



Resilience as Shared Architecture

Re-grounding Organisational Resilience in Asia-Pacific Workplace Realities

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Abstract

Most workplace resilience frameworks currently in use were developed within Western, highly individualist contexts and then exported globally with remarkably little cultural translation. This paper argues that the resulting model - resilience as a personal skill, taught through workshops, measured by self-report - is poorly matched to the relational and hierarchical realities of regional workplaces in such cultural rich societies across the Asia Pacific rim, and that the mismatch produces predictable failure: *high engagement at the training-room door, no behavioural change in the team.*

Drawing on resilience science (Masten; Bonanno; Hobfoll), burnout research (Maslach & Leiter), psychological safety (Edmondson; Detert & Edmondson), and cross-cultural organisational scholarship (Hofstede; Hwang; Farh & Cheng; Chen & Miller), the paper proposes that resilience is best understood as shared architecture that being a property of the system within which a person works, not exclusively a trait the person carries into work. **Three levels are required: individual capability, relational quality, and system design.** In an Asian context, the relational level is often the most powerful lever, because collective coping, 'face' dynamics, paternalistic leadership and hierarchical voice constraints already shape how distress is expressed, hidden or repaired.

The paper offers a practical framework for leaders and practitioners across the region, set against the documented mental health strain in jurisdictions like Hong Kong workplaces where AXA 2024 reports: 49% burnout, up from 22% in 2023; and Gallup 2024 suggests: 49% report daily work stress. The paper closes with measurable indicators of progress and a starter intervention leaders can run in fifteen minutes.

1. Purpose and the question this paper asks

This paper is written for the researchers, practitioners, counsellors, coaches, HR leaders and policymakers attending HRCONF2026. It assumes participants already accept that *workplace resilience matters*. The question explored here is slightly different: *why do so many resilience interventions appear effective in the training room, yet fail to meaningfully shift the team environment people return to afterwards?*

The argument in one sentence: resilience is a property of the architecture around a person, not a property of the person; and in Asian workplaces, the architecture that matters most is relational. When leaders, teams and systems are aligned to protect and replenish people, resilience compounds. When they are not, no amount of individual training will hold.

As the author I write from thirty-plus years of applied work across consulting, coaching, counselling and supervision in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. I bring a Sydney-based vantage point and a practitioner's caution: the model in this paper is offered as a working framework, refined through engagements but not yet validated across all the cultural contexts the region contains. I welcome challenge to its thinking...

2. The quiet weight, and where it is heaviest

There is a particular kind of tiredness now visible across workplaces throughout the region. It is not simply long hours, though those are present. It is the cumulative strain of constant adaptation while the structures around people change faster than they can metabolise.

Hong Kong is among the most acute sites of this strain. The [AXA Mind Health and Wellbeing Study \(2024\)](#) found that 49% of Hong Kong workers reported burnout in 2024, more than double the 22% reported a

year earlier. [Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2024](#) recorded that 49% of Hong Kong workers experience daily work stress which is among the highest rates in the region. An [Aon and TELUS Mental Health Index](#) placed 40% of Hong Kong employees and 39% in Mainland China at high risk of developing mental health issues. The Hong Kong Legislative Council Research Office (IN02/2025) notes that only 12.5% of employees diagnosed with mental illness in 2023 reported receiving any form of workplace support.

These figures matter for two reasons. First, they make the stakes concrete: this is not an academic exercise in framework refinement. Second, they reveal that the Hong Kong situation is not principally an individual-resilience deficit. The workforce is not less robust than it was three years ago. The pressure on it has changed, and the systems around it have not caught up.

When resilience is offered to people in this context as a personal coping skill, two things happen. The training is well-received with the language of regulation, recovery and boundaries is genuinely useful. But the training fails to translate, because the moment the participant returns to a team in which staying late signals loyalty, raising a problem signals weakness, and the supervisor has not changed their own behaviour, the new skill cannot survive contact with the old system.

