

Building Workplace Resiliency

Developing
Organizational
Culture



Igniting the bio-economy's brainpower

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BioTalent Canada

BioTalent Canada supports the people behind life-changing science. Trusted as the go-to source for labour market intelligence, we guide bio-economy stakeholders with evidence-based data and industry-driven standards. We are focused on igniting the industry's brainpower, bridging the gap between job-ready talent and employers, and ensuring the long-term agility, resiliency and sustainability of one of Canada's most vital sectors.

Recently named one of the 50 Best Workplaces in Canada with under 50 employees, a Best Workplaces™ for Mental Wellness, Healthcare, and a Great Place to Work® for 2022, BioTalent Canada practices the same industry standards it recommends to stakeholders. These distinctions were awarded to BioTalent Canada following a thorough and independent survey analysis conducted by Great Place to Work®.

The information in this resource is based on best practices and should be adapted to your own situation. Required or strongly recommended items are noted explicitly.

For more information visit biotalent.ca.

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1 How does organizational culture contribute to resiliency?

1.1 What is organizational culture?

Organizational culture is essentially your brand as an employer. It defines your internal and external identity, and is the vision and set of values, behaviours and practices that make up your organization. Work environment, leadership behaviours, diversity, inclusivity, employee behaviour, programs, policies and practices all contribute to a company's culture.

Organizational culture should support all employees' basic need to belong. A healthy work environment helps employees feel included and that they are doing meaningful work. This increases their connection with the organization's vision, purpose and goals because it is clear how they are contributing to the bigger picture.

Employees who know they matter to their organization, are contributing to the company's success and feel the culture is in line with their beliefs and values are more likely to stay for the long-term.

1.1.1. Culture is a competitive advantage: Great culture attracts great talent

One of the biggest barriers to growth faced by Canadian bio-economy companies is attracting and training talent, according to [BioTalent Canada's National Labour Market Information Study](#). But workplace culture can help you win the talent race. Employees are your strongest asset, and a strong culture can help your organization:

- **Attract top talent:** Attracting highly qualified talent to your organization significantly improves its chance of success. Having highly qualified experts on your team raises the bar for all employees and elevates performance.
- **Engage employees:** A strong culture helps employees stay motivated and inspires them to go above and beyond in their roles. For example, happy employees are more likely to go the extra mile for clients or complete a project on time and usually perform well in their roles, all of which can have ripple effects across the organization.
- **Retain top talent:** Finding good people takes time and effort, so you need to do all you can to keep them. Happy employees are more engaged and therefore less likely to leave, which helps keep you ahead of the competition.

1.2 What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the capacity to “bounce back”—to absorb, react, adapt. Recent definitions of organizational resiliency emphasize less the “fortress” approach to addressing challenges and disruption—that is, attempting to rigidly protect the company from external factors that could cause uncertainty—and instead focus on flexibility, adaptability and risk management.¹ At the company level, resiliency is the ability to effectively anticipate and address disruptions and their impacts at the organizational level. In this sense, resiliency is characterized as a set of specific organizational capabilities, routines, practices and processes by which a firm conceptually orients itself, acts to move forward and creates a setting of diversity and adjustable integration.² Its goal is to support organizational sustainability in the face of disruption and enable organizations to absorb, react and adapt to it now and in the future.

Leaders from Canadian bio-economy companies that successfully responded to disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic described resiliency in similar terms, including being adaptable, agile, flexible, financially sound, responsive to change, transparent and open.³

¹ Denyer, D. (2017). Organizational Resilience: A summary of academic evidence, business insights and new thinking. *British Standards Institution and Cranfield School of Management*, 9.

² Lengnick-Hall, C. A., and Lengnick-Hall, B. (2011). Developing a capacity for organizational resilience through strategic human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21 (3), 2.

³ From the BioTalent Canada survey for the “[Building resiliency and sustainability for the bio-economy to withstand disruption](#)” research project, which gathered feedback from 344 Canadian bio-economy employers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 How does organizational culture relate to resiliency?

