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# **Bouncing-back with a smile: towards a hospitality-specific resilience framework.**

## **Abstract**

*This paper explores which resilient behaviours are essential for hospitality employees, with a focus on Generation Z. The Dutch hospitality industry reports the highest levels of work pressure, combined with increasing guest incivility and emotional labour, resulting in a need for better-defined resilience strategies. Through a qualitative focus group with eight hospitality professionals from education and industry, this study identifies key behavioural patterns and compares them to the Employee Resilience Scale (Kuntz et al., 2016) and the Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework. Findings confirm alignment with existing models while highlighting unique contextual demands, such as the need to perform emotional labour without visibly showing stress. Leadership and organizational culture are identified as essential enablers of resilience, especially for Gen Z. These preliminary results lay the groundwork for hospitality-specific interventions and further research within a Professional Doctorate focused on resilience-building in hospitality operations and education.*

## **Keywords**

Resilience, Hospitality, Generation Z/Gen Z, Inner Development Goals, Employee Wellbeing

**Track:** The Future of Talent Management

**Focus of Paper:** Industry/Educational

## **Introduction**

### ***Sector Specific Challenges***

According to the national survey for work conditions in 2024, the Netherlands is the sector where the most employees experience high work pressure with 29%, in comparison to other high pressure sectors like healthcare (23%) and education (22%). with the highest work pressure (van Dam et al., 2025). Typical challenges of the industry contributing to this pressure are high staff turnover, emotional labor and increasing guest incivility (Daryanto, 2022; Alola & Alola, 2018). Around 20% of Dutch hospitality professionals experience regularly unwanted behaviour on the workforce (CBS, 2024). The growing necessity for a resilient workforce seems evident according to Lu et al. (2022), and Tonkin et al. (2018).

Kalisch et al (2017) define resilience as “*the maintenance or quick recovery of one’s mental health during or after adversity.*” Resilience has also been defined as a critical factor in maintaining service quality and operational continuity (Kuntz et al., 2017a). However, the industry still lacks a clear, hospitality-specific framework for understanding and developing resilience among employees.

This gap is particularly urgent for the newest generation entering the workforce. Generation Z (born 1996–2010) has been increasingly associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and burnout. (OECD, 2025). In the Netherlands, 22.4% of 18–25-year-olds report feeling mentally unwell (CBS, 2022). With 58% of Dutch hospitality employees belonging to Gen Z (ABN AMRO, 2025) and the hospitality industry consistently reporting the highest levels of work pressure, this creates a critical overlap and increases the urgency to define and understand what resilience means in a hospitality context as service quality and overall operational efficiency are at stake.

### ***Objective***

This paper is part of a Professional Doctorate (PD) in leisure tourism and hospitality, which aims to contribute practical, research-informed solutions to the hospitality industry and bridge the gap between industry and education.

The objective of this paper is to explore which resilient behaviours are essential for the hospitality workforce and to lay the foundation for a future definition of hospitality-specific resilience and meaningful interventions for Gen Z hotel workforce, their managers and hospitality business students.

The paper begins with a theoretical framework, followed by a description of the exploratory qualitative study conducted in the form of a focus group. It concludes with a set of hospitality-specific resilient behaviours and offers an initial analysis of how these behaviours align with frameworks introduced in this paper, to assess their relevance and potential for hospitality staff and students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The hospitality sector consistently reports the highest levels of work pressure across all industries in the Netherlands (van Dam et al., 2025). In an environment characterized by fast-paced service delivery, emotional labor, and increasing guest demands, ensuring both employee well-being and service performance is vital. The Service-Profit Chain (Heskett et al., 1997) links internal service quality, including employee satisfaction and engagement, to customer satisfaction and ultimately profitability. Michel et al.’s (2022) service profit chain meta-analysis empirically reported the association between

employee engagement and customer engagement. Gronholdt and Martensen (2016) and Yee et al. (2011) further support the service profit chain's argument about the important relationship between employee well-being and service quality.