3. Resilience science, briefly, and what travels

Let me take you on a very a short orientation for readers from disciplines outside organisational psychology. The resilience literature has moved a long way from its origins.

Masten described resilience as “ordinary magic” not the property of exceptional individuals, but the predictable outcome of intact relationships, meaning, problem-solving capacity and supportive environments. Bonanno showed that resilience is not the absence of distress; it is the capacity to respond flexibly and adapt after adversity. Bonanno and Burton’s work on regulatory flexibility added a practical insight that translates well across cultures: resilience often depends on matching coping strategies to the situation, rather than relying on a single preferred style.

Hobfoll’s Conservation of Resources theory is particularly useful in the workplace: stress arises when valued resources such as time, energy, status, social connection, autonomy, and hope are threatened or depleted faster than they are replenished. Maslach and Leiter demonstrated that burnout is shaped by six conditions (i) workload, (ii) control, (iii) reward, (iv) community, (v) fairness and (vi) values alignment and is best read as a signal about the workplace, not a verdict on the worker.

Edmondson’s psychological safety construct travels less easily than its global popularity suggests. The original 1999 finding that team learning depends on people feeling safe enough to take interpersonal risks, is robust. But Detert and Edmondson’s later work on implicit voice theories is more directly relevant here: people across cultures hold tacit beliefs about when speaking up is dangerous, and those beliefs are stronger in high power-distance contexts. Psychological safety in a Hong Kong, Tokyo or Seoul team is not built by importing Silicon Valley meeting norms. It is built by understanding which voice theories are operating and changing the conditions that hold them in place.

This is the core of what travels: the systems orientation of contemporary resilience science. What does not travel is the implicit individualism that often surrounds it in popular Western application.

4. The cultural mismatch most resilience programs ignore

Western workplace wellbeing discourse rests on assumptions that are not universal:

- That the individual is the unit of intervention.
- That voice and direct disagreement are signs of psychological safety.
- That boundaries are negotiated between employee and employer as roughly equal parties.
- That distress is best made visible.
- That separating work from personal life is a healthy default.

Each of these assumptions sits in tension with the relational architecture of many Asian workplaces. This does not mean that Asian workplaces are less capable of supporting resilience, but rather they support it differently, and so to then they fail it differently.

Power Distance and Voice

Hofstede's research, refined extensively by Chinese scholars and applied across the region, documents that Hong Kong, Mainland China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia all score moderate to high on power distance. The downstream effect is well established: subordinates are less likely to raise problems with senior leaders, and more likely to communicate concerns laterally or through trusted intermediaries. A psychological safety intervention that simply invites "anyone to speak up in the meeting" will produce silence and, often, a polite-seeming meeting that masks unresolved issues.

Face and The Cost of Public Vulnerability

Hwang's work on mianzi (face) and lian (moral character) is essential reading. To ask a Hong Kong manager to disclose, in front of their team, that they are struggling, is to ask them to risk something Western frameworks rarely account for. This is not weakness or evasion; it is a coherent social logic in which face protects the relational fabric the group depends on. Resilience interventions that fail to design for face-preserving disclosure paths will be quietly avoided.

Paternalistic Leadership

Farh and Cheng's tripartite model of paternalistic leadership - authoritarianism, benevolence and morality - describes a pattern that remains common in family-owned and traditionally-structured firms across Greater China and much of Southeast Asia. Done badly, it produces fear and suppressed problems. Done well, it produces deep loyalty and effective collective coping. Either way, it does not respond to interventions designed for low power-distance, with transactional employment relationships.

Endurance as Virtue

Japanese gaman, Korean cham-da, the broader Confucian valorisation of perseverance are real cultural resources for resilience. They also produce real risks: karoshi, guolaosi, gwarosa - death from overwork - are named conditions in Japanese, Mandarin and Korean precisely because the underlying pattern is structural. The same cultural strength that enables collective effort under pressure can, when not balanced by system protection, become the mechanism by which system strain is converted into human collapse.

