

SHIFTING PARADIGMS: THE TRANSITION FROM WELLBEING PROGRAMMES TO RESILIENCE SKILLS

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- ◉ *There's a shift towards skill-based approaches in the world of learning and development, which we fully support.*
- ◉ *We believe a focus on resilience skills can help to overcome some of the growing challenges faced by wellbeing departments, as well as ineffective wellbeing interventions.*
- ◉ *Using resilience skills is effective, targetable, trainable, relevant, and empowering. It's very much in line with the direction skills training is taking in modern workplaces.*

A SKILLS-FIRST SHIFT IN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

"The term 'skills-first' is increasingly used by a wide range of organisations across the private and public sector to describe a new approach to talent management that emphasizes a person's skills and competencies – rather than degrees, job histories, or job titles – with regard to attracting, hiring, developing, and redeploying talent."

World Economic Forum, 20231

There's an ongoing shift in the world of learning and development (L&D). Things are moving from a role- or title-based approach to a talent-development or skill-based approach. This has been driven by several key trends, including:

- ◉ **Growth in the knowledge economy** – As economies worldwide have evolved into knowledge- and service-based economies, the demand for a wider range of soft and technical skills has increased.
- ◉ **An accelerating rate of change** – The rapid pace of technological innovation has necessitated continuous learning and adaptation. Skills that were relevant a decade ago may no longer be sufficient today.
- ◉ **Employee engagement** – The scramble for talent has meant that offering learning opportunities and upskilling is a crucial aspect of retaining talent.

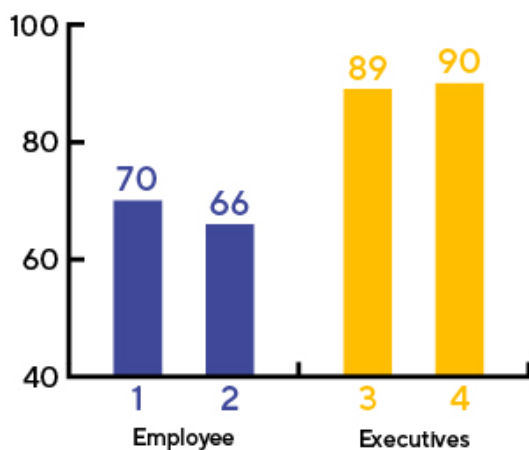
This shift has had a significant business impact, for those implementing these changes. It's led to improvements in engagement, performance, and flexibility. For example, a study by the Corporate Executive Board found that offering career development opportunities – of which skills-based

training is a critical component – can increase employee engagement by up to 29%.² Research by Deloitte found that organisations focusing on a skills-first culture were 63% more likely to achieve positive results across 11 key business and workforce outcomes.³ These included meeting or exceeding financial targets, compared to businesses which hadn't adopted skills-first practices.

This shift has also led to key innovations and developments in workplace learning and culture:

- ◉ **Personalised learning pathways** – There's been a rise in individualised and adaptive learning experiences, that cater to employees' unique skillsets and learning paces. This approach helps employees develop the specific competencies they need for their roles and adapt to future changes.
- ◉ **Skill- and competency-based hiring and promotion** – Organisations are increasingly valuing skills and competencies over traditional credentials, such as degrees and work experience. This shift has impacted hiring practices, with a growing emphasis on skills assessments and competency-based interviews.
- ◉ **Continuous learning culture** – There's a stronger focus on fostering a culture of continuous learning within organisations. Employees are increasingly given ongoing opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge, reflecting an understanding that learning is a lifelong process.⁴

The growing importance of a skills-based approach in talent management



- 1) Favour a skills-based approach
- 2) Would be attracted to and remain with an organisation that offers a skills-based approach
- 3) Say skills-based approach will define work, talent, and careers
- 4) Are actively experimenting with a skills-based approach

Source: Deloitte - *The skills-based organisation: A new operating model for work and the workforce*

At Awaris, we believe a similar shift towards continuing learning is required in the world of wellbeing, too. And this shift will help address deteriorating wellbeing in workplaces, and the ineffectiveness of current wellbeing programmes.

ENTER RESILIENCE SKILLS

We've identified a series of [resilience skills](#) that can change the dial on workplace wellbeing. These skills can help us shift our state and regulate our stress levels, helping us navigate our internal landscape. **When we speak of 'skills', we're referring to specific learned behaviours or actions that individuals can perform with a degree of proficiency.** They're often acquired through training, practice, or life experience. Resilience skills are typically measurable and observable, and individuals exhibit different degrees of proficiency in them.

