factors including organization design, capacity to identify change, emergency response and safety management.<sup>2</sup>

Workplaces are a facilitative environment that can foster resilience and build skills, habits and routines for workers to prosper with appropriate organizational supports amid challenges.<sup>4,5,8</sup> Challenges are environmental factors that help create responsibility and accountability and enable individuals to build resilient qualities and trust with others.<sup>5</sup>

In facilitative environments, challenges and support coexist at a high level.<sup>5</sup> To develop organizational resilience, it is important that challenges and supports are present. Too much challenge with little support compromises workers' well-being, and too much support with little challenge creates a comfortable, stagnant environment with no opportunity for professional and personal development. The interplay of high challenge and high support promotes workers' ability to prepare for adversity and respond in a trusting environment.<sup>4,5</sup>

Leaders can train resilience within their organization by maintaining an environment where employees are supplied with the means (infrastructure, wellness resources) to withstand unexpected stressors and successfully cope with change.<sup>4,8</sup> Key habits for leaders to consider when creating a resilient workplace include compassionate conversations, clear communication and consistent engagement.<sup>7</sup>

### **How is organizational resilience built?**

There is a positive relationship between workers' well-being and organizational outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

Developing and maintaining resilience within workspaces requires resources and structures to support well-being. Demands in the workplace – cognitive stressors, time pressures and emotional exhaustion, for example – directly influence well-being and as a result, can erode resilience.<sup>10,11</sup> To mitigate negative impacts of demands, job resources such as supervisor help, task control and task variety can act as supports to maintain well-being and proactively build resilience for individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Most workplace resilience models focus on individual-centred approaches. However, research shows that organizational factors are more significant predictors of worker burnout than individual factors.<sup>12,13</sup> This is largely because people perceive having less control over workplace stressors than in other environments, such as at home.<sup>10</sup> We need to move away from individual-centred approaches to organizational-level approaches for resilience, placing organizations at the centre of responsibility.<sup>3</sup> The key to building resilience requires responding to changing workplace circumstances and prioritizing cultural coherence.<sup>14,15</sup> Organizational culture refers to patterns of behaviour that define how work is completed.<sup>15</sup> Cultural coherence occurs when key enablers (cultural traits) are used to improve culture through routine practices and behaviours such as change management, risk mitigation, streamlined decision-making, robust procedures, and flexibility and improvisation.<sup>15</sup> Cultural coherence depends on leaders' authenticity and embodiment of cultural practices, which improves employees' connection to their work and organization.<sup>15</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges to organizations in our sector, particularly the rapid shifts to hybrid care models that support client services. With staff and direct service providers already experiencing high levels of burnout from emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (cynicism), the need to build resilience among our workforce is greater than ever.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence suggests that throughout the pandemic, organizations with a distinctive culture and clear understanding of their purpose (healthcare, business and academic sectors) found it easier to adapt to changing work conditions.<sup>15</sup> When organizations implement protective resources and corrective strategies, hindrances and workplace stressors that undermine resilience can be minimized, and workers are exposed to complex, beneficial work and goal development.<sup>16,17</sup>



**Example from the field:** One organization conducted a survey among its global workforce to hear employees' thoughts on their workplace's cultural coherence and determine whether efforts to maintain a distinct culture throughout the pandemic enabled teams to fulfill responsibilities, meet deliverables and find satisfaction at work. Findings showed that workforces with strong adaptability to unforeseen events prioritized culture amidst challenges and their leaders consistently modelled the purpose, value and culture of the organization.<sup>15</sup>

## Resilience in hybrid workspaces

Impacts of the pandemic among workforces include higher rates of poor mental health, burnout, fatigue and substance use.<sup>14,18,19</sup> Many of us were faced with additional stressors that affected our ability to maintain balance and created a perpetual state of alarm.<sup>19</sup> The shift to hybrid work for many organizations created a new set of challenges such as privacy concerns and blended work-life environments.<sup>18,19,20</sup>

