

The Psychology of Personal Resilience

Background reading to accompany MAS Personal Resilience E-learning Programme



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Personal resilience is having flexible strength of mind to succeed in the face of challenges

- Derek Mowbray

What is personal resilience?

Personal resilience is having the flexible strength of mind to succeed in the face of challenges, threatening events or the behaviour of others.

Events occur all the time. You don't pay particular attention to most of them because you've experienced them before and you don't perceive them as a potential threat.

Occasionally you become exposed to events that pose a challenge because they focus on you personally, and attract your attention because they are not easily dealt with. They require extra mental energy to work out what to do to address the challenge and overcome it.

There are progressive events - those you experience whilst growing up, developing as a person, and making what you hope are positive changes to your life. As a grown-up these are often events you chose to be exposed to in order to achieve something advantageous in the future, such as moving house, sticking with a tedious job, or travelling the world on your own.

There are regressive events - those that may pose a threat and prevent you from being in control of what you want to do. They are events that force you to stand still or diminish you in some way. Such events could include the behaviours of others, being stuck in life, having an intimidating manager or colleague, or experiencing illness.

The only thing you can do with all types of events is react to them.

It is the way in which you react and decide what to do which is core to your personal resilience.

When faced with a challenge, you need strength of mind:

- To prevent an emotional reaction dominating your thinking,
- To create the mental space to enable you to think about it, and
- To call on strategies for dealing with the event.

Emotions are unavoidable impulsive reactions to some events, which can hijack your capacity to think clearly.

You need to be mentally flexible to enable you to think of all possible ways of overcoming a challenging event. The stronger you are mentally, and the more flexible you are, the more likely you are to be able to tackle more demanding and challenging events.

However, being resilient is a choice. You can choose to be resilient depending on whether you are sufficiently motivated to overcome the challenge. Your motivation will be influenced by the context, including the cultural context, of the challenging event, and your assessment of 'what's in it for me?'

There are other interpretations of resilience, such as being able to cope, being mentally tough, bouncing back – although this last one, bouncing back, is more closely associated with recovering from a situation rather than preventing a situation causing you distress.

Our definition places resilience in the prevention zone, preventing you experiencing debilitating degrees of stress (strain and stress) whilst reacting to an event or challenging situation.

Resilience won't prevent you from experiencing 'good stress' - controlled pressure and tension - as these degrees of stress are stimulants and can help you to be resilient.

Resilience helps you maintain performance. Performance in this context is your ability to keep concentrating on completing a task, any task, in the face of situations that may hijack your concentration onto something else.

What are the characteristics of a resilient person?

Someone who is generally resilient will often have the insight to:

- Know themselves very well
- Know what they want out of life
- Know their achievements and failures
- Know their core values and standards
- Know they can rise up to and overcome challenges
- Know how to organise their life
- Know how to deal with uncertainty
- Know how to control their anxiety
- Know how to cope with excess demand
- Know how to tackle poor behaviour in others
- Know how to communicate, persuade and listen
- Know how to be attentive to others
- Know how to have the flexible strength of mind to achieve what they want when they put their mind to it.

Why do you need to be resilient?

You need to be resilient to keep in mental control of yourself in challenging situations - to be able to think clearly enough to find ways of overcoming the challenge.

Having flexible strength of mind enables you:

To overcome challenges

Resilience is used to overcome challenges of everyday life. Some challenges are more demanding than others. For the most part you hardly pay attention to the routine challenges you face, mainly because you've experienced similar challenges in the past, and know you can cope with them without difficulty.

It is the challenge that you perceive as a threat that places your mind on alert and makes you concentrate on how to overcome it.

In the workplace, where threatening challenges often arise, you need both motivation and resilience to overcome them successfully.

However, your own personal resilience can only go so far.

Resilience is a choice.

You can decide to be positively resilient if sufficiently motivated and form an attitude that gives you the energy to overcome a challenging event by confronting it, standing up to it, and finding positive and constructive ways of overcoming it.

