

Masterclass Topics

This is a list of topics that are typically covered by Dr Etienne van der Walt. (*Note: The length of the masterclass determines how much content can be covered and the depth to which we can go.*)

Understanding the foundational importance of resilience is critical for leaders — not only for high business performance, but for life itself.

1. Business to the brain: The science of resilience and adaptation

We start off by exploring why we as humans do business, and how doing business has developed over time. We explore the impact of change and, especially, the acceleration of this technologically driven change. We then consider the human brain-body system: how it continuously works to achieve and ensure a sense of safety. It is through using our knowledge, skills and expertise that humans grow and learn, solving complex problems and overcoming challenges. We uncover the role of allostasis in promoting resilience and how it helps us maintain balance and stability. We tell you why we at Neurozone consider resilience as the bedrock of life and how resilience, allostasis and business to the brain are, in fact, all expressions of the same human drive for complex adaptation, something essential to our survival and success.

2. Brain basics and applied neuroscience for resilience

The brain is a fascinating and complex organ that plays a vital role in our ability to cope with adversity and to thrive in challenging situations. We take a look at

how we can apply and integrate what neuroscience is constantly revealing to us in order to build resilience, enhance leadership and improve performance.

Neural (brain cell) circuits, for example, use a 'low energy to high yield' principle, so we look at how we can apply this to develop strategies that will help create and support high-performance teams.

In the final part of this section, we challenge many older human capital paradigms with the idea that burnout, resilience, wellbeing and performance are all part of the continuum of life and, as such, should form the core axis of high-performance organizations.

3. Chronic stress and burnout: When the brain-body system implodes

We take a close look at what happens in the brain-body system when things go wrong, honing in on stress. We remind you why not all stress is bad. A stress response — the assigning of energy to overcome challenges — is actually beautifully constructed. We need it to survive, for high performance and to thrive. We reveal why there is a tremendous negative impact on our systems if things are out of balance — such as when we assign too much energy to irrelevant challenges (anxiety) or exert energy continuously because we cannot overcome challenges (chronic stress).

This leads into the importance of the unconscious mind, and how it continuously pays attention to everything inside and around us for energy assignment. We'll examine cases where chronic stress is prevalent, and explore burnout as a medical syndrome and its implications for productivity in the workplace.

The antidote? Resilience. We share our research that shows how effective the application of resilience, especially collective resilience, can be in preventing chronic stress and burnout.

4. Individuals, teams and organizations as living systems

It is a fundamental truth that life is much more than the sum of its parts. Rather, it is a 'whole' that emerges from a living system — a shimmering, living entity. We illustrate this by looking at how, at our simplest, we're made up of nuclei, mitochondria and organelles that, together, make up cells. These form organs, which, in turn, form living organisms — that's you and me. But we're vulnerable on our own and, as anthropologists tell us, we're wired to connect, naturally aggregating into groups — pairs, families, teams, tribes, subcultures, departments, organizations and societies. This aggregation into systems — collections of units from which larger 'wholes' emerge — is what keeps us alive. We also thrive by learning, collaborating and creatively solving problems together.

We consider why leadership exists and what leaders should know about living systems to ensure self, team and organizational synergy. By understanding the principles of living systems, we can build a strong sense of purpose in ourselves, our teams and our organizations. We explain why we believe the leaders of the future will harness and support their people as individuals, while recognizing the importance of optimizing living systems for maximum energy and yield.

5. Harnessing energy: How to maximize the energy-to-yield ratio

What we've realized at Neurozone is that managing energy is a critical part of leadership. Arguably, if humans had the ability to produce unlimited energy, the concept of leadership might not even exist. But by understanding the physical properties of energy and its limits, leaders can foster an environment that maximizes the energy of individuals, teams, and businesses alike.

We explore the following aspects about energy:

- **Combustion:** We look at how we generate energy and how it's used to power bodily processes, including our brains and the collective brains of our teams and businesses.
- **Goals and rewards:** We explore how our energy is directed according to our goals and the reward system of the brain.
- **Energy blockers:** These reduce the secretion of dopamine, a neurotransmitter, and limit our energy. We consider how this relates to belief and optimism.
- **Energy leaks:** We examine the effects of chronic stress in real workplace scenarios.
- **Energy maximization:** We look at how energy of the self, teams and organizations can be increased.
- **Energy-to-yield ratio:** Did you know brain EEGs show that team synergy synchronizes team members' brain patterns? This effectively provides flow, the very sought-after 'low energy for high yield' state.

We then put everything together to devise practical strategies proven to help teams and organizations achieve collective resilience and high performance readiness.

6. Social safety: Why and how we interconnect

Our brains evolved to ensure we stay alive, survive and thrive *together*. This is why we do business together. Even when we're working remotely, we unconsciously crave synergy.

We delve into the evolutionary importance of the 'group brain' and how our need to belong is an unconscious driver of survival. We show why bonding is important for teams' and organizational wellbeing and performance. We also discuss how a lack of a sense of belonging can be life-threatening, leading to chronic stress, illness and death.

We introduce the crucial idea that differently sized aggregates are governed by different neural networks in the brain. Families, teams, departments and organizations are living entities that are driven and governed by specific behaviors and characteristics. We consider how these drivers are continuously in play – and look at how leaders can harness these to cultivate strategies that optimize resilience in the workplace.