Consequently, resilience has become a central concept in workplace well-being literature and is increasingly seen as critical to sustaining performance and employee satisfaction in organisations (Kuntz et al., 2017b). Most scholars acknowledge the complexity of resilience and emphasize that it is highly dynamic and individual (Kalisch et al., 2017; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). Mahdiani and Ungar (2021) build on this by calling for a more differentiated perspective, introducing the dimensions of context, degree, and usage (CDU). *Context* refers to the situational and systemic conditions in which resilience occurs; *degree* addresses the intensity or extent of resilience shown; and *usage* concerns how and for what purpose resilience is enacted. Their framework highlights that resilience is not inherently beneficial and may be overused, misapplied, or even counterproductive. For example, maintaining resilience under sustained pressure can lead individuals to suppress emotional needs or empathy. This is particularly relevant in hospitality, where empathy and collaboration skills (Jung, Lee & Lim, 2023) are essential for managing emotional labor and guest interaction.

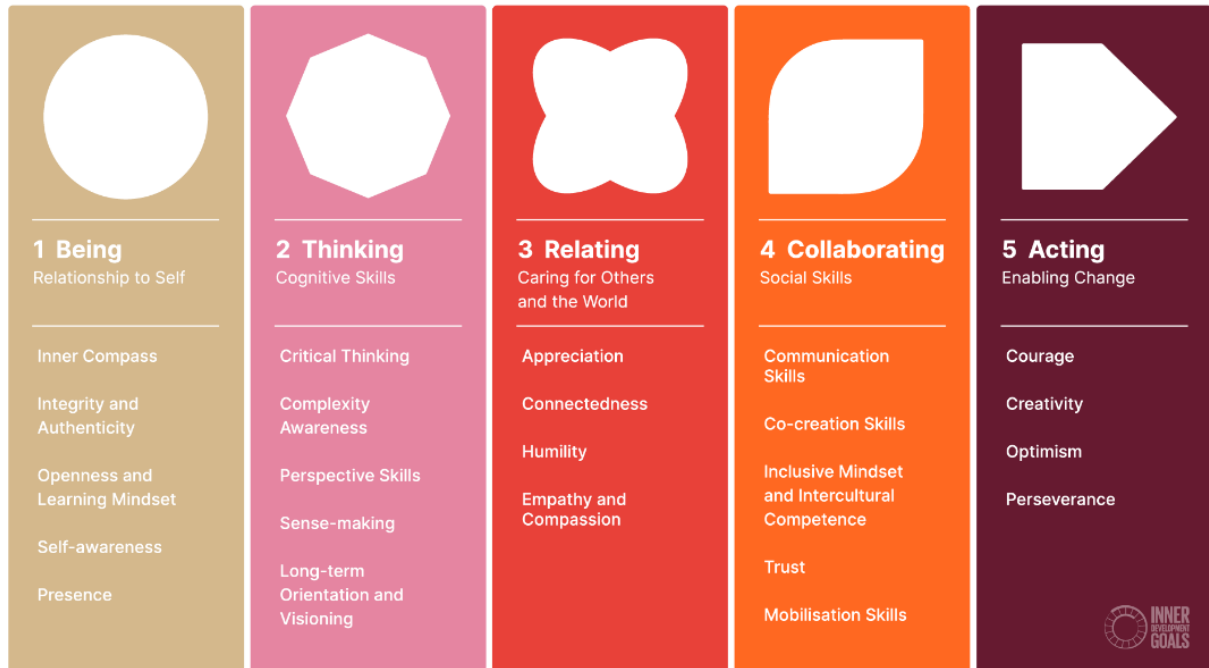
In parallel, the narrowed definition of employee resilience by Kuntz et al. (2017b) provides a workplace-specific understanding of resilience, describing it as “*an individual's capacity to effectively leverage organizational resources to adapt, thrive, and navigate dynamic work environments.*” To operationalize this definition, the Employee Resilience Scale (EmpRes) outlines specific behaviours observed in resilient employees (Kuntz et al., 2016) such as effective collaboration, learning from mistakes, asking for support a.o.. For a full overview of the list please refer to table 2.