You may choose to be passively resilient, if you are insufficiently motivated to rise up to and tackle a specific challenge. You may decide that

expending mental resources on dealing with this challenge is too great to make a positive difference to you. You may prefer to ignore the challenge if you can, or hibernate and hope the challenge goes away. This may be a decision you make to maintain a semblance of survival and enable you to continue functioning at a low level which you decide is better than any alternative. This is passive resilience. You exist but you don't thrive. This form of resilience is observed in organisations with passive, possibly coercive cultures, that function by using fear as a proxy for motivation.

You may choose not to be resilient at all. This may not be a conscious choice as the event may be so threatening that you lose mental control and perceive you are faced with no alternative but to suffer the consequences arising from the threat. The threatening event engulfs you and the emotional reaction dominates.

Your choice will be heavily influenced by the cultural context of the event itself. A positive cultural environment will influence your attitude to be positively resilient. Other forms of culture, less positive and supportive, will influence your attitude to be passively resilient – you simply keep going knowing you're not going to have much of an impact on these types of culture or the events occurring within them, so your response is to maintain the best equilibrium you can find for yourself so you can continue to survive but you won't thrive.

To plan for the impact of future challenges

With a positive resilient attitude, you can anticipate potentially challenging events in

advance, and prepare yourself to overcome them.

To cope with continuous and ongoing challenges

Resilience will help to protect you from the effect of ongoing events and behaviours which can have a sort of drip drip drip effect which, without a resilient attitude, may eventually become too much to tolerate.

To deal with the unexpected

You need positive resilience to cope with unexpected events. They can be shocking. The stronger your mental control, the quicker you'll be able to access strategies for coping with them event.

However, if the event is shocking, you will experience levels of stress (pressure, tension, strain and stress). Your resilience will have little impact on that feeling, but will help you reduce the degree of stress to a level (pressure and tension) that enables you to start coping.

What is stress?



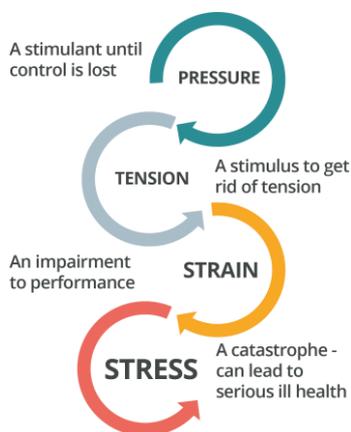
Mental stress is an extreme adverse psychological response to personal perception of uncontrollable pressure, tension and strain.

Left untreated, stress can cause serious physical conditions and illness.

Stress is at the wrong end of a spectrum

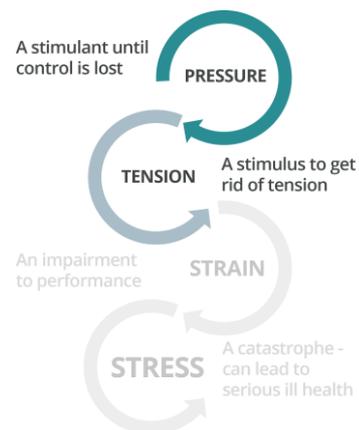
Stress is a much used word with multiple interpretations.

To try and make sense of stress, it is helpful to understand that stress is at the wrong end of a spectrum that starts with pressure, deteriorates into tension, then deteriorates further into strain and then stress. Not everyone follows this pattern; some leapfrog tension and experience strain. Some leapfrog from nothing to experience stress.



Pressure and Tension

Some pressure and/or tension is normal, and is not necessarily bad for you or the organisation you work in. If kept within your control, pressure and tension will benefit you.



Pressure

Pressure is a stimulant, as long as you remain in control of your pressure and know it's coming to an end.

Pressure enhances concentration as hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) are increased in your body. Too much hormone can have an adverse impact, so if you feel you cannot control the pressure, because you don't know when it's going to end, you may deteriorate into tension.

Tension

Tension is, also, a stimulant. You don't like feeling tense, an uncomfortable feeling that may include muscle tightening and headaches.