The Collective Frame

This is the most important inversion. Western resilience discourse treats the individual as the locus of resilience and the team as the support. In much of Asia, the team, and behind it, the family, is the locus, and the individual is one expression of it. This is a strength for resilience: collective coping resources are real and powerful. It is also a risk: when the collective demands sacrifice, the individual has fewer culturally permitted exits.

A resilience framework worth using in this region must hold both: the strength of collective coping, and the cost when collective demand exceeds collective capacity to absorb.

5. Three vignettes from the region

The same underlying problem that being well-intentioned training that fails to translate, presents differently across the region. Following are three composite vignettes, drawn from practice and anonymised.

Vignette A: Hong Kong public hospital, allied health team

Following a serious adverse event, the hospital commissions a resilience program for nursing and allied health staff. Attendance is high, feedback is warm. Six months later, sick leave is up, two senior clinicians have resigned, and the team's incident reporting rate has fallen. On review, the training had taught participants to "name what they were carrying." The relational architecture of supervisors trained in the same era, hierarchical norms about not raising concerns above one's grade, a culture in which the senior consultant's silence ended discussion, had not been touched. *Staff had a new vocabulary but nowhere safe to use it.*

Vignette B: Mainland Chinese technology firm, mid-cap, Shenzhen

A 996 workplace (9am–9pm, six days a week) introduces mindfulness sessions and a meditation app subsidy. Engagement metrics improve briefly, then regress. The chief people officer privately concedes the obvious: the intervention treats the symptom of a system designed to extract maximum output. When the same firm later restructures the engineering manager role to require a weekly one-to-one focused exclusively on team workload and recovery - a structural rather than skill-based intervention - voluntary attrition in target teams drops by roughly a third within twelve months. The mindfulness app is still available. It is no longer the headline.

Vignette C: Japanese trading house, Hong Kong office

A bicultural environment with Japanese senior leadership and locally hired Hong Kong staff. The leadership team commissions a Western-style psychological safety workshop. Local staff find it earnest but irrelevant: the unspoken rules around senior Japanese executives' authority remain untouched, and they know it. A second consultancy is brought in. It works first with the Japanese executive team on what they will model specifically, scripts for acknowledging uncertainty in front of subordinates without losing face, and a structured monthly honne (true feeling) session led by a respected intermediary. Six months later, anonymous voice survey scores have risen across both cultural groups, and the executive team reports that operational problems are now surfacing two to three weeks earlier than they did before.

The pattern in all three cases is the same. The presence or absence of individual skill is not the differentiator. The differentiator is whether the relational and structural architecture around the person changed.

6. The model: resilience as shared architecture

I propose a three-level model. The levels are familiar; the cultural emphases are not.

SYSTEM LEVEL

workload design • role clarity • recovery norms • policy / lived gap



RELATIONAL LEVEL

psychological safety • face-preserving voice paths • repair • leader signals



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

regulation • flexibility • recovery skill • meaning

6.1 Individual capability - necessary, not sufficient

Emotional regulation (Gross), regulatory flexibility (Bonanno & Burton), recovery practice, and the preservation of personal meaning under pressure remain foundational. Individuals do better when they have these skills than when they do not. The error is treating this level as a complete intervention. In a broader Asian contexts, the additional caution is to ensure individual skill-building does not silently endorse over-endurance teaching people to absorb more, rather than helping them know when to ask the system to give.

6.2 Relational quality - the highest-leverage level in this region

Psychological safety, repair after rupture, leader signalling, and the quality of supervisor-subordinate exchange shape what an individual can do with their capability. In high power-distance contexts, this level requires deliberate design:

Face-preserving voice paths. Anonymous channels, trusted intermediaries, structured rotating “speaker” formats, written-then-discussed agendas... all of allow problems to surface without putting individuals in face-threatening public positions. They are not a workaround; they are the architecture.