In theory, hybrid work models could minimize exposure to illness and fulfill work responsibilities while allowing employees more flexibility to structure their workdays.<sup>21</sup> However, hybrid workspaces can be mentally exhausting because of their changing nature. The instability and unpredictable nature of hybrid work makes it more difficult to create routines and find balance between work and home life.<sup>22</sup> The negative mental health outcomes and hybrid work experiences are compounded for service providers in mental health and addictions, with reported increased rates of stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms.<sup>20,23</sup>

For many in our sector, hybrid work is new. Individuals and organizations require consistent effort, energy and planning resources to adapt to this new environment and its demands.<sup>20</sup> Mental health and addictions organizations have had to structure hybrid workspaces for employees and adapt their services to provide hybrid care to various populations. For service providers, “tele-pressure” is a key mental health determinant involving a fixation with checking and responding to messages quickly.<sup>23</sup> In a hybrid workspace, the blending of work and personal environments can intensify this pressure if providers and staff feel the need to always be available to each other and clients.

Over time, pressures related to constant workplace changes, service models and accountability to clients can break down built resilience among teams. To counter challenges associated with hybrid work, organizational interventions are key to ensure employees have the supports they need.<sup>12</sup> Three factors should be considered when developing interventions.

- Resilience is proactive.
- Resilience thrives on relationships.
- Resilience is an ongoing process.<sup>14</sup>

The ability of an organization to succeed amid adversity relies on its ability to plan ahead, maintain camaraderie and social cohesion, and routinely invest in employee wellness practices.<sup>14</sup> Sector organizations should reflect on current practices and determine how to mobilize these factors in their hybrid models to build and sustain psychological safety among employees. Shifting to a hybrid work model is an opportunity for organizations to reevaluate and improve how they work. Coordinated hybrid models can leverage the benefits of both in-person work (socialization and collaboration) and remote work (focus and flexibility).<sup>24</sup> For agencies in our sector, this includes exploring innovative ways to provide support to children, young people and their families.

Over time, creating space to problem-solve collaboratively can lead to higher performance and well-being among employees.<sup>25</sup> When teams lean into challenges together and find diverse solutions supporting all employees, they can develop organizational resilience.<sup>25</sup>



**Example from the field:** One organization built on existing mental health support strategies such as launching new software to remotely maintain team communication, giving employees and their families access to digital apps to connect with healthcare providers without appointment and routinely conducting surveys to determine employee needs and concerns.<sup>14</sup> These efforts made it possible for the organization to better support employees in response to their unique circumstances impacted by the pandemic. Interventions at the organizational level have minimized disruptions and created a psychologically safe workplace for employees to maintain responsibilities and appropriately deliver services.<sup>14</sup>

## Resilience in practice

The transition to hybrid workspaces in the child and youth mental health and addictions sector presents unique circumstances. Building resilience requires an ongoing response to workplace environments that are undergoing constant change.<sup>13</sup>

For organizations to develop resilience, they must lean in and prioritize three core components through policy and practice: routines, rituals

and rhythm.<sup>25</sup>

- Routines = organization meets operational deliverables.
- Rituals = employees' needs from the organization are met, such as social support.
- Rhythm = established frequency of routines and rituals.<sup>25</sup>

## Guiding principles for organizational resilience

### Communication and collaboration

Robust communication practices should be top of mind for leaders and teams when considering resilience in hybrid work models. Healthy communication occurs when team members share a common workplace language and vision.<sup>3,15</sup> Key strategies to support hybrid communication include:

- weekly check-ins with entire team.
- formal and informal meetings such as brief video calls.
- social engagement opportunities in-person and online.
- balanced virtual communications (in-person and virtual)



### Examples from the field:

- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) provides weekly e-mail updates on COVID-19 information from the CEO. At the Knowledge Institute, the executive team provides updates every Friday through the organization's online blog. These regular updates communicate key messages to staff and build awareness of current events and important information.
- Organizations have implemented informal social events and meetings such as virtual coffee breaks to bring teams together for purposes other than work. Creating new avenues for employees to connect on a personal level can establish greater social cohesion and trust in the workplace.