Organizational culture directly contributes to resiliency. Culture defines how workplaces operate, impacts how comfortable and productive employees are, and facilitates effective teamwork. These are all key for enabling a company to effectively respond to disruptions and changing contexts. Organizational cultures that don't actively support employees or ensure a shared vision and values are less able to respond effectively to turbulence, change or challenging contexts.

Resiliency is also a function of individuals or groups of individuals and their responses to disruptive situations. Change is inevitable in any organization, but how employees and leaders predict, navigate and adapt to change will affect an organization's resiliency. Individuals contribute to resiliency through specialized knowledge, skills and experience.⁴ Individual resiliency is complex, but research has demonstrated that organizational culture impacts it directly, both positively and negatively.

Positive organizational cultures that support individual resiliency include those that have policies, practices and programs in place to help employees:

- Bounce back from challenging times, both at work and at home
- Develop stress management skills
- Focus on moving forward within a collaborative team environment with common goals


Having a stable, engaged workforce contributes to organizational resiliency as teams pull together to overcome obstacles, integrate new team members and confidently address challenges.

⁴ Coutu, D. (2002). How resilience works. *Harvard Business Review*. 80, 46–55.

1.3.1. Tips for developing a culture that supports organizational resiliency

- **Open, two-way communication:** Communicating with employees verbally rather than in writing encourages discussion and helps employees feel heard and supported. This equips them to address challenges that impact their capacity to adapt, engage and thrive—the essence of resiliency. Eighty per cent of employers surveyed rated communication skills as “very important” to their success in addressing challenges brought on by the pandemic.⁵
- **Health and wellness programs:** Implement an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which most benefits providers offer and is often quite affordable. These programs give employees access to tools, resources, and medical and legal professionals that can help them overcome stressful personal or professional situations and foster resiliency. It is also a convenient resource for managers to offer employees who may need support. About 9 in 10 Canadian bio-economy employers noted that mental health resources for employees would be very or somewhat useful to implement to help build resiliency in their organization.
- **Leadership:** Your leadership team’s behaviour sets the tone for the organization as a whole. If they don’t make conscious efforts to create a company culture that aligns with their vision for the organization, the culture will emerge on its own—shaped by how leaders communicate, make decisions, engage with staff, treat employees, and implement policies and programs. Every leader’s role is to create an environment where employees feel connected and can thrive, and this can often be achieved by leaders connecting with and checking in on staff regularly. Among Canadian employers in the bio-economy, leadership was listed as one of the top three facilitators in a successful response to the challenges and disruption brought by the pandemic.
- **Community and connection:** Encourage employees to connect through social events and new collaborations. These opportunities strengthen relationships, share knowledge across teams and build resiliency.
- **Training:** Provide training on resiliency-building topics (e.g., having difficult conversations, improving communication skills, building workplace relationships, improving emotional intelligence) as well as courses on health and wellness to help

⁵ From the BioTalent Canada survey of Canadian bio-economy employers for the [“Building resiliency and sustainability for the bio-economy to withstand disruption”](#) research project.



employees manage stress and build resiliency.⁶ Ninety-one per cent of Canadian bio-economy employers have reported training and upskilling as key components in building resiliency. The skills and characteristics most endorsed by these respondents include adaptability, positive attitude, problem solving, communication and collaboration.

⁶ From the BioTalent Canada survey of Canadian bio-economy employers for the [“Building resiliency and sustainability for the bio-economy to withstand disruption”](#) research project.



2 How do we develop organizational cultures that build resiliency?

2.1 Creating culture at different employee stages

Building a culture that supports both individual and organizational resiliency takes effort that will vary depending on where employees are in their journey with the organization. This journey has four main stages, whether it's for an intentional short period of time (e.g., an internship) or for a longer, multi-year experience. These stages are:

1. recruitment
2. onboarding
3. development
4. retention

While it may take some upfront investment, the payoff is substantial for companies that develop a broad action plan that considers key aspects of organizational culture at each employment stage.