In addition to established resilience definitions and behaviours, this paper introduces the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) as a complementary framework to explore and potentially structure resilience-building initiatives. The IDGs are a framework of 23 transformational skills organized across five dimensions: Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting (Jordan, T., 2021) and have been developed through international co-creation with scientists, practitioners, and thought leaders. It is an evidence-based framework that aims to summarize the skills and qualities necessary to deal with the global and existential challenges of our times, using similar language as one can find in resilience literature. The framework is already being adopted by corporations (e.g., IKEA, Google) and educational institutions globally, and across sectors (Jurisic et al., 2023). This includes Hotelschool The Hague, where the IDG framework is currently being explored as a foundation for personal development and leadership learning. It is intended to help future hospitality professionals grow as changemakers and global citizens, equipped to address the complex challenges of the industry. While the framework has been linked to individual and collective resilience in earlier research (Wamsler et al., 2022), its relevance to the hospitality sector remains open. This paper introduces the IDGs as a potential

framework to explore whether the resilient behaviours emerging from the data collection can be meaningfully connected to the inner qualities and skills promoted by the IDGs.

**Figure 1**

***Inner Development Goals Framework.***



*Note.* Reprinted from *IDG Framework*, by Inner Development Goals, 2021, <https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org/framework>. Copyright 2021 by the Inner Development Goals initiative. Used with permission.

## **Methodology & Context**

### ***Research Setting & Participants***

This paper forms part of the first phase of a Professional Doctorate (PD) project in leisure tourism and hospitality. The broader PD aims to explore the role of leadership in enhancing resilient behaviours among Gen Z hotel employees. This initial paper focuses on defining hospitality-specific resilience behaviours through exploratory, qualitative research involving stakeholders from education and industry in form of a focus group session. Eight participants took part, including a balanced mix of hospitality educators, hotel management professionals, and L&D or HR experts from international hotel chains and hospitality schools. All participants were senior professionals in their respective fields,

selected to reflect a wide range of perspectives across hospitality operations and education (see table 1 for an overview of the focus group participants. The group was split into two subgroups to maximize diversity of role and experience. This approach aligns with qualitative research principles that prioritize co-construction of meaning and are well-suited for exploring emerging or context-sensitive topics (Boeije, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Table 1**  
**Overview of Focus Group Participants**

<b>Participant Nr</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Company Type</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>
1	HR Director	5-star hotel chain	42
2	CEO	Multibrand Hotel Management	25
3	Entrepreneur	Hospitality Consultancy	40
4	L&D Director	5-star hotel chain	20
5	Lector	Hospitality Business School	13
6	Lector	Hospitality Business School	34
7	Dean	Hospitality Business School	2
8	Manager	Hospitality Business School	25

### ***Design and Justification***

The session consisted of five consecutive activities designed to explore how participants define, observe, and apply resilience in hospitality. It began with an individual reflection exercise, where participants were asked to write their own definition or understanding of resilience on post-its.

Next, participants engaged in a group discussion focused on identifying observable resilient behaviours within the context of hotel operations and practical hospitality settings. Each group compiled their responses on a flipchart, resulting in collective lists of key behaviours. Following this, participants

were instructed to synthesize a definition of ‘hospitality resilience’ using the inputs from the previous two activities.

The fourth activity was a recorded group discussion exploring the broader relevance of resilience in the hospitality sector. Participants were presented with three questions, introduced sequentially at five-minute intervals: 1) *Why is resilience essential for hospitality employees?*, 2) *What challenges in the industry demand resilience?*, and 3) *How does resilience impact employee well-being and team performance?* The discussion was transcribed for further analysis.

Prior to this final round, participants were intentionally reshuffled to increase the diversity of viewpoints within each group and to reduce potential groupthink. This allowed for the exchange of new perspectives and reinforced the collaborative nature of the session.

This multimodal design allowed for the collection of both written and verbal data. Combining individual reflection with group dialogue encouraged diverse perspectives, while the progression of tasks allowed ideas to deepen across formats.

### ***Ethical Considerations and Limitations***

Participation was voluntary, and informed verbal consent was obtained for audio recordings. No personal or sensitive data were collected. The exploratory nature and small purposive sample represent a limitation; findings reflect the perspectives of senior professionals rather than frontline hospitality employees or students. Broader validation will follow in future phases of the study.

