

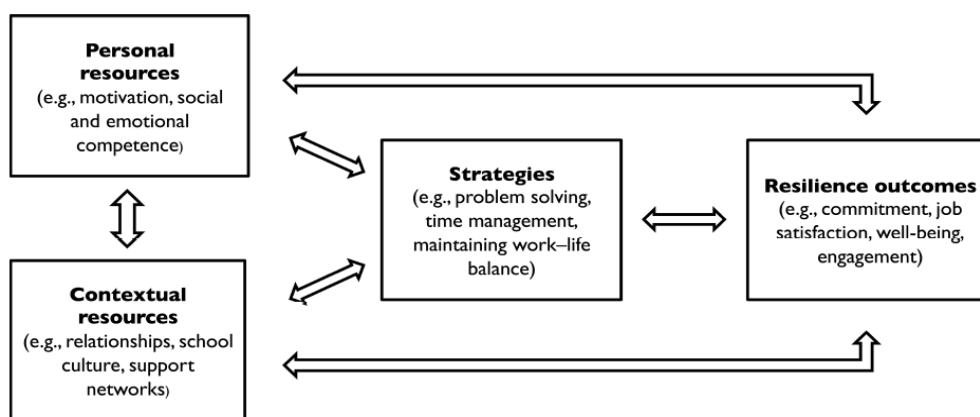
Resilience

Resilience is often simply characterized as the ability to 'bounce back' from a challenge, or to maintain equilibrium and continue to thrive in the face of adversity.

However, resilience is not only a personal capacity, since contexts may also promote resilience through positive workplace culture, policies and practices, collegial support, and strong relationships.

Under a more comprehensive definition, resilience is a dynamic and multi-faceted *process* in which individuals draw on personal and contextual resources, and use specific strategies to navigate challenges and to work toward adaptive outcomes.¹ **Personal resources** include emotional competence, motivation, mindfulness and self-compassion, while **contextual resources** include relationships and support networks with family, friends and colleagues.²

Strategies for building resilience include problem-solving, professional development, humour, life balance, reflective practice and support services. The **outcomes** of resilience include wellbeing, job satisfaction, engagement and enjoyment in work.



Resilience is particularly important for veterinarians since their job is often characterized as stressful (albeit rewarding), and vets are known to be at elevated risk of negative mental health outcomes such as stress, depression, anxiety, and suicide. Yet there are signs that resilience may be under-developed in those entering the profession; for example, Australian research found that about a third of surveyed vet students showed low resilience, and few reached the threshold for high resilience.³

Safeguarding mental health and resilience has been identified as a **key priority for the profession**.

How is resilience recognised?

Perceived by you:

- You can navigate the stresses, emotions, and competing demands of the veterinary workplace
- You are confident that you have the resources and tools to rise to challenges
- You feel motivated and energised to 'keep going', hopeful and optimistic
- You can positively reframe challenges, and persevere in the face of frustration and failure
- You can recognize the signs of stress and take proactive steps to mitigate stress

Perceived by others:

- Confident, motivated
- 'Bounces back' quickly from stressful events
- Tackles problems positively
- Persistent, tenacious, goes back after failure to try again
- Has good support networks
- Has positive/adaptive coping strategies

Why is resilience important to employability?

Since employability includes being *satisfied* as well as successful in work, capabilities supporting life satisfaction, mental health and wellbeing are—by definition—key elements of employability. Developing the capacity for resilience will enable you to ‘bounce back’ more quickly from stressful events. The capacity to navigate stressors effectively by drawing on the strategies and resources that build resilience contributes to personal wellbeing and job satisfaction. These include **problem-solving**, **continual learning**, **motivation** for being a veterinarian, **emotional competence**, and **reflective self-evaluation**. Importantly, the contextual resources which you can draw on include those in your working environment, such as **collaboration and teamwork**, support provided by your colleagues, support staff and boss, and **managing workflow** so that you can achieve what is needed within the time available. Drawing on the combination of personal and contextual resources you have available and the strategies for resilience will ultimately contribute to **sustainable engagement** in the veterinary profession.

Veterinary employers and workplaces increasingly value resilience as an element of employability. Employers told the VetSet2Go project they look for evidence that potential employees have good support networks; can balance work and leisure; are not too self-critical or perfectionist; have a suite of coping strategies; and can function well under pressure.

What they said

“It’s just a matter of knowing it’s okay to make mistakes and knowing there is always someone to talk to, whether it be at work or outside of work.” (Recent graduate)

“[...] we also say to [candidates], tell us about a challenging situation that you’ve dealt with. And similarly, we ask our referees about what challenging situations have they dealt with and how did they cope with that.” (Employer)

“What I liked about them: they appeared to be resilient people, they had travelled, they had seen a little bit of the world. Vet wasn’t their only life [...] they were ‘can-do’ kind of people.” (Employer)

Possible strategies to enhance your resilience

Draw on your motivation for being a vet:

Becoming a vet requires strong intrinsic motivation to successfully finish vet school. Draw on that motivation to help you address new graduate challenges.

Expand your emotional competence:

Being aware of, and able to navigate through, your emotions will help you bounce back more quickly from stressful events.

Take an optimistic perspective:

It is easy to feel overwhelmed with the challenges of practice. Instead, see if you can reframe them in your mind as temporary and isolated, and able to be resolved with effort.

Talk with your friends and colleagues:

You are not alone. Talk with friends from vet school, work colleagues and your boss when you feel stressed. They can help you to find fresh perspectives and solutions.

Proactively build your support networks:

Positive relationships with family, friends and colleagues are important support networks that you can turn to when you feel like your resilience is low.

Nurture activities outside of work:

Work-life balance is challenging as a new graduate. It is also an important aspect of resilience. Try to enjoy at least one activity or hobby a week that isn’t related to work.

Monitor your stress levels:

Pay closer attention to your own signs and symptoms of stress, and heighten self-awareness of how you respond to stressful challenges. Or ask others—sometimes they might recognize that you are feeling stressed.

Further Resources:

- Bartram, D. & Boniwell, I. (2007) The science of happiness: achieving sustained psychological well-being. *In Practice* 29: 478-482
- Moffett, J., Matthew, S.M. & Fawcett, A. (2015) Building career resilience in veterinarians. *In Practice* 37(1): 38-41
- RCVS Mind Matters www.vetmindmatters.org
- Viner B. (2010) *Success In Veterinary Practice: Maximizing Clinical Outcomes And Personal Well-Being*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell

References:

1. Mansfield, C.F., Beltman, S., Weatherby-Fell, N. & Broadley, T. (2016) Classroom ready? Building resilience in teacher education, in R. Brandenberg, S. McDonough, J. Burke & S. White (eds.) *Teacher Education: Innovation, Intervention and Impact*, 211-229. Singapore: Springer.
2. Cake, M.A., McArthur, M.M., Matthew, S.M. & Mansfield, C.F. (2017) Finding the balance: Uncovering resilience in the veterinary literature. *JVME*, 44(1): 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jvme.0116-025R>
3. McArthur, M. et al. (2017) Resilience, mindfulness and self-compassion, *JVME*, 44(1): 106-115. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jvme.0116-027R1>