

Introducing our latest eCollection: Resilience in the Recession

Elizabeth Cotton reflects on a series of posts written for this site on wellbeing and the workplace. The six articles have been compiled into an eCollection that can be downloaded in PDF format.



One year on from these original six blogs and I've learned a lot about surviving work through blogging. As a life-long member of Team Neurotic I had never before wanted to communicate my internal dialogue with anyone I don't share an exact DNA match. One year ago I had a crisis when I was faced with redundancy for the first time in my life. Having spent my entire career working as a trade unionist and four years into training to become a therapist, I found myself paranoid, alone and a mess. To add a bit of self-loathing into the mix, I also couldn't swallow the shame of not being a Teflon superhero, instead experiencing a wild and undignified spectrum of feelings for a woman in her 40s. I am indebted to my BFF who instead of settling down with a box of popcorn to watch my epic decline, told me to play on my strengths (inclination to be verbal) and work it out in the blogosphere. The weekly discipline of telling you what I think, rather than indulging in psychic cave dwelling or day time telly, has forced me for the first time in my adult life to talk about what I believe in all its raw humbling glory.

We are going through an age of profound institutional failure, our organizations obsessed by their own decline. Blogging has become the only show in town if you want to say something about the reality of work. Our workplaces have battened down the hatches so tightly we can barely let out a little squeak from under the floor boards. Blogging gives me a way of talking about something that I care about deeply without turning me into an unemployed martyr

excommunicated from my profession because I have audaciously become very very angry. Blogging is also the safest way for us to work out whether we are going mad or not, and ask the questions that we are too scared to ask Occupational Health. The stigma attached to mental health problems remains the workplace equivalent of having "999" tattooed on your forehead. In the blogosphere you can exist and interact with the world anonymously and safely, going as far to say that having a smartphone could be a modern prophylactic for mental health.

Having moved from working in philosophy, to trade unionism and now to psychoanalysis I already don't get invited to many parties so the penny-dropping silence around the realities of the recession have been familiar turf. One of the problems with talking about mental health has been that it raises complex questions and ideas and with them the potential for a marketing car crash. How to flog a world view where human life is about making the best of a bad lot, learning to bear pain and frustration and finding out that you're not perfect? Having spent the last year talking to anyone that stands still long enough about surviving work, my experience is that there has been a quiet psychic revolution going on in the UK.



The most unlikely people are ready to talk about the real stuff of losing it at work, anger and conflict, ideas that in those warm bath days of economic wealth brought us out in a rash.

Blogging offers the profound-lite mix, that allows us to have a laugh at our own suffering and feel OK about being a bit of a weirdo. But blogging isn't just for the giggles, it's something that academics have to take seriously in this impact driven epoch. Gone are the days when having your mum read your work counts as dissemination. Ideas have to be read, and this requires a way of seducing the reader into issues that don't immediately strike you as a terribly good idea such as talking about loneliness. This was the one blog I almost regret, ironically summoning a month of living in a single-occupancy force field which actively repelled other lonely people, giving me loads of room on the tube but setting back my self-confidence to the dark teenage days of 1984. Live and learn.

There are dangers to buying into the healing powers of blogging, familiar to anyone working in the therapeutic world. I'll admit there have been points where I have secretly thought maybe I can spare you the pain and humiliation of paying a mental health practitioner to relentlessly point out you're not omnipotent or immune to human frailty. Hoping that going through the indignity of crawling through the fields of psychic shame just to be ordinarily unhappy on your behalf would save you the bother. I'm not asking you to thank me because far from being altruistic, it was a way of delaying my own blind date with being myself. A part of me honestly thought that if I could just be funny/clever/sweet enough I could make things better for both of us, curing us of being human and the hard reality of just being ourselves.

So this brings me to what I have really learned this year, kicking and screaming the entire way. That my resilience depends on other people. Turns out that the one thing that I had to do in response to a very real crisis in my life, was work out how to have better relationships – with people that I love, my colleagues, this society that I want to be a part of and of course, myself. Being myself turns out to be the hardest part because it requires me to stop being such a hero and to wear my pants on the inside. Blogging gave me a bit of space to work some things out, including how to be myself and with this a real shot at having resilient relationships, the key to surviving life and work. As any activist and therapist will know, the work of helping people change their lives involves changing ourselves, and this, old chum, is the stuff of blood n guts. It's not always dignified, you will sweat more and it's unlikely to go on your CV but it is the basis of a good life and true love.

I hope that you will continue to read the blog at www.survivingworkweekly.wordpress.com.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

You may also be interested in the following posts (automatically generated):

1. [Workplace resilience initiatives are on the increase in the current recession, but do they offer us a real way forward? \(36.3\)](#)
2. [In uncertain times, the social capital of group relationships in workplaces may be the key to growth and resilience. \(21.5\)](#)
3. [LSE Centre for Economic Performance: Financial Regulation – Can we avoid another Great Recession? \(16.6\)](#)
4. [Jobs in a recession: now would be a good time for the government to conduct infrastructure projects but a bad time to cut unemployment benefits \(15.5\)](#)