Paternalistic leadership done with care. Where benevolent paternalism is the prevailing leadership culture, the leverage point is leader behaviour modelling, not leader replacement. A senior leader who publicly acknowledges uncertainty, protects junior recovery time, and names workload trade-offs reshapes the local resilience economy more than any workshop.

Collective coping as resource. Team rituals around shared meals, structured peer supervision, and group debrief practices use the collective orientation as protective infrastructure rather than fighting it. Chen and Miller’s ambicultural management which drawing the best from Eastern and Western practice, is the right register.

6.3 System design - where the underlying contradictions live

Workload, role clarity, decision-making pathways, recovery norms, the gap between stated values and lived behaviour. Hobfoll’s Conservation of Resources theory is the spine: a resilient system protects and replenishes resources rather than continuously extracting them.

In the Hong Kong context specifically, the LegCo Research Office’s 2025 finding that the city’s “light-touch” regulatory approach leaves wide gaps in employer mental health duty of care, sits at this level. So does the structural mismatch between 60+ hour working weeks and any individual recovery practice that a workshop could plausibly install.

System resilience also includes what Weick and Sutcliffe call high reliability organising: attention, learning, anticipation, and the capacity to respond under uncertainty. This is not motivational language. It is operational discipline, and it scales.

7. From program to infrastructure: what implementation looks like

The implementation challenge is moving resilience from intervention to infrastructure. Interventions still have a place: workshops, coaching, supervision, reflective practice. But they must connect to the daily operating life of the organisation.

Three integration points:

1. **Leadership modelling.** Leaders cannot ask of others what they do not display. In paternalistic leadership cultures, this is especially powerful; when the senior figure protects recovery, names limits, and admits uncertainty, the relational system reorganises around the new signal.
2. **Team practice.** Shared language for stress, recovery, conflict and repair. Routines that make resilience visible: meeting hygiene, debrief after pressure, structured supervision, workload conversations before crisis. In Asian contexts, building rituals that fit collective and face-aware norms, rather than importing Anglo-American meeting forms, is the difference between adoption and abandonment.
3. **System alignment.** Policy, performance systems and cultural expectations examined for contradiction. If the wellbeing strategy says one thing and the workload design says another, people will believe the workload. Resilience compounds when formal commitments and informal signals point the same way.

What success looks like (measurable indicators)

A program is working when, over a 12-month horizon, an organisation can show movement on three or more of the following:

Domain	Indicator	Practical measure
Individual	Self-reported recovery quality	Quarterly two-item pulse (sleep, weekend recovery)
Relational	Voice and early problem surfacing	Time from issue emergence to leader awareness; anonymous voice survey
Relational	Psychological safety (culturally adapted)	Edmondson 7-item adapted for face-aware items; supplemented by network mapping
System	Workload sustainability	Weekly overtime hours; PTO uptake rate; after-hours email volume

Domain	Indicator	Practical measure
System	Policy / lived gap	Annual structured audit of three policies against observed behaviour
Outcome	Retention and absence	Voluntary attrition, sick leave days, critical incident rates

None of these measures require expensive instrumentation, in fact several can be run by a team leader with a spreadsheet.

8. Reframing responsibility

The most important shift in this paper is the reframing of responsibility, and here the Asian reading produces a different conclusion than the Western one.

Western workplace resilience discourse has spent the last decade correcting an overreach: it had placed too much responsibility on the individual and too little on the system. The corrective is welcome.

In many Asian organisational contexts, the starting point is different. Responsibility is already understood as collective and relational; the individual is already embedded in obligation to team, supervisor and family. The risk here is not that responsibility is over-individualised. The risk is that collective responsibility is mobilised in ways that protect the system at the expense of the people in it. The classic example is a team that absorbs an unreasonable workload out of loyalty to a manager who is themselves absorbing an unreasonable workload out of loyalty to a senior leader... until something breaks, and the breakage is read as personal failure of whoever was holding it at the moment.