7. Collective creativity: Commonalities, inclusion and diversity

Teams that are set up to use their knowledge, skills and expertise to perform at their best share certain characteristics. We explore one of the most important of these: diversity.

We look through the lens provided by applied neuroscience to properly understand the impact of diversity on the workplace:

- **Complex adaptability:** The brain screens unconscious possible solutions for relevance, especially for their acceptance by the group. This ‘tribal’ brain is the one that must be satisfied for belonging; if we violate it, the solution will not come to consciousness, especially if we are risk averse. Having team members with different ‘tribal’ brains ensures we have more solutions to work with.
- **Operational styles:** The value of the diversity of a masculine, ranking operational style and a feminine, collaborative style will become apparent as we explore them.
- **Collective creativity:** We explore the concepts of affective and cognitive empathy as well as psychological safety. We share strategies based on Neurozone’s research that reveals how we can synthesize these into a collective creative mix for team synergy.
- **Energy and risk:** We show that the brain builds knowledge, skills and expertise in a sequential fashion, with expertise and risk-taking engaging

in a complex dance with energy. We look at how younger team members often use their knowledge and fluid intelligence to solve problems — although this comes at high energy expense. It can, however, contribute risk, novelty and disruption to the group. It is in this way that diversity makes a valued collective contribution especially if it is counterbalanced with the skills, expertise and experience of older team members.

Participants work together to structure a model for diversity and inclusion using these neuroscientific applications.

8. Mindset and mindfulness

In this session, we explore how both mindset and mindfulness are governed by the brain. This complex organ is responsible for interpreting the world around us and for guiding us safely through life. This value-based interpretation system is known as our mindset — and it is this that drives our emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions.

Through an understanding of different mindsets — fixed vs growth or scarcity vs abundance — we can understand (and change!) our own. We show how a growth mindset is an essential tool for building resilience as it is rooted in the idea of neuroplasticity and the ever-changing brain.

While mindset determines what we see (or, rather, what we sense), mindfulness helps us see what's important, discarding distraction. We show how this naturally acquired 'creativity drug' can lead to more innovative problem-solving and decision-making. It boosts emotional regulation, clarity as well as a sense of having more time.

We explore how mindset and mindfulness impact performance and try a few mindfulness techniques.

9. Brain rhythms and their effects on resilience and high performance

The entire brain-body system is rhythmical. As biological beings, we evolved to be synchronized with external rhythms in nature, most notably the day/night cycle. We again look to the brain to help us understand how profound rhythms are. The brainstem uses rhythms and cycles to keep us alive: think of breathing, our heart rate and hunger/thirst cycles.

We share Neurozone's research that confirms that optimizing our physiological rhythms — moving, exercising, sleeping and eating well — is a foundational imperative not only for individuals, but also for higher-order living entities: teams and organizations. We consider the emphasis we put on our management systems and structures and how these may affect the physiological rhythms of the living beings that make up our organization. For teams, promoting bonding and a sense of connection can also help optimize physiological rhythms and improve resilience.

Finally, we synthesize the idea of rhythms for individuals, for teams and for the organization into practical strategies for resilience.

10. The brain: a learning and problem-solving machine

We take a quick, high-level tour of the brain to show how it is structured to learn. It uses knowledge for problem-solving (innovation) and grows through experience by building skills and expertise, improving the way we connect for greater collective creativity.

We explore key aspects of learning and innovation:

- The rhythms of exercise, sleep, nutrition and mindfulness affect the brain's growth factors. We provide tips on how to get these in the right doses.
- We identify best practices for learning and problem-solving, taking a look at the value of abstraction, working memory, reduced latent inhibition and cognitive flexibility.

Relevant case studies are considered as we devise practical ways to optimize and incorporate these building blocks for learning and innovation into the workplace.

11. High-performing teams and the domains of high performance

Teams can become living and breathing entities that operate in a state of collective flow. This state is crucial for promoting team resilience, but it is a result of a complex and dynamic process that cannot be forced. Instead, team leaders and members should focus on cultivating key drivers of resilience — and trust the rest will follow.

In this session, we synthesize key drivers or constructs into five high-performance domains:

- High Performance Rhythms
- High Performance Connectors
- High Performance Energy
- High Performance Transformers
- High Performance Innovators

We use what we have learnt to develop a comprehensive model of collective resilience. Teams will be able to use this as a checklist to cultivate a dynamic

team that easily operates in a state of collective flow, leading to increased performance and success.

12. High-performance ORGAN-izations

Great leaders intuitively inspire their organizations into life in an ever-changing global business ecosystem. As we've seen, achieving this takes much more than a sense of common higher purpose.

Although creating and maintaining resilient, sustainable organizations largely remains a leadership responsibility, there is also a need for continued optimization at a granular level. We introduce the Neurozone model which, through combining collective resilience and analytics, provides strategic 'road maps' for different decision-making levels in an organization.

The nature of true resilience is dynamic. We conclude by showing how it can be enhanced and applied through a profound dynamic: prioritizing what we do under different internal and external conditions.

Thank you for joining us on this exploration of the essential drivers of resilience that will transform your organization into a dynamic, high-performance ORGAN-ization.