We believe a skill-based approach to resilience has several advantages. **The first is that they're effective in reducing perceived stress.** When it comes to how stressed one feels, applying resilience skills is more important than what stressors you're actually exposed to (up to a point, as we've explained in a [previous blog post](#)). Our data, compiled from over 2,000 employees, shows that resilience skills account for 40% of the variance in perceived stress by our surveyed population (*see chart below*). Whereas the stress factors one experiences (such as a high workload or caring for a family member) only explains 18% of the variance of perceived stress.

Practicing resilience skills explains 40% of perceived stress variance

Much more than the stress load (stressors) we face



39% of perceived stress can be predicted by the resilience skills balance score (R squared).

- The correlation is highly significant.
- Stressors only explain 18% of the variance of perceived stress.

This is in line with multiple studies that say our behaviour accounts for around 40% of the variance of wellbeing or resilience.

Second, resilience skills are assessable and trainable. Skill distributions in large numbers of people can be assessed. It's possible to see which skills are widely distributed among employees and where there are gaps. And to also understand which skills have the greatest impact on outcomes. There can be large-scale upskilling based on these assessments, which we've already done with some of our partners.

Finally, resilience skills are targetable. Skills are easier to define and target than the broad state of 'wellbeing'. In the ill-defined definition of resilience as enduring suffering, there's no realistic way to judge whether someone can handle a challenge or not. Other than to hope they can just grin and bear it. Whereas with skills, we can clearly define them, as well as acknowledging the limits of these skills. For example, someone could exercise regularly, contributing to their workplace resilience. But this doesn't automatically mean they can run a marathon. In the world of skills, we thus have a reasonable sense of their limits.

THE ADAPTABILITY OF RESILIENCE SKILLS

As well as these advantages, we've noticed further insights in our work with resilience skills. **Resilience skills have specific relevance.** This means the most relevant resilience skills can be targeted, according to the type of stress employees are experiencing. For example, when people are experiencing workload-related stress, then sticking to [Healthy Habits](#) of mind and body, such as movement, rest and sleep, and nutrition, have a strong positive impact combatting stress. Whereas when people are facing the stress of change, ambiguity, or disconnection, then social-emotional skills are more effective.

Different professions require different resilience skills. For example, working in the legal sector is marked by a high degree of perfectionism and heightened negative thinking. Thus, focusing on self-compassion, care, and a positive outlook were the most effective in changing the dial on resilience in this population. Engineering teams work under high workloads and time pressure. Thus, attention regulation skills had the highest impact on resilience and perceived stress. A skills-based approach allows us to devise the most impactful interventions for the unique challenges faced by each profession.

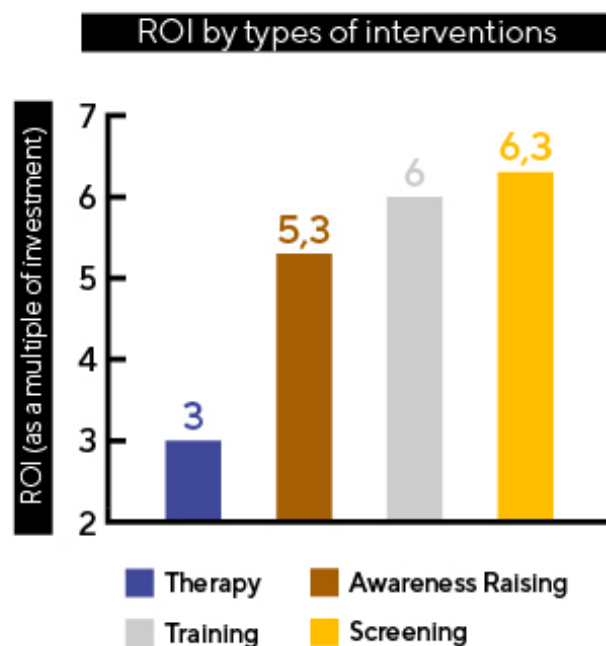
Finally, a resilience skills approach can be used to understand the stress profile of a type of work. It can help those in that role see how their skill profile matches the stressor profile of the role, and what they need to work on. Overall, we believe our resilience skills approach is effective, targetable, trainable, relevant, and empowering. And very much in line with the direction skills training is taking in modern workplaces.