## **Results**

### ***Post its & Flip Charts***

The written data collected during the focus group session provide an overview of how resilience is understood and enacted in the hospitality industry. Participants frequently describe resilience in terms of bouncing back, adapting, and maintaining flexibility. The phrase “*bouncing back*” is explicitly mentioned three times. Closely related are references to flexibility, adaptability, and stamina, including statements such as “*capacity to push through*,” “*willing to try again*,” and “*seeing things through despite setbacks*.” These are complemented by expressions like “*thinking in solutions*,” “*proactiveness*,” and “*initiative*,” which emphasizes a mindset oriented toward action and

responsibility. Terms such as “*accountability*” and “*not blaming others*” reinforce this focus on taking ownership in challenging situations.

Participants also frequently refer to elements of emotional well-being, including “*protecting boundaries*,” “*safeguarding yourself and your team*,” and “*asking for help when needed*.” One post-it states that “*everything can’t be done at the cost of something else*,” indicating an awareness of limits and the need to preserve personal well-being.

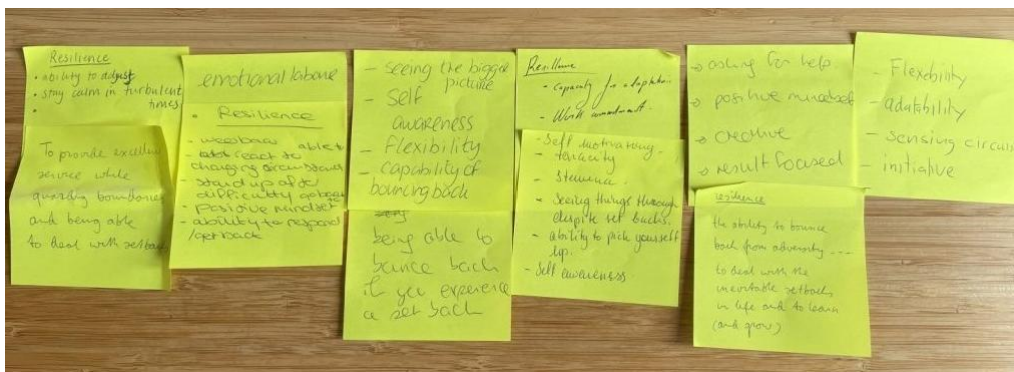
Emotional labour is explicitly named, and several participants highlight the importance of maintaining a positive mindset, with two specifically writing it down.

The theme of self-awareness appears in multiple forms, including references to “*being open*,” “*daring to be vulnerable*,” and “*taking time to reflect*.” These social and emotional skills are also reflected in mentions of teamwork, being a “*team player*,” and references to “*high EQ*,” as well as the importance of managing stakeholder needs. One group explicitly included “*guest-oriented resilience*” and “*balancing all stakeholder needs*” in their collective definition.

Participants also mention the importance of perspective-taking through phrases such as “*putting things into perspective*” and “*seeing the bigger picture*.” Leadership is named multiple times as a relevant factor, with notes about untrained leaders and organisational culture being connected to low resilience. One note links resilience to younger employees who “*do not push through*,” and social media is referenced in the context of increasing individualisation.