A systems-informed view in this region therefore does two things at once: it preserves the strength of collective responsibility as a resilience resource, and it asks leaders and organisations to take active responsibility for what the collective is being asked to hold. Agency remains with individuals to develop skill, and to set boundaries within what their context allows. But responsibility for designing sustainable conditions sits squarely with leadership and organisational design.

9. Practical implications for leaders and practitioners

For leaders, the question is not “how do we make our people more resilient?” The better question, and the one that survives translation across cultures, is “*what are we doing that builds or erodes the architecture around our people?*” Examine the everyday signals. What happens when someone says they are overloaded? What behaviours are celebrated? Who gets promoted? Are recovery and reflection treated as legitimate parts of performance, or as luxuries? Do problems surface early or only when expensive?

For practitioners be it counsellors, coaches, organisational consultants, HR professionals, or others, the implication is that program design has to begin further upstream than the program. Resilience work without leadership preparation, team follow-through, and a pathway into policy review will almost always

be absorbed back into the unchanged culture. The professional skill is not in the workshop. It is in the architecture work around it.

For researchers, the open questions multiply...

- How do face-aware voice mechanisms perform against direct-disclosure mechanisms across different Asian contexts?
- How do paternalistic leadership patterns interact with high-reliability organising practices?
- Can ambicultural management be taught, or does it depend on the leader's own bicultural fluency? Hong Kong - bicultural by history, deeply networked across the region - is an unusually rich site for this work.

10. A starter intervention you can run in fifteen minutes

As promised, the paper closes with one practical action, because conference papers that close only with calls for further research do not change anything.

The Resilience Signals Review (15 minutes).

In your next team meeting, ask three questions:

1. What does this team currently reward - explicitly or implicitly - that may quietly cost us?
2. Where, in the last month, did someone raise a concern late because raising it early felt risky?
3. What is one small change to how we work that would replenish rather than extract this month?

Listen. Do not defend. Write down what you hear. Choose one of the suggestions and act on it within thirty days. Tell the team you did.

This is not a sufficient intervention. It is a starter. Three tiers from here:

- **Starter** (this month): Run the 15-minute review. Make one structural change. Report back.
- **Standard** (this quarter): Pair the team review with a leadership audit - what signals are you personally sending? Adjust one. Run a 90-minute team workshop on face-aware voice paths.
- **Ambitious** (next twelve months): A 90-day resilience infrastructure design - policy review, leadership development cohort, indicator dashboard, and a measurement cycle aligned to the table on page 7.

If you would like the facilitator script for the 15-minute review, or the policy review template for the longer engagements, write to admin@shanewarren.asia.

11. Conclusion

Resilience is already present in organisations. People adapt every day, they absorb pressure, recover from setbacks, manage difficult emotions, support colleagues, solve problems and continue forward. The question is whether organisations are supporting this human capacity or quietly consuming it.

Across the Asia-Pacific, the existing cultural infrastructure for collective coping, loyalty and endurance is real and powerful. It is also, on its own, insufficient. The data from Hong Kong, Mainland China, Japan and Korea make clear that the gap between what systems are demanding and what people can sustainably hold is widening, and that the cultural strengths in the region are being asked to absorb more than they were built to absorb.

A mature regional response will not import Western individualist frameworks unchanged. It will not romanticise traditional collective endurance either. It will treat resilience as shared architecture built deliberately, at three levels at once, with cultural intelligence at the relational level and operational discipline at the system level.

The simplest way to say it: resilience is not something people bring to work; it is something organisations either build or quietly erode. That sentence holds whether you read it in Sydney, Hong Kong, Tokyo or Seoul. What changes between those cities is the architecture you must build to make it true.

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This paper is offered for discussion at HRCONF2026. Please contact the author for the facilitator script, policy review template, or to discuss adaptation to specific organisational contexts.

