

Cyberwork

Bouncing back Kate Anthony

One of the trickiest parts of maintaining good mental health at work is holding onto one's thought processes rather than acting on emotional responses.

The workplace is filled with day-to-day occurrences that affect how we behave, and the introduction of online communication has provided us with a hidden stream of triggers that could influence our interactions without acknowledgement of those underlying emotions. The content of a poorly written or badly thought out email from a colleague can leave one with a flood of negative emotions, such as irritation, anger or anxiety – and this can bleed into our day-to-day practice without us noticing.

According to the management consultants Hay Group,¹ becoming more resilient is about 'consciously giving ourselves more thinking time – widening the gap between an event and our reaction to it'.¹ For many individuals and groups in the workplace, reacting to single events or changes as they occur and calling that resilience simply isn't enough any more – the healthy workplace needs to foster resilience daily to create a thriving and proactive environment in order to get tasks done and to achieve the goals common to an organisation. Ignoring the underlying thought processes experienced in the face of challenges and only giving time to the

“The content of a poorly written or badly thought out email from a colleague can leave one with a flood of negative emotions, such as irritation, anger or anxiety – and this can bleed into our day-to-day practice without us noticing”

negative emotions associated with them are what lead to burnout, affecting overall work performance and creating the 39 per cent of all work-related illnesses that can be attributed to stress, depression or anxiety.²

So how can we widen the gap between an event and our reaction to it in the workplace, and how can we take advantage of technology for both ourselves and the client population we work with? One good example of how the digital world can be embraced to help us face challenge stems from the needs of the military to fight stress. The Human Performance Resource Center (HPRC) provides online, evidence-based information and resources to help the US military and their families in all aspects of performance. The HPRC offers examples of four electronic ways to define and develop resilience that can be sensibly adopted by any organisation.

- 1 Assess current resilience levels** – There are many online assessment tools designed to give a reading of resilience levels that can be built upon using the tips and ideas offered by websites to bolster resilience.
- 2 Using a mood tracker app** – Downloading a mood tracker app to a smartphone means you can monitor emotional and behavioural patterns that affect daily life and work on improving those skills used to combat negative reactions to occurrences. Many can generate reports that can be used by an organisation to identify weak spots in how the company is functioning overall.
- 3 Consider bio-feedback tools** – This requires investment in a biosensor device as well as an app, and incorporates a rounded biological-emotional approach to recognising levels of stress and anxiety that lead to breakdown of functioning in humans.
- 4 Incorporate fun into the workplace approach** – The HPRC recommends a mobile app that can quickly identify nearby fun activities away from technological solutions using a smartphone's GPS capabilities and the camera function. This professional

behavioural health therapy is called Pleasant Event Scheduling (PES), and can link you to nearby online associates who can be invited to join in.

The phrase 'There's an app for that' has become something of a cliché in mental health fields when considering how we combat challenge and obstacles in our daily work activities and lifestyles. However, many technological solutions are recognising and embracing offline activities as a basic element in achieving good mental health and a resilience to trauma and unexpected change, and it is these tools that we can turn to when needing to develop a strategy to meet the challenges of everyday work and life. By using technological tools, we can often incorporate that vital step of widening the gap between an event and our response to it, and in doing so build our resilience in a conscious manner in both the workplace and outside of it.

References

- 1 Hay Group. The resilience workbook. [Online.] <http://tinyurl.com/o73a343> (accessed 12 February 2015)
- 2 Health & Safety Executive. Stress-related and psychological disorders in Great Britain 2014. [Online.] London: HSE (undated). www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf (accessed 12 February 2015)



Dr Kate Anthony, FBACP has trained practitioners and organisations worldwide in online therapy and related fields and is a Fellow of BACP. She is co-founder of the Online Therapy Institute and Managing Editor of TILT Magazine (Therapeutic Innovations in Light of Technology).
www.onlinetherapyinstitute.com
www.kateanthony.net