



## **Building resilience: How C-suite executives can not only bounce back, but bounce up from adversity**

As a core human trait, resilience is written into our DNA, a default code that helps us survive and adapt in the face of disruptions large and small. Given its central role in human flourishing, resilience has been studied across the fields of positive, cognitive, and clinical psychology. For decades, researchers have also studied it through the prism of neuroscience, coaching, leadership, and philosophy. More recently, this key attribute has been put to the test, as 2020 made resilience scholars out of just about everyone.

Yet, resilience is more than meets the eye. Certainly, it's about bouncing back from disruptions and adversities. Indeed, this *bounce-back* notion is a commonly understood definition of resilience. But resilience also serves a higher function and value. Ultimately, it's about bouncing out of self-limiting thinking and paradigms, and bouncing up to our highest levels of potential and our most magnetic, impactful realization of leadership. This is the path of self-transcendence.

This *bounce-up* value was the focus of Deloitte LLP's recently concluded Executive Resilience Academy, a six-week virtual series that immersed 21 cross-role C-suite executives in the latest science of resilience. Participants explored the underlying conditions that foster resilience, the core evidence-based practices for building this trait among individuals, and the vast leadership implications of stretching personal potential.



## Three realms of resilience

The series was centered on Deloitte’s resilience perspective, which spans the three human dimensions—or realms—where resilience happens (or not) in real life. With this model as their guide, executives learned and practiced the makings and moves of “whole-person” resilience. In addition, the curriculum focused on how the underlying conditions, adversities, and capabilities act in a symbiotic, interdependent manner across the following realms:

- The **personal realm** is the domain of self-awareness and self-mastery. Within this realm lie the core resilience conditions of metacognition, mental and emotional agility, realistic optimism, and meaning through character strengths. In other words, it pertains to exercising sage-like self-command and aligning one’s life and work with one’s deepest, most authentic values. “It’s in this realm that we dive headfirst into the personal reflective work one has to do in order to truly build the foundations of resilience,” says Ash Robinson, the Academy’s co-lead and one of the scholars behind the “Three realms of resilience” approach. “Ultimately, it boils down to your thinking, feeling, and reacting style— how you’re going to respond to life’s slings and arrows. Because it’s not the events of life and work that determine our feelings, reactions, behaviors, and outcomes, it’s the stories we tell ourselves *about* those events.”
- The **interpersonal realm** is all about relationship mastery. Specifically, do our relationships provide a deep, fulfilling sense of connection? Underlying this is the authenticity, supportiveness, trust, and sense of engagement that we get with family, romantic partners, friends, and colleagues. A crucial component is the relationship-formative role of communication, including the importance of the ways we show up for people’s good news, as well as difficult conversations.
- Finally, the **extrapersonal realm** comprises the external, “environmental” conditions that need to be navigated across nature, society, and work, to bolster resilience and achieve broader impact and legacy. In addition to navigating external conditions, executives and leaders have expansive influence over forming these conditions for others.



## *Whole person leadership resilience*

Just as adversities in real life often overlap, the three realms also act interdependently. As part of the curriculum, the series explored how these dimensions arise in relationships and offered participants tangible ways to apply what they learned. For example, in the interpersonal realm, connection was covered, including the ability to build and nurture supportive, authentic relationships based in empathy, shared values, and constructive communication. In the extrapersonal realm, participants learned environmental agility—the ability to sense the “health” of environmental conditions and mitigate the impact of suboptimal life and workplace forces.

"The sentiment we got from participants was that 'This is easy to apply, but I've never done it,'" says Natalie Melamed, the program's co-lead, and a senior manager in Deloitte LLP's Executive Accelerators. "To create resilience habits, we instilled in participants that they have to keep practicing and actively trigger their brains to remain aware of the continuous changes within and around them."

When whole-person resilience is in place, it opens the door for optimized behaviors and results. It also allows leaders to activate a resilience strategy, more effectively guide others, boost productivity, and build high-performing teams. What's more, by incorporating these methods into their daily practices, executives can also challenge belief systems that might be holding themselves and their organizations back.

"It's not the adversities that determine our emotional response, it's how we think about them—and our underlying default reaction patterns—that determines how we're going to experience these events," says Robinson. "The good news is that the conditions that underlie resilience are the same core conditions that underlie the wisdom and magnetism central to great leadership. So, upping your resilience is ultimately a major leadership power move."

*Note: In future articles in this series, we'll take an in-depth look at daily practices around mindfulness; discuss how C-suite leaders can overcome inner, interpersonal, and extrapersonal adversities; and explore how executives can rewire their own brains to boost personal performance, as well as that of their teams.*

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