Routine collaboration between teams and leaders improves communication and honours employees' thoughts and ideas.<sup>3,27</sup>

Collaborative practices may involve the following initiatives:

- reflective practices such as employee development conversations
- employee engagement in planning and decision-making activities for the organization
- requests for feedback from leaders, teams and colleagues through surveys, performance appraisals, one-to-one discussions and other methods<sup>25-28</sup>

## Relationships and recognition

Maintaining a supportive organizational culture allows individuals to build meaningful relationships with one other. Greater resilience is created when employees can trust their role is valued by others.<sup>28</sup>

- Establish peer mentorships, buddy systems, and employee networks. Invest in other relationship-developing activities in-person and online.
- Develop welcome and onboarding packages specific to new employees' circumstances, such as virtual "meet and greets" with team members or in-person orientation with leadership.
- Acknowledge employees' efforts in a fair and timely manner through virtual "shout-outs" and success sharing at meetings.<sup>1,9,28-30</sup>



**Example from the field:** CHEO's Shining Star Award Program allows employees to nominate their colleagues' achievements in multiple areas including service, collaborative care, learning, innovation, leadership and spirit. The Knowledge Institute uses virtual team platforms for "Bright Spots" that acknowledge team members' work successes. Creating opportunities for employee recognition supports greater social cohesion and positive environments where people feel valued.

## Accountability and responsibility

Provide clear expectations for all employees and share knowledge of individual and team roles and responsibilities to encourage accountability for personal and collective work.<sup>14,23,30</sup> When employees are unclear of responsibilities and organizational goals, resilience is weakened over time.<sup>16</sup> Strategies and resources to build accountability and responsibility can include:

- employee work plans developed between supervisors and their team(s) that are updated regularly.
- organization-level strategic plans developed with achievable goals.
- conversations with leaders to identify employees' project roles and responsibilities within the organization's broader strategic planning.
- routinely updated organization charts specifying employee roles.<sup>14,18,25</sup>



**Example from the field:** One organization uses a "Supporting Employee Success" workbook to guide conversations between leaders and employees on roles, responsibilities and performance outcomes.<sup>18</sup> This tool enables leaders and their team members to interactively approach development conversations with compassion, review role expectations and assess employees' ability to meet personal responsibilities and organizational goals.<sup>18</sup>

## Organizational policy and assessments

Create accessible, user-friendly resources to promote and maintain employee resilience. These resources should appropriately reflect collaborative understandings of required processes to support employees, teams and the organization.<sup>15,16</sup> Resources may include policies on workplace safety, employee well-being, cultural cohesion, disconnecting from work, paid leave, and others.<sup>31,32,33</sup>



### Examples from the field:

- Organizations have modified their practice to reduce client contacts and session times, space out clinical care and provide more breaks to encourage physical movement throughout the workday. These changes let providers manage their virtual care workload more effectively.
- In 2021, the Government of Ontario passed Bill 27, Working for Workers Act, 2021 requiring organizations to develop policies for disconnecting from work.<sup>33</sup> This Ontario-wide policy outlines rules for disconnecting from work that organizations must follow to support work-life balance and employee well-being.<sup>33</sup>

To measure resilience, organizations should routinely conduct assessments with feedback methods for leaders and teams.<sup>11,25,27,34,35</sup>

Assessments offer the best understandings of resilience when evaluating the success of an organization's features (innovation, collaboration, capacity), outcomes and recovery.<sup>11</sup> Key considerations when assessing resilience include:

- frequency and timings of measurement.
- comparative assessments between teams.
- reporting bias-transparency on assessment limitations and safeguards.
- updates to existing wellness resources with focus on targeted strategies for resilience development and maintenance.
- identifying roles leaders play in professional development activities and how to reinforce organization goals.<sup>15</sup>



### Examples from the field:

- One agency conducted CEO town halls, staff surveys and team huddles to develop in-office, hybrid and remote work policies. Considerations for employee needs, client needs, resource availability, privacy and team equity informed the new hybrid work model. These assessments prioritized employee feelings and ideas to create policies at the organizational level.
- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) has created a checklist for leaders to use for assessing their organization's capacity to support employee resilience in a recovery state and long-term. Items for assessment include updated mental health strategies, training for new working models, review of employee benefit plans, connections to human resources and revised performance indicators that reflect hybrid work operations.<sup>14</sup>

### Resources and supports

Multiple forms of support can help build a culture of resilience and come from different sources including leaders, colleagues and human resources.<sup>16</sup> However, not all forms of support are helpful. Leaders should avoid bringing too much attention to issues, and threatening competence by overtaking employee work and offering unnecessary support.<sup>16</sup> Identifying the need for support, providing consistent messaging across all teams, and ensuring open communication is a delicate balance when an organization is dealing with ongoing stress and challenges.