## Figure 2

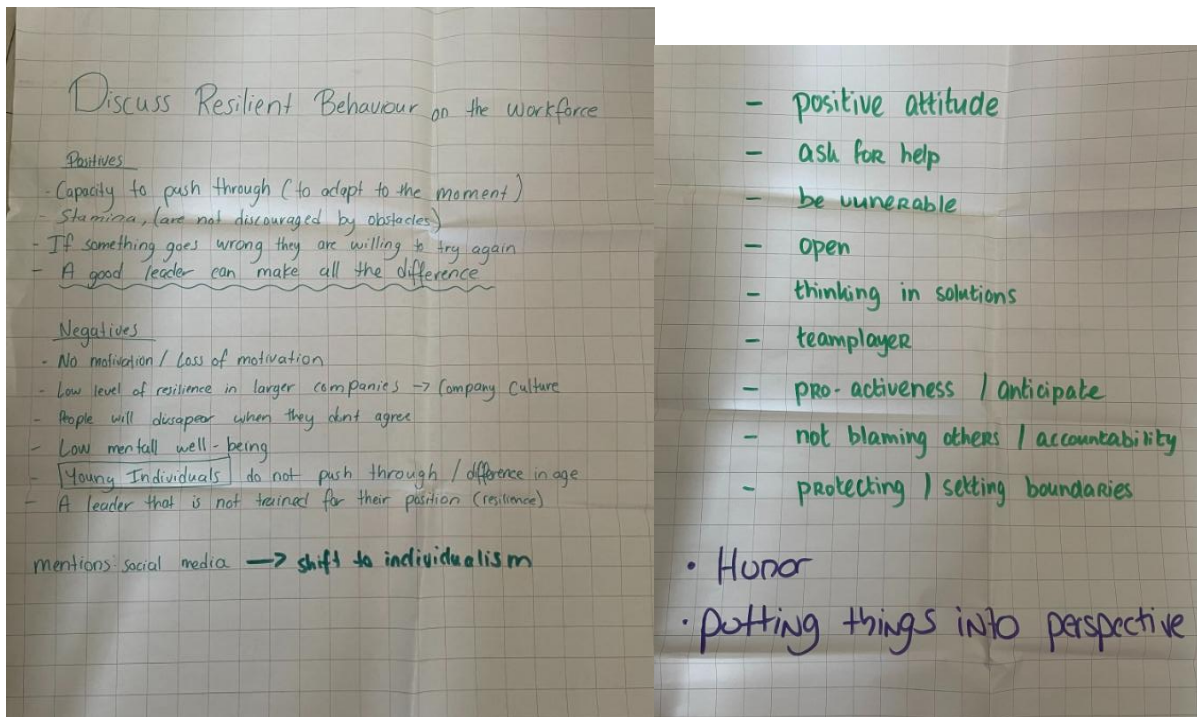
Photos of post-its with individual definitions of resilience



Note. Collected during focus group session in January 2025.

**Figure 3**

Photos of flipcharts with group results of resilient behaviours in hospitality



Note. Collected during focus group session in January 2025.

### **Group Discussion Highlights**

Preliminary insights from the recorded group discussions add further context to the written data. Participants emphasized that adversity in hospitality work is inevitable, citing the unpredictable nature of guests and the constant presence of service-related setbacks. As one participant stated, “*Guests are unpredictable! Setbacks are guaranteed!*”. Another commented that “*guests are entitled—entitled that the staff will take care of them,*” reinforcing the theme of high pressure and continuous performance demands. The expectation of consistently “24-hour” high service quality was described as a reason why resilience is not only desirable but fundamental.

Several participants stressed the importance of safety and trust as prerequisites for resilience, particularly in relation to leadership. One participant stated, “*The influence of the general manager on that is very big. Because the culture is set by that person,*” pointing to the role of leadership in shaping resilient work environments. Another participant explicitly linked leadership to well-being, suggesting that leaders significantly influence whether employees feel supported in navigating challenges. Cultural context was also discussed, especially in relation to behaviours like asking for help or showing vulnerability. One group mentioned that in certain cultures, such as some parts of Asia, failure is strongly avoided, which could affect how resilience manifests in those environments. Lastly, the value

of emotional and interpersonal skills was noted, with one participant remarking, “*That requires a certain level of empathy and understanding and so forth, so that's a lot to ask... somebody who's getting 2,000 euros a month,*” highlighting the emotional demands placed on front-line employees with limited resources.

## **Discussion**

### ***Alignment with Employee Resilience Scale***

The findings confirm that resilience in hospitality is understood and observed as a set of context-specific behaviours that are emotional, practical and often social. Many of the behaviours identified by participants align closely with the behaviours outlined in the EmpRes (Kuntz et al., 2016). Key elements of hospitality work such as “*effectively collaborating with others,*” “*managing high workloads,*” and “*persisting through difficulty*” were explicitly or implicitly mentioned across the data. Teamwork, pushing through, staying calm under pressure, and being a team player were frequently cited, indicating strong alignment. Furthermore, behaviours like open-mindedness, learning from mistakes, and seeking support are reflected in both the EmpRes scale and the focus group results.