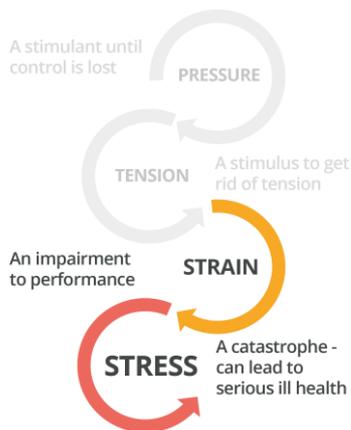
Because you don't like the sensation you want to get rid of the feeling.

You do anything you can to get rid of tension – hence it being a stimulant to take action.

If you can't get rid of tension you may deteriorate into strain.

Strain and Stress

Strain and stress should be avoided. Personal resilience helps you to resist them.



Strain

Strain is an impediment to performance. You feel unwell. You feel strained over a period of time. You think more about the cause of your feelings and sensations than about what you should be concentrating on. In effect, your concentration is hijacked by an event or behaviour so you focus more on these than on the tasks you want, or are expected, to complete.

If you cannot bring strain into your control, by being able to ignore the cause and focus on your tasks, you may deteriorate into stress.

Stress

Stress is a potentially dangerous condition that can do you harm. It diverts your concentration, makes you feel ill, and makes you want to hide away.

Your memory is shot, behaviour changes, and you constantly feel anxious and, possibly, depressed. You may act like a 'zombie', staring

into space and not being able to absorb and process information.

If you experience stress, you wouldn't be at work; you'd want to escape.

Left untreated you are at risk of experiencing some of the more dangerous physical conditions and illnesses, such as some cancers, heart disease and obesity. You normally require help to recover.

You may not fully recover. You recover to a new level of you, and probably avoid situations that caused you stress in the first place.

Psycho-presenteeism

One of the largest general challenges facing leaders and managers is people coming to work in body but not in mind – psychological presenteeism.

It is a challenge because people who fall into this category may be working but they aren't performing at their full potential. Their concentration and motivation has been hijacked.

In the main, people who come to work in body but not in mind experience degrees of uncontrollable tension and strain, and don't, or can't, use their resilience. They drift. They become helpless.

The diagram on the next page shows the organisational attributes and features that are aligned with the degrees of stress.

Each degree of stress is a reaction to an event or difficult behaviour and people react differently to the same event. Your reaction will be heavily

influenced by the cultural environment. You can have the same event in different environments, provoking different reactions. For example, not everyone will experience strain when confronted by a demand for a quick fix solution to a complex problem; equally, there are some

people who say they thrive on conflict, but the people they are in conflict with may suffer serious psychological difficulties.

The image below is a representation of the general alignment between events, behaviours and degrees of stress.

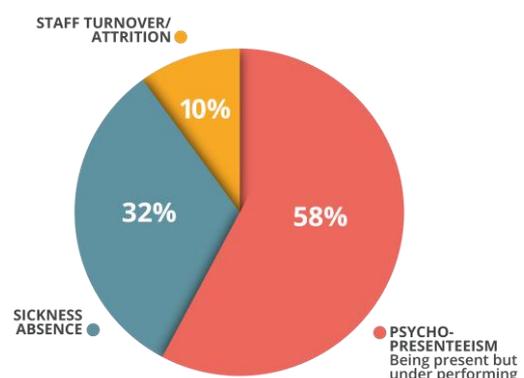


You are more likely to have to rely on your resilience if you work in an organisation with the dominating features described in the middle zone shown in the image above – where presenteeism and dis-engagement are the norm.

Costs of psycho-presenteeism

The costs of people coming to work in body but not in mind (psycho-presenteeism) is, arguably, the largest avoidable routine cost organisations experience.

The cost of strain and stress



Proportion of losses attributable to psychological distress.

The lost resources are accounted for by lack of attention, accidents, under-performance, increased insurance, doing tasks slowly, low productivity, diverted manager time.

There are, also, foregone opportunities linked to lack of energy, lack of entrepreneurialism, lack of innovation and ideas.

The drain on resources is normally calculated as twice to five times the combined costs of sickness absence and staff attrition.

The cost is several fold more than the lost resources due to physical conditions. Those coming to work in body but not in mind will be doing this over months and years, whereas people with physical conditions experience normally just a short term absence and remain engaged in their work.

What causes stress?

Stress is caused by events and behaviours which you perceive as uncontrollable.

In the workplace