To help building organizational resilience, workplaces should integrate:

- social supports that provide emotional care and develop relationships, such as in-person or virtual coffee chats, personal check-ins between leaders and teams and social activities.
- instrumental supports addressing employees' needs, such as helping colleagues with work duties or providing the required supplies to complete tasks.
- informational supports to provide workplace information or guidance, such as organizational policies, bulletin boards, virtual water coolers and knowledge translation events.<sup>1,5,16,30,35,3</sup>



**Example from the field:** The Knowledge Institute implemented “Freedom Fridays” to give employees one meeting-free day every month. Creating space in employees' schedules has provided dedicated time for project work, writing and editing.

## Digital transformations

In hybrid workspaces, organizations can leverage technology to their benefit for training, information-sharing and creating connections internally and with external partners. Establishing well-maintained virtual methods to engage with and support hybrid and remote employees improves team socialization and sustains personal networks.<sup>31</sup>

It is critical for organizations to safeguard security and privacy regulations to accommodate hybrid work models and set boundaries on virtual communications.<sup>32</sup> Effective digital transformations to promote employee well-being, development and resilience include:

- allowing direct service providers to spend more time on service delivery instead of administrative tasks.
- re-routing email communications or turning off low-urgency messages to reduce service interruptions for direct service providers.
- implementing technology sundown policies that stipulate communication hours, such as Bill 27, Working for Workers Act, 2021.
- introducing digital skill and literacy development and training for virtual platform use.
- sharing materials in advance of virtual meetings to provide time for review and increase focused engagement.
- using video calls and instant messaging rather than scheduled meetings for brief communications.
- experimenting with new digital platforms and activities such as speed networking for employees to learn about each other, polling, games and quizzes, 3D immersive meetings and on-screen engagement.<sup>18,31,37-41</sup>



### Examples from the field:

- The Knowledge Institute created a virtual “Summer Fitness and Activity Challenge” where employees were encouraged to submit weekly activity minutes and personal facts tied to Canadian locations. With this information, employees’ activity was tracked and presented in digital graphics to indicate the team’s cross-Canada adventures.
- Many organizations have leveraged digital resources to increase team engagement during meetings including Zoom whiteboards and breakout rooms and game platforms for team activities.

## Redesigned workspaces

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have had to adapt their physical environments and work structures to maintain operations.

For agencies in the child and youth mental health and addictions sector, these changes have included considerations for hybrid service delivery, and this can bring additional challenges and opportunities to support clients. However, we have learned that sector organizations can provide client services in various work locations if they have the appropriate resources and technology.<sup>32</sup>

More than ever before, hybrid workspaces and working models should be flexible and equitably meet the needs of employees, teams and organizations to sustain the resilience that has been built over the past two years.<sup>14</sup> Examples include:

- improved workspaces that allow for in-person and virtual collaboration and creativity.
- shared workspaces among staff, such as communal office space.
- flexible working hours and rotating schedules that balance employee needs and responsibilities, such as revised caseloads for direct service providers.
- open workstations where employees can book offices or touch-down desks as needed.
- adaptable work locations when appropriate, including remote work.<sup>14,34</sup>



**Want to know more? For more information on supporting your team in hybrid workspaces, check out these additional resources from the Knowledge Institute:**

- [Leading in a hybrid workspace: Moving our teams from surviving to thriving](#)
- [Take good care: Conversations about leading and managing well-being in challenging times](#)
- [Supporting virtual teams and remote clinical supervision](#)
- [Supporting the wellbeing of mental health service providers](#)
- [Hybrid leadership primer](#)
- [Hybrid leadership tip sheet](#)

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695 Industrial Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 0Z1

 – 1 613 737 2297

EN – [cymha.ca](http://cymha.ca)

 – 1 613 738 4894

FR – [smdej.ca](http://smdej.ca)