The ability to take feedback, especially criticism, can be linked to how employees respond to guest complaints or entitled behaviour, which was a recurring theme. Asking for help, including from team members or managers, was named multiple times, showing a direct link to “*approaching managers when support is needed.*” While service-specific behaviours such as smiling, not taking things personally, and not visibly showing adversity are not explicitly covered in the EmpRes scale, they may be interpreted under broader categories such as “*resolving crises competently*” or “*successfully managing unexpected challenges.*”

**Table 2**

**Behaviors included in the Employee Resilience Scale (Kuntz et al., 2016)**

No	Behavior
1	Effectively collaborating with others to handle unexpected challenges at work.
2	Successfully managing a high workload for long periods of time.
3	Resolving crises competently at work.
4	Learning from mistakes at work and improving the way one does their job.
5	Re-evaluating performance and continually improving the way one does their work.
6	Effectively responding to feedback at work, even criticism.
7	Seeking assistance at work when specific resources are needed.
8	Approaching managers when their support is needed.
9	Using change at work as an opportunity for growth.

***The Importance of Leaders***

The role of leadership and context was consistently raised throughout the session. This confirms earlier work by Kuntz et al. (2017b) and Mahdiani and Ungar’s (2021), who emphasize the importance of contextual and organizational resources in shaping resilience. In hospitality, context includes constant guest interaction, emotional labour, and continuous performance expectations. Participants highlighted the central role of leaders in this setting, not only in shaping organizational culture but also in creating the necessary conditions for resilience, such as trust and psychological safety. Safety and trust were described as prerequisites, often fostered through leadership behaviour and leading by example. This is particularly relevant for Generation Z, who place high value on supportive leadership, psychological safety, and ongoing coaching on the work floor (El Hajal & Losekoot, 2024).

***Inner Development for Outer Resilience***

Resilient behaviours in the hospitality industry seem to encompass a wide range of internal and relational capacities. A preliminary comparison reveals alignment with multiple IDG skills. For instance, the recurring mention of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and boundary-setting aligns with the “Being” dimension (e.g., Self-awareness, Inner Compass, Presence). “Thinking in solutions,” adaptability, and keeping a long-term perspective correspond to the “Thinking” dimension (e.g., Complexity Awareness, Perspective Skills, Sense-making). Collaboration, empathy, stakeholder

management, and asking for help are central to the “Relating” and “Collaborating” dimensions (e.g., Empathy and Compassion, Co-creation Skills, Trust). Perseverance and optimism are part of the “Acting” dimension. Based on this initial exploration, the IDG framework appears to cover most of the skills described in the data, suggesting potential as a tool to structure and develop resilience in hospitality education and practice systemically.

## **Conclusion**

This paper identified resilient behaviours specific to the hospitality industry. The findings closely align with the Employee Resilience Scale (Kuntz et al., 2016), confirming its relevance as a foundation. Behaviours like problem-solving, persistence, seeking support, and learning from mistakes are clearly reflected in both the data and existing scales.

However, hospitality workers face distinct conditions. They must deliver consistently high service quality while managing emotional labour, including guest incivility and unpredictable demands. At the same time, they are expected to remain calm, friendly, and composed, regardless of internal stress. This combination of constant pressure and the expectation to hide personal strain creates what can be described as a “double adversity.” It underscores the critical role of emotional regulation and well-being in hospitality resilience.

Emotional regulation is also a central element of the IDG framework, which offers additional value when applied to the hospitality context. Skills such as self-awareness, empathy, collaboration, and trust-building reflect many of the behaviours described in this paper. Therefore, the IDG framework may support a more contextual and holistic approach to resilience, as supported by recent literature.

One important contextual factor that has been repetitively related to resilience building is the role of leadership and organizational culture. Trust and psychological safety are not only essential conditions for resilience but also important factors influencing Gen Z work engagement. Future work should explore these factors further. As part of the ongoing Professional Doctorate research, the next phase will investigate how leadership behaviours and organizational culture can actively support resilience among Gen Z hospitality employees.

## **Limitations**

The main limitation of this paper lies in the exploratory and descriptive nature of the analysis and the limited sample size. The audio transcripts from the recorded discussions have not yet been

systematically analysed. A more in-depth thematic analysis, supported by data analysis software NVivo, will follow to deepen the findings and confirm the preliminary themes presented here. Subsequently, the behaviours will be mapped against the IDG framework to explore its potential as a structure for training, evaluating, and guiding resilience development in hospitality education and organisational practice.

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