

## Busting the Myths – Efficiency

Chasing down efficiency to the n<sup>th</sup> degree is wasted effort. Whilst removing the obviously inefficient aspects is necessary for the result to be good, trying to endlessly improve efficiency will not deliver a benefit.

Once major inefficiencies are removed from any given task, any productivity gain is made via an investment in resilience.

<b>List-makers</b>
<b>Busy managers and leaders</b>
<b>Productivity specialists</b>
<b>Process improvement consultants</b>
<b>Quality seekers</b>
<b>Lean process experts</b>
<b>All juggling mums and dads</b>
<b>And all and anyone who seek the enlightened way of efficiency</b>
<b>Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!</b>

You are the experts of process. You are the experts of efficiency. You aim for smooth operations. You aim to prioritise clearly, assign resources, run the machine, analyse the results, improve the results, eke out another drop of productivity, whilst reducing costs and increasing the output of the task.

<b>Task 1. Done.</b>
<b>Task 2. Done.</b>
<b>Task 3. Done.</b>
<b>Next, Task 4.</b>
<b>Then, Tasks 5, 6, 7...</b>

All this at reasonable quality. You are good at ensuring the balance of efficiency versus sufficient quality to meet the needs of the customer or process. You make lists to get organised. You make other lists to ensure what is important and what is not important. You identify plans, measures of success, and key processes to manage all the tasks. You aim for efficiency big time.

The problem is driving for efficiency is hard. It's time-consuming. It's a fulltime job just to stand still. The demands in the workplace are increasing: you are asked to do more with less, including leading through complexity. There are three issues with a singular focus on inefficiency:

<b>How can you maintain a super-man or super-woman level of effort on this all the time?</b>
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Efficiency-chasing creates a burden. Whilst productivity improves a little, you become a slave to efficiency. That creates demotivation. That in turn then means that hard-earned productivity gains are short-lived and things slip backwards.

**Once you have an efficient process for it all, but you still don't have enough time to do everything, what then?**

An option often sought as a short-term solution is to increase the work hours. You drop non-vital activities. You don't go out so much with your friends maybe. You don't play the sport you normally do but instead cut the time down to just going to the gym which you enjoy less, but at least you're doing something! You get up earlier so you can fit more in. You are determined not to drop any balls. However, the juggling causes fatigue. Over time, you forget what it's like to feel any different. Being tired and juggling and feeling like you're not making much headway becomes the new norm.

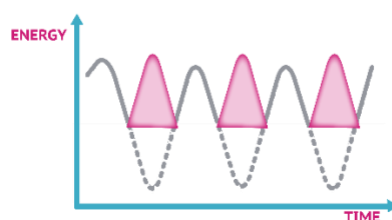
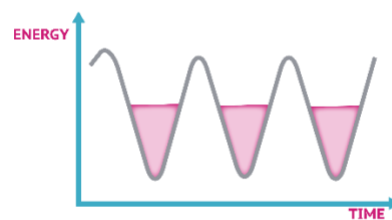
**Lastly, and important for leadership, what about time for strategic thinking, innovation and space for creativity?**

If you spend all your time focussing on the efficiency of all your processes, there is no room for free-wheeling and being imaginative. Being able to have the freedom for creative thinking is important. An all-efficient person is definitely not a creative one!

### The Resilient Way

If you have ironed out the obvious inefficiencies, the real upsurge in productivity comes from resilience. With resilience you can double your capacity:

How to Double your Capacity



The diagram above shows a typical high performer’s energy, which goes up during times of challenge, and down in the aftermath. This is a ‘Bounceback’ level of resilience, and shows that whilst the person gets through the challenge, there is a cost in energy terms. In the downs of the aftermath, not only is this a loss of capacity, it is also where the most inefficiencies reside. To be clear, you are most inefficient when you are tired. The Resilient Way reverses the ‘downs’, which leads to the doubling of your capacity. Imagine! The high performer does this by investing in their Adaptive Capacity, the component of resilience that gives access to the real flexibility day to day. Other elements give you stability, but this is the big one for releasing capacity to do the stuff you love.

**Those with the highest resilience invest, in a normal period, 35% of their time to what The Resilience Engine calls ‘Adaptive Capacity’.**

Your Adaptive Capacity is made up of three main components:

**Firstly, perspective – the ability to grasp context.**

Being able to step back from a situation in order to better see and understand. This implies an ability to weigh up a range of factors, from how very different groups of people will interpret a gesture, to being able to put a single interaction or one bit of information in perspective.

**The second is refreshing yourself.**

Consider this as energy, the combination of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy. Energy is directly proportional to resilience; they follow the same ups and downs. Whilst not the same, energy is a major component of resilience. Those with the highest resilience will invest in their energy on a very regular basis, not just to keep it at neutral at the end of the day, but to give surplus.

**The last component is pacing yourself.**

It’s an advanced skill whereby you manage your load according to your capacity on a continuous basis. It’s like a souped-up version of the learning cycle<sup>30–32</sup> which allows you to see what is coming down the line, and smooth out bumps before they arise.

### How does resilience release capacity?

<b>You get rid of unnecessary resilience drains.</b>
<b>You see options more readily and often in easier, faster ways.</b>
<b>You have fewer iterations in any task to achieve ‘good’.</b>
<b>You stop sweating the detail.</b>
<b>You don’t seek to resolve things that are unresolvable. You don’t keep going and going at something when it won’t budge. You accept it, and move away until the issue has altered or diminished in some way, or you are more resourced to tackle it.</b>
<b>You pull in extra resources as required.</b>
<b>You learn. This really is the key to it all. You learn, learn, learn. And that means you can go forward more resourcefully.</b>

## Applying the Resilient Way

Reflect on the follows. You can do this as a solo or team exercise.



### Write down

Write down for each element of your own Adaptive Capacity both how you support this and what you do that drains it. Here's my current example which highlights a distinct lack of focus on pacing, causing an unnecessary resilience drain:

Adaptive Capacity Element	Supportive	Unsupportive
Getting Perspective	Weekly calls to colleagues outside of main team, just to sense check what is going on  Switching off mobile data at weekend	Being over-busy  Allowing stress to get the better of me
Refreshing Yourself	Tennis  Family time  Sleep  Stopped drinking during week	Being over-busy  Saying yes to new things when I haven't finished old ones
Pacing	Very little!  Note this means I really have a gap in my Adaptive Capacity!	No planning!



### Review

Which areas of your Adaptive Capacity are you happy with? Which areas are you less happy with? What resources are available to you – either internal or external – that could help?



### Change

With the Resilient Way you answer the following questions honestly:

**Is this resilience-boosting? (Or resilience-draining?)**

- What is actually meaningful to you? Meaning will give you energy.
- If it's not meaningful, how can you either shift it or let it go?
- If you can't shift it or let it go, what is the optimal quality/effort ratio?

**What are the criteria for 'good'?**

- What level of quality is needed here?
- When does it need to be done by?
- How long realistically will this take?
- Who else needs to know/have input into this?

**What do you actually have capacity for? And how can you align your/others' capacity to meet everything on your plate realistically?**

- What is your energy like right now?
- How resourceful do you feel?
- Who or what else can help to reduce the load?
- What flexibility is there in the task?

**How can you get more perspective on this matter?**

**✓ Commit**

Where is the most important opportunity for investment in your Adaptive Capacity? Within this, what outcome(s) do you wish for yourself? What do you need in order to commit to making this opportunity real?