ADDRESSING THE SHORTCOMINGS OF WELLBEING APPROACHES

During the pandemic years many companies invested heavily in workplace wellbeing. They offered an admirable level of support for their employees. However, this hasn't lasted. We're currently seeing significant declines in wellbeing investments across different sectors and industries, as finance executives ask tough questions about the return on wellbeing investments. At the same time, wellbeing departments are also facing two further challenges. First, taking care of the increasing number of people suffering from stress and mental ill-health. And second, the emergence of more recently identified wellbeing challenges. In the last few years, a stream of growing wellbeing challenges have been on the agendas of many wellbeing departments. From social isolation, financial anxiety, and belonging, to grief, menopause, or female health. These combined challenges are placing a strain on budgets and **making it harder to invest in prevention rather than remediation.**

We firmly believe a resilience skill-based approach can help with all these challenges. **First, skills have a much better return on investment (ROI) than most other wellbeing interventions.** Numerous wellbeing meta-reviews show that modular, individualised skill-building measures are among the most effective in improving wellbeing outcomes.⁵ Skill building works, because the cost-benefit analysis can be assessed. For example, a report by Deloitte showed that investing in training skills has among the highest ROI for wellbeing outcomes (*see chart on the left*).⁶ Skill training has a high ROI because it's foundational, building basic skills which can be applied in different situations.

Training and screening interventions show best return on investment



Source: Deloitte Analysis UK Mental Health Report 2022

Second, resilience skills are foundational. This means they can be used as a foundation to cope with challenges in other areas of your life and work. For example, the pandemic and post-pandemic years led to rising housing and living costs, made worse by the war in Ukraine. It plunged a lot of people into financial insecurity. Here, there's context-specific support that people can be given, including sound financial advice. But the resilience skills of emotional regulation, positive outlook, and connection to others, will also make a big difference here. These won't 'solve' your financial worries. But these skills can buttress you against the anxiety caused by them. They can help you weather the inner turmoil caused by financial worries.

In a similar manner, let's look at the belonging crisis in more detail. Many companies focused on physical health and safety during the pandemic, ensuring that core work was ongoing. But many businesses simply couldn't predict the damage being done to the social fabric of their teams and wider business by lockdowns, let alone in wider society. This has had sweeping repercussions on

many aspects of people's lives. It also contributed to employees' lack of engagement and the rise of quiet quitting, where workers do the minimum amount needed to keep their jobs.

Tackling these trends will require investment and time in rebuilding the social fabric of work. The best way to do this is for people to practice skills of social connection and care. Spending time with each other. Feeling connected. Talking and connecting about matters that are meaningful to their hearts and minds. When individuals, teams, and leaders invest time and effort in their social connections and express care for each other, the social fabric of an organisation is rebuilt, brick by brick. The foundational resilience skills of social connection and care can also help address challenges of belonging. Every time a new challenge arises, it's possible to understand which foundational resilience skills will help.

Finally, the effectiveness of resilience skills have a clear limit. Put simply, resilience skills fail when workers' face too many stressors. Our approach accepts that workers won't be able to maintain their resilience when the stress load is too high. This is crucial. Around 60-80% of burnout and retention issues for employees are caused by a toxic stress load. A preventive approach won't help once the stress load is toxic. Organisation-wide interventions must be applied here, to make sure workers don't face a toxic level of stress. This challenge must be clearly identified within departments, with delineated responsibilities.

Against this backdrop, we believe that a resilience skill-based approach will address some of the existing challenges individuals and wellbeing departments are facing in meeting today's stress factors. And this why our [programmes](#) are, and always will be, firmly based upon on skill-building approaches.

Sources

1 ['Putting Skills First: A Framework for Action'](#), *World Economic Forum*, May 2, 2023

2 [Corporate Executive Board](#)

3 Sue Cantrell, Michael Griffiths, Robin Jones, and Julia Hiipakka, ['The skills-based organization: A new operating model for work and the workforce'](#), Deloitte, September 8, 2022

4 Ibid.

5 Joep van Agteren, Matthew Iasiello, Laura Lo, Jonathan Bartholomaeus, Zoe Kopsaftis, MARRISA CAREY, and Mochael Kyrios (2021), ['A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological interventions to improve mental wellbeing'](#), *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5 (April), p631-52

6 ['Mental health and well-being in the workplace'](#), Deloitte, September 2022