Gather feedback from your team to improve and create the best employee experience and understanding of organizational culture. This will, in turn, contribute to a stronger, more resilient organization.

Stages of the Employee Journey



2.2 Stage 1: Recruitment – Reflecting culture that builds resiliency

Recruiting employees who can address challenges and positively respond to disruption will help build organizational resiliency. Accordingly, interviews with Canadian bio-economy employers indicate increased interest in recruiting talent with a “resiliency mindset”.⁷

Employee considerations and insights at the recruiting stage:

- Candidates are savvy and will research companies before an interview.
- They will reach out to their personal and professional networks for feedback on your organization.

Actions that reflect to potential hires that the organization prioritizes resiliency:

- **Promoting your employee value proposition (EVP).** The essence of your company, your EVP are the benefits employees receive in exchange for their skills, capabilities and experience (see Putting it into practice: Job posting tips).
- Having a **structured interview process** that includes questions to assess resiliency (see Putting it into practice: Interviewing to assess resiliency).
- Ensuring you have a **fair and equitable hiring process** that encompasses inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) concepts (see the “[Building Workplace Resiliency: Adopting Inclusion, Equity, and Accessibility](#)” resource).
- Implementing a **referral program** that provides payment or perks to existing employees for referrals who are hired and stay past the probation period.

⁷ From the BioTalent Canada survey of Canadian bio-economy employers for the “[Building resiliency and sustainability for the bio-economy to withstand disruption](#)” research project.

2.2.1. Putting it into practice: Job posting tips

Writing a job posting that reflects your organizational culture is essential to attracting the right talent. For any job posting, ensure that you:

- Describe what makes your workplace unique. This could include facilities such as a gym, unique aspects of benefit packages, flexibility in work hours and location, or specialized workplace tools.
- Provide adequate detail on the role and responsibilities. This can be adapted from the [National Occupational Standard](#) (NOS) for bio-economy occupations or from sector-specific job boards such as [The PetriDish™](#).
- Describe three or four characteristics that will help a candidate succeed in the role.
- Outline any non-negotiable requirements for candidates to be considered for the role such as specific experience, education, knowledge, certifications or technical skills.

2.2.2. Putting it into practice: Interviewing to assess resiliency

The best way to assess a person's resiliency is often to observe their behaviour in challenging situations. If this is not possible (e.g., during recruitment), there are questions you can ask in the interview to help assess this. These include:

1. Tell me about a time you had to deal with a challenging situation or client. What was the outcome?

Follow up questions:

- i. What was the specific challenge? Who was involved? Please explain how you helped resolve the issue.
- ii. What was most challenging for you in dealing with this issue?

The candidate will likely focus on positive examples, so you may need to follow up with these additional probing questions.

2. What coping techniques did you use in this situation?

Illustrates how the candidate manages stress.

3. What did you learn from this situation?

Illustrates how candidates reflect, learn and grow from challenges.

4. **What would you do differently if this happened again?**
Illustrates self-awareness and growth.
5. **How did you move on after that challenge?**
Illustrates how candidates learn and move forward or if the situation caused long-term stress or other issues.
6. **How would your colleagues and/or manager(s) describe your behaviour throughout this experience?**
Illustrates capacity for considering others' perspectives.
7. **If this were to happen again, what would you do differently to move forward?**
Illustrates if candidates have learned new skills or coping mechanisms that improve their resiliency.

2.3. Stage 2: Onboarding – Creating and reflecting a culture that builds resiliency

Canadian bio-economy employers had to rapidly adapt their procedures and operations in response to the pandemic, including being more flexible with onboarding. Many adopted new approaches such as having virtual meetings to introduce new hires to their teams, documenting processes that would usually be shown in person, and scheduling check-ins with new remote workers (a process usually conducted more casually). Employers identified more tools and resources for onboarding as one of the top 10 areas that contribute to their capacity to build organizational resiliency.

Employee considerations and insights at the onboarding stage:

- New employees are typically anxious about their first day.
- They expect to be welcomed, trained and provided resources and tools.

