

MPF Start-up Initiative

Willingness to take risks and resilience, work-life balance as a founder

Showing perspectives – flexibility, efficiency, money

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Resilience for deep-tech founders

Resilience is crucial for deep-tech founders. In an environment characterized by complex technological challenges, long development cycles and high uncertainty, the ability to overcome setbacks and emerge stronger is essential. A central aspect of this is the recognition that every challenge offers an opportunity to grow and develop from it.

Example: Resilience in practice

The German deep-tech start-up Lilium, which is working on electric air taxis, is an excellent example of resilience in the deep-tech sector. Despite technical setbacks, regulatory challenges and skepticism from parts of the industry, the company has consistently stuck to its vision and learned important lessons along the way. Each challenge was used as an opportunity to improve the technology, adapt the business model and strengthen the team. This approach has made Lilium one of the most promising companies in the field of urban air mobility.

Rethinking: From Problems to Growth Opportunities

Deep tech founders must learn to view challenges not as obstacles, but as opportunities for personal and entrepreneurial development. This perspective can be transformative and strengthen the resilience of the entire team.

Solutions:

- Implementation of a "growth mindset" throughout the company
- Regular reflection rounds to learn from setbacks
- Celebration of Failure: Acknowledging Failures as Important Learning Experiences

Building emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a key factor for resilience. It allows founders to better understand and manage their own emotions and those of their team, especially in stressful situations.

Solutions:

- Participation in workshops on the development of emotional intelligence
- Introduction of mindfulness practices in everyday work
- Regular feedback and open communication within the team

Development of adaptive strategies

In the fast-changing world of deep tech, the ability to adapt and respond flexibly to new situations is critical to long-term success.

Solutions:

- Regular scenario planning and strategy reviews
- Building a diverse network of mentors and advisors
- Fostering a culture of continuous innovation and adaptation

Strengthening team cohesion

A resilient team is more than the sum of its parts. By building strong relationships and mutual support, deep tech founders can strengthen the collective resilience of their company.

Solutions:

- Regular team-building activities aimed at building trust
- Implementation of peer support systems within the team
- Promoting a culture of openness and mutual respect

Personal development as a priority

Resilient founders understand that their personal development is directly linked to the success of their company. They actively invest in their own growth and skills.

Solutions:

- Regular participation in training courses and conferences
- Establishing a routine for personal reflection and goal setting
- Looking for challenges outside the comfort zone

The power of positive reinterpretation

A key aspect of resilience is the ability to reinterpret events positively. Deep tech founders can use this technique to identify opportunities even in the most challenging situations.

Solutions:

- Introduction of "reframing" exercises in team meetings
- Creation of a "Lesson Learned" log for each project
- Development of best-case scenarios for seemingly negative situations

Building resilience networks

Resilient founders understand that they are not alone. Building a strong network of like-minded people can be an important source of support and inspiration.

Solutions:

- Active participation in start-up networks and experience exchange groups
- Mentoring programs for younger start-ups as an opportunity for reflection
- Building partnerships with other deep-tech companies for mutual support

Resilience through financial planning

An often overlooked component of resilience is financial preparedness for challenges. Deep tech founders need to plan strategically to survive financial lean periods.

Solutions:

- Development of various financing scenarios and contingency plans
- Building relationships with different types of investors (VCs, angels, strategic investors)
- Exploration of alternative sources of financing such as grants or research collaborations

Cultivating perseverance

Perseverance is a central aspect of resilience. Deep tech founders must learn to stay motivated and focused even in difficult times.

Solutions:

- Develop clear, long-term visions and milestones
- Regular reflection on personal and corporate mission
- Implementing rituals to strengthen mental endurance, such as meditation or journaling

Fostering a Learning Organization

A resilient organization is a learning organization. Deep-tech startups should foster a culture where continuous learning and adaptation become the norm.

Solutions:

- Establishment of regular "learning days" or "innovation weeks"
- Promoting interdisciplinary projects and rotations within the team
- Establishment of an internal knowledge management system for the documentation of learnings

Developing resilience is a continuous process that requires time, commitment, and conscious effort. However, for deep tech founders, it's an essential skill that can make the difference between success and failure. By seeing every challenge as an opportunity for growth, founders can not only strengthen their companies but also grow personally with the challenges. This attitude allows them to succeed in the long term and make a significant contribution to technological innovation.



Risk

Example: Isar Aerospace

Isar Aerospace, founded by Daniel Metzler, is an example of how risk-taking and resilience can lead to success. Despite the highly competitive and capital-intensive space market, the company has achieved a leading position in the European New Space sector through continuous innovation and strategic partnerships.

Managing financial risks

Deep tech start-ups often require significant financial resources for research and development. Founders must be willing to take personal financial risks and find creative financing solutions.

Solutions:

- Diversification of financing sources (venture capital, government subsidies, cooperation with industrial partners)
- Development of milestone-based financing models
- Use of performance-based funding programs, such as those offered by the federal government

Tackling technological challenges

The development of breakthrough technologies is fraught with many setbacks and unexpected obstacles. Founders must be able to react flexibly to technical problems and find alternative solutions.

Solutions:

- Build a diverse team with complementary skills
- Establishing a culture of continuous learning and adaptability
- Regular review and adjustment of the technological roadmap

Maintaining motivation during long development cycles

Deep tech projects often have long development times, which can test the motivation of the team. Founders need to find ways to maintain enthusiasm and belief in the vision.

Solutions:

- Celebrating interim successes and milestones
- Regular team-building activities to strengthen cohesion
- Transparent communication about progress and challenges

Work-life balance as a deep-tech founder

The challenge of finding a healthy work-life balance as a founder of a deep-tech start-up is considerable. Intensive work on complex technological solutions can easily lead to burnout and reduced productivity.

Examples

Jack Ma, founder Alibaba Group

Jack Ma often argues that work-life balance should not be seen as strict separation, but as finding meaning in what you do. He emphasizes that passion and purpose can make work feel less like a burden and more like a fulfilling part of life.

Richard Branson, founder Virgin Group

Richard Branson often emphasizes that work-life balance is essential for long-term success. He believes that flexibility, trust, and personal well-being lead to better performance than long working hours. According to him, people are most productive when they have the freedom to create a life they enjoy, not just a job they endure.

Hasso Plattner, founder SAP

Hasso Plattner has repeatedly highlighted that sustainable performance requires balance, not exhaustion. He believes that innovation thrives when people have the mental space to think clearly, rather than being worn down by endless hours. For him, long-term success comes from a healthy rhythm between focused work and personal well-being.

The reality of above-average engagement

In the context of work-life balance for deep-tech founders, it is important to maintain a realistic perspective. While a balanced lifestyle is undoubtedly important, at the same time:

If you are not prepared to deliver above average (= excellent work and high time investment), you cannot expect to be more successful than average.

This finding is particularly relevant for deep-tech founders who operate in a highly competitive and demanding environment. Here are some important aspects to consider:

The Need for Extraordinary Commitment

1. Complexity of tasks: Deep tech innovations often require a level of focus and dedication beyond normal working hours.
2. Competitive advantage: In a field where every advantage counts, extra commitment can make all the difference.

3. Learning curve: Constant evolution in a rapidly changing technology environment requires continuous learning, often outside of regular working hours.

Many successful deep-tech founders have shown that extraordinary success often goes hand in hand with extraordinary effort:

- Dr. Özlem Türeci and Prof. Uğur Şahin (BioNTech): Worked practically around the clock during COVID-19 vaccine development.
- Daniel Wiegand (Lilium): For years, he invested a large part of his time in the development of electric air taxis.

For deep-tech founders, work-life balance does not necessarily mean an equal split between work and leisure. Rather, it is about finding a sustainable level of high intensity that balances personal growth, entrepreneurial success and long-term health. A willingness to invest above average – both in terms of quality and quantity – is often the key to delivering exceptional results in the demanding world of deep-tech innovation.

Time management and prioritization

Effective time management is crucial to cope with the diverse demands of the founder's life and at the same time find time for personal recreation.

Solutions:

- Implementing time management techniques such as the Pomodoro Method
- Clear prioritization of tasks based on their strategic importance
- Delegation of tasks to qualified team members or external service providers

Building a supportive network

A strong personal and professional network can help founders overcome challenges and find a better balance.

Solutions:

- Active participation in start-up networks and mentoring programs
- Establishment of an advisory board with experienced industry experts
- Maintaining personal relationships outside the start-up environment

Self-care and mental health

Neglecting one's own health and well-being can have a negative impact on the company's success in the long term.

Solutions:

- Establishing fixed routines for sports and meditation
- Regular breaks and holidays for complete relaxation
- Use of coaching or therapy offers for mental support



Prospects for deep-tech founders

Deep-tech start-ups offer unique perspectives in terms of flexibility, efficiency and financial opportunities.

Example: BioNTech

BioNTech, founded by Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci, impressively demonstrates the prospects that deep-tech start-ups can offer. Through their groundbreaking mRNA technology, they have not only made a decisive contribution to the fight against the COVID-9 pandemic but have also achieved significant economic success and set new standards in biotechnology.

Flexibility in work design

The nature of deep-tech projects often allows for flexible working models that challenge traditional office structures.

Solutions:

- Implementing remote work options for R&D teams
- Use of co-working spaces for collaboration and networking
- Introduction of flexible working hours that correspond to individual productivity rhythms

Increasing efficiency through technology

Deep-tech start-ups can use their own expertise to optimize internal processes and make them more efficient.

Solutions:

- Developing or deploying AI-powered tools to automate routine tasks
- Use of data analytics technologies to optimize decision-making processes
- Implement agile development methodologies for faster iteration cycles

Financial opportunities and value creation

Successful deep-tech start-ups have the potential to create significant economic value and offer attractive financial prospects for founders.

Solutions:

- Development of patent strategies for the protection of intellectual property
- Exploration of licensing models for developed technologies
- Establishment of strategic partnerships with established companies for market access and scaling

Result

Founding a deep-tech start-up undoubtedly requires a high level of commitment, risk-taking, and perseverance. At the same time, it offers unique opportunities for innovation, personal growth and potentially transformative impact on society. Through a strategic approach, continuous learning, and the right work-life balance, deep-tech founders can not only lead their businesses to success but also live fulfilling and balanced lives.