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Building resilience and adapting with agility

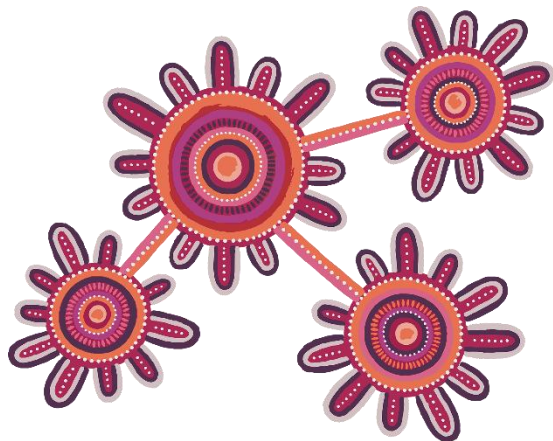
Dominique Barker, Chief Information Officer, Australian Institute of Family Studies

Women in Tech Fest 2026

Acknowledgement of Country



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The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Some examples challenges we face in technology leadership



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- Stabilise and deliver transformation
- Absorb/steward emotional labour during change
- “Make it work” sometimes without formal change and resourcing
- Be more “reactive” than we would like, with the emergence of new technology
- Foster high-performing teams
- Prepare for and respond to the evolving cyberthreat landscape

Common anti-patterns



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These are some common behaviours that we may engage in that can compromise our resilience and agility more quickly.

Override

If the signal is ignored, resilience debt accumulates

Internalise

Emotional data turns into self-doubt

Overcarry

Absorbing team anxiety, stakeholder pressure, organisational uncertainty

Override manifestations

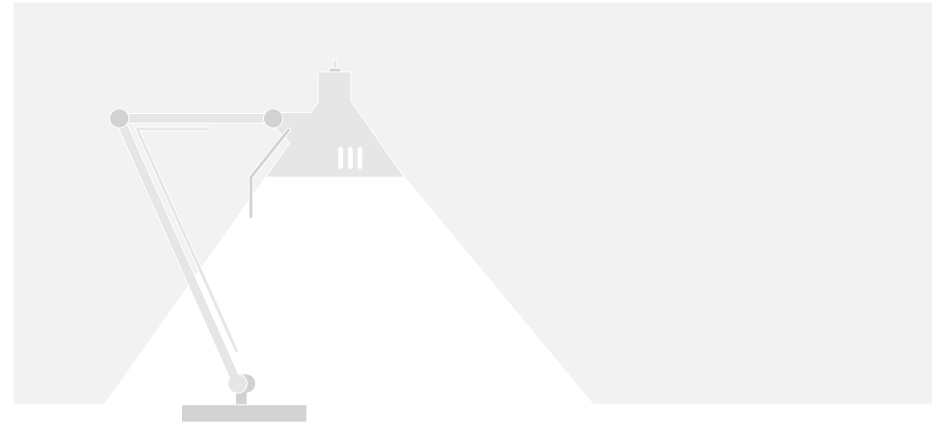


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How this shows up:

- Saying “yes” when you know capacity is already exceeded
- Treating endurance as proof of your competence
- Believing that visibility and credibility come from being unbreakable



Override consequences



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What this costs us:

- Reduced decision quality and creativity
- Eventual disengagement or burnout that feels “sudden” but isn’t
- Modelling unhealthy norms to your team





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This is not resilience. It is deferred collapse.



Look for the warning signs.
Build in decision checkpoints.



Reframing “override” for resilience and agility



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**True resilience is responsiveness, not suppression.
Decision checkpoints are intentional moments to
stop *doing* and start *deciding*.**

They are not status updates.

They are not retrospectives at the end of a project.

They are *permission points* to adapt.



Internalise manifestations



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“It must be me” Emotional data turns into self-doubt

How this shows up:

- Assuming a difficult interaction reflects personal inadequacy
- Interpreting “resistance” or “not being liked” as failure of leadership style
- Over preparing to compensate for perceived or “hypothetical” gaps
- Questioning and ruminating on your own legitimacy especially following stretch opportunities.

Internalisation consequences

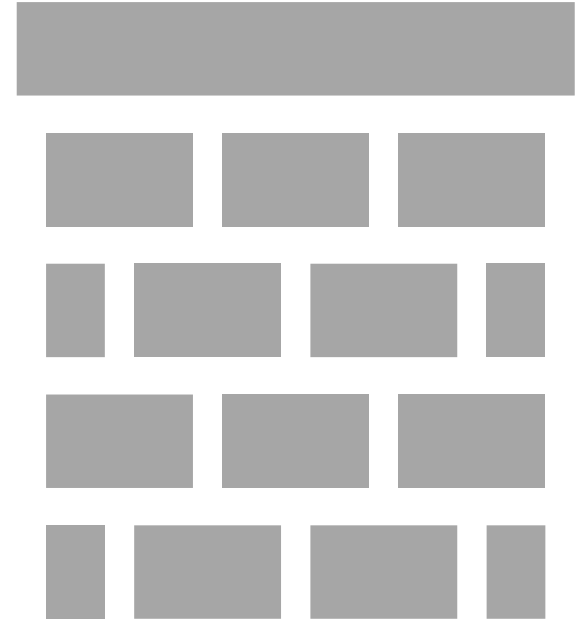


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What this costs us:

- Loss of confidence and leadership presence
- Emotional energy spent on self-correction instead of strategic thinking
- Reduced willingness to “speak up” or speak with authority
- Emotional data gets mislabelled as personal failure





Feelings are data,
not verdicts.



Reframing “internalisation” for resilience and agility



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- Separate the signal from the story

Ask: “What is the emotion telling me about the system, not about my worth?”

This allows you to harness emotional responses as contextual intelligence.

Ask: “What’s happening around me?”

This allows you to make sense of your peers, without the solo rumination.

Over-carry manifestations



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How this shows up:

- Holding unspoken fears to “protect” others
- Taking responsibility for morale, clarity and stability – alone
- Feeling exhausted even when things appear “fine.”



Over-carry consequences



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What this costs us:

- It creates blurred boundaries between leadership and caretaking
- We can feel emotionally overloaded and depleted
- We have reduced capacity for strategic leadership



Reframing “over-carrying” for resilience and agility



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Leadership is not about absorbing pressure, it is about distributing it safely.



Awareness instead of **Ownership**

“I notice tension”

“I must fix it”

“I create space for conversation”

“I absorb the emotion”

“I model regulation”

“I carry the load”

Why this matters for women in tech



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We have learned to:

- Push through ambiguity
- Carry emotional and organisational load
- Prove credibility through endurance
- Absorb pressure quietly so the system keeps moving



Why this matters for women in tech:



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When we pause to **decide** rather than push to **survive** we:

- ✓ Interrupt burnout before it becomes identity;
- ✓ Replace self-sacrifice with strategic authority





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- Ends/Questions