Actions that create and reflect a resiliency-building culture:

- **Welcoming** new employees via a team email
- Ensuring their **equipment** is set up and they have any **resources** they need
- Developing and providing an **onboarding plan** with **clear expectations** for the first 30, 60 and 90 days
- Ensuring they have a **training schedule** so new hires know what to expect

- **Assigning a buddy** to help new employees integrate over the first few weeks
- **Encouraging connections** with employees outside their regular team to expose them to different parts of the organization
- Ensuring the manager dedicates time to **discussing the new hire's role**, making introductions, setting expectations and **providing feedback** within the first few months

2.3.1. Putting it into practice: Onboarding checklist

☐ Welcome email message sent to company/team

Sample text: Please join me in welcoming [name] to our team, who will be joining us on [date]. [Brief sentence or two on new hire's employment background]. We are excited to have [name] onboard!

☐ Email to new employee prior to start date

Sample text: Hope all is well. We are so excited to have you on board! Please find attached the information you will need to prepare for your first week. Don't hesitate to reach out to [name] if you have any questions. Looking forward to your first day!

☐ Setup

Ensure all necessary tools are ready for the new hire's first day (e.g., computer, phone, badge, passwords, logins and system setup).

☐ Buddy system

Partner the employee with another employee (a "buddy") who can welcome them, help train them, show them around, provide them with resources and introduce them to colleagues. This eases the transition and training time and serves as a gentle introduction to the organizational culture.

☐ Training schedule

Create a training schedule for corporate knowledge and role-specific tasks. New employees greatly appreciate this, and it introduces them to the organizational culture. It also demonstrates that the company is organized and committed to helping them succeed.

❑ **Welcome packages/swag**

Welcome packages have become increasingly popular to welcome employees to the company. This could include a company mug, pen, notebook or mousepad. There are a variety of small items that can be customized depending on budget. Some employers even offer sweatshirts or backpacks that both promote the company and make new employees feel valued.

❑ **Scheduled time with manager**

Scheduling time for a new employee to spend with their manager in their first day, week and first three months is essential for employee engagement. Discussing their role, objectives and upcoming changes or projects keeps new employees motivated and helps them interpret and ultimately support the organizational culture.

2.4. Stage 3: Development – Creating and reflecting a culture that builds resiliency

Employee development is key to employee engagement and company growth. Investing in development is a commitment to employees, and in turn often builds a sense of loyalty to the organization.

Bio-economy employers consistently identified social-emotional learning and leadership skills as key to addressing challenges created by the pandemic.⁸ Companies that found opportunities for growth during the disruption—an important indicator of resiliency—placed more emphasis on developing soft skills such as adaptability, maintaining a positive attitude, communication and collaboration. This is consistent with findings from a literature review conducted as part of BioTalent Canada’s “Building resiliency and sustainability for the bio-economy to withstand disruption” research project, as well as results from BioTalent Canada’s labour market intelligence studies. Bio-economy employers have also noted a lack of these key skills among current and new employees, highlighting the need to help employees develop them.

Employee considerations and insights at the development stage:

- Employees want to grow professionally and be inspired.

⁸ From the BioTalent Canada survey of Canadian bio-economy employers for the [“Building resiliency and sustainability for the bio-economy to withstand disruption”](#) research project.

- Employees who feel supported and valued are more willing to share their knowledge and experience.

Actions at the development stage that create and reflect a resiliency-building organizational culture:

- Setting **SMART performance goals** for each employee's role that include developing and supporting the organizational culture, and discussing **career goals** with each individual.
- Communicating transparently and openly about the organization's **career progression policies** and processes.
- Creating opportunities that **support employees' professional growth**, including increasing skills in areas that support organizational resiliency such as adaptability, maintaining a positive attitude, communication and collaboration (see Putting it into practice: Employee development plans).
- Strengthening the organization by creating opportunities for employees to **share their knowledge** and skills.
- **Investing in mentorship and training**, particularly in areas that support organizational resiliency.

2.4.1. Putting it into practice: Employee development plans

Managers can discuss the following questions with employees to explore issues and ideas that will help inform an individual development plan:

- **What are your career aspirations? How can we support you?**
- **What opportunities interest you (e.g., projects, roles, other teams or mentors in the organization)?**
- **What training could help you in your current role?**

Employees should be encouraged to take initiative in their professional development. They can complete a self-assessment that includes their goals (formulated as SMART goals is often helpful), the training or mentorship required to achieve that goal, the support they require and the time it will take to complete. This should then be reviewed and agreed upon with their manager, after which it becomes their development plan.

Besides providing a layer of accountability to the development process, this plan helps motivate employees and provides managers timelines for planning training resources and

supports, promotions or succession planning. A **sample self-assessment plan template** could include the following sections (example answers in italics):

☐ **Goal (SMART format)**

During the next three months, I will build supervisory skills by shadowing the manager for two days per month, helping employees with production problems, and training staff. I will write a summary of my critical learnings at the end of each month.

☐ **Training required**

- IDEA training
- Leadership courses
- Leading a team project to develop leadership skills
- Quarterly coaching/mentoring session with John Nielson, Director, Labs

☐ **Success measures**

- Successful completion of training
- One year being coached/mentored by John with his feedback on development

☐ **Support needed**

- Training cost approval: \$6,000 over a two-year period
- Manager support and approval from John to provide mentorship

☐ **Completion date**

- July 2024 (18 months)

2.5. Stage 4: Retainment – Create a culture that builds resiliency

Retaining knowledge in an organization, especially with key employees, builds resiliency. Longer-serving employees build more experience, understand and support the organizational culture, and ultimately contribute to resiliency.

Rapid employee turnover combined with high proportions of new hires can be not only costly to an organization but can significantly impact resiliency. If the organizational culture encourages flexibility, new ideas, learning and integration of new talent, then retaining longer-term employees can provide stability that is be beneficial for building and maintaining resiliency.

Employee considerations and insights at the retainment stage:

- Companies that have fair and equitable practices, highly collaborative environments, and that recognize employees for their work often have high retention rates.
- In addition to connecting to their roles, employees benefit from feeling emotionally connected to their workplace and cared about.

Actions at the retainment stage that create and reflect a resiliency-building organizational culture:

- Provide **regular feedback** on work and coaching employees them on how to improve.
- Recognize **their work** and rewarding them when possible and appropriate.
- Include employees in **brainstorming sessions** or provide opportunities to grow through stretch projects where they can learn new skills.

2.5.1. Putting it into practice: Tips for retaining talent

Retaining talent often depends on your organizational culture. Practices that can contribute to employee retention include:

Workforce planning: Effectively addressing workforce issues that put additional pressure on performing employees (e.g., high turnover, lack of employees, low engagement) can improve overall resiliency. Overworked, burnt-out or frustrated employees are less able to cope with disruptions and challenges.

Recognition and rewards: All employees expect to have performance and salary reviews. Public acknowledgement and celebration of employee-specific achievements are always appreciated. But in a competitive job market, performance reviews and salary increases or bonuses are among the most important parts of your annual HR practices.

Compassion: Ensure your managers lead with empathy. Employees have lives outside of work and sometimes experience challenging times when they need their manager's support. This was especially true during the pandemic, when employees were experiencing significant stress while also adapting to working from home with their families present.

HR practices: Ensure you have fair, equitable practices and policies on promotions, performance management, remote working, time off, sick days, vacation, salary increases or salary reviews. When employees feel they are not receiving fair treatment, they will become frustrated and demotivated.

Building workplace resiliency in Canada's bio-economy

Your organizational culture is just one factor that contributes to workplace resiliency. Strengthening inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA); hiring and retaining internationally educated professionals (IEPs); and fostering an equitable workforce free of discrimination are among other vital steps.

BioTalent Canada has published a series of resources offering tips, plans and other tools to further support your workplace resiliency efforts. Explore them at biotalent.ca/resiliency.

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