

# HRD

**HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECT**

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**SPECIAL REPORT**

**MBA GUIDE  
2016**

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A 'VUCA' WORLD**

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## RESILIENCE

# STRENGTH FROM WITHIN

Businesses are taking steps to steel their employees to cope with an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

**Barbara Jones** outlines one approach



**MUCH HAS** been written about the effects of stress and complexity on our workforce today. More than ever in the history of business – and history in general for that matter – we are in a time of discontinuous change, a term coined by Charles Handy in 1994. This means that we aren't changing along a continuum, but are actually moving into a whole new paradigm. The new norm in which business now operates is a norm that is beset with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. This can be stressful – and complex!

Leadership development consultancy Executive Mandala believes the challenges brought about when operating in these high-pressure contexts offer opportunities to step into the 'mental growth' space. This is often referred to as resilience, and the key element of mental growth and resilience is developing high levels of psychological insight – awareness of one's own mental processes. Mind strength development is crucial to building this.

Developing psychological insight (psychological capital) is what helps people to get through tough times. When technically competent people can cultivate such insight/mental strength, they have a much better chance of dealing with both stress and complexity. By being able to improve their ability to self-regulate their

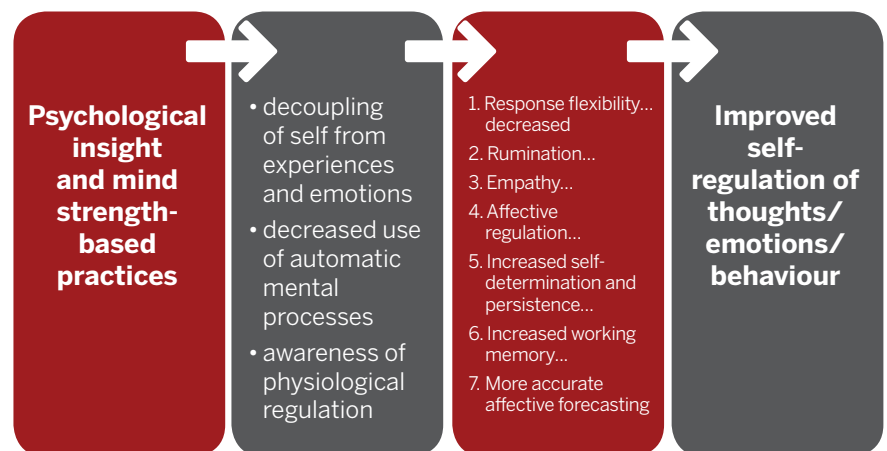
thoughts, emotions and behaviour, they can begin to enjoy a range of positive effects on their performance and wellbeing. (See box below.)

In 2013, Executive Mandala launched the Executive Mind Centre with specific services in this area. Tech company First Data Resources Australia was an early adopter of these services. In 2013, it launched mind strength development programs for its people.

These programs, called Building Resilience, were introduced initially as part of an overall change program, and were offered to all levels throughout the organisation. Janette Lemonjian, HR director at First Data Resources Australia, wanted to give staff going through the change process a program that was genuinely "for them". She wanted to give them not just skills and knowledge that would equip them to perform more

## Mind strength development and self-regulation

### CORE AND SECONDARY PROCESSES LINKING PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHT TO SELF-REGULATION



Source: Executive Mandala



easily within the work environment, but competencies that would support them in their broader life context.

Here, Lemonjian outlines the program and its benefits to First Data employees.

**Q:** What had you hoped for when you commissioned the eight-week program for First Data people?

**A:** As with many organisations, we were

for the decision-making process, both at work and in one's personal life

- the ability to maintain or improve one's personal motivation and morale
- support recovery or coping mechanisms for dealing with the stressful times more readily
- the development of skills to withstand pressure and improve concentration
- the skills to cope more effectively with

## “We were seeking answers as to how to build organisational resilience and to support our people to see the bigger picture and stay the course”

experiencing continual change, which in turn was contributing to concerns for our culture locally. We were seeking answers as to how to build organisational resilience and support our people to see the bigger picture and stay the course. We believed it was critical to bring people on the journey of change with us, while building their personal fortitude and perspective.

More specifically, we were targeting a program that provided:

- improvements in performance/support

change, and/or potential frustrations or disappointments.

**Q:** Describe some of the outcomes for both individuals and First Data.

**A:** A key outcome for the organisation has been the ‘buzz’ created through delivering something new and completely outside the square, not only developing the employee but also strengthening the ‘individual’ within.

Immediately following the initial eight-week program, news was out and we had a

waiting list of participants eager to start. But, in reality, for the program to be successful it was essential that people were committed and ‘signed on’ for the entire eight weeks, which we understood was a considerable commitment. So, with the full backing of our leadership, we agreed to ‘share’ in the commitment, meaning that if the individual gave an hour of their personal time per week, the organisation would do likewise, and hence we had full participation for two hours each week.

**Q:** What approaches/practices were of most benefit to you and your people at work and at home?

**A:** Based on feedback we’ve collated over the programs run to date, key benefits are noted as learning mind strength techniques and providing tools to maintain equilibrium, focus and calmness; allowing oneself the freedom to make personal choices on how to react; gaining an appreciation for the ‘impermanence’ of a situation and how to navigate through the now; and permission to call ‘STOP’ and take a minute to think about how one’s reactions impact others.

**Q:** Have people been able to sustain these practices? How has that shown up in the workplace?

**A:** Whilst sustainability of these practices is largely up to the individual, I can say we’ve noticed a greater degree of tolerance amongst past participants. They understand there is a bigger picture at play and they have a choice as to how they will react or engage.

**Q:** Were there any pitfalls along the way? What were they? How were they overcome?

**A:** Really the only pitfall has been how to support the ongoing development or practice of the mind strength learnings. As with all learnings, practice makes perfect, and the application of new-found skills is essential in order to embed them and have them become part of one’s personal resource toolkit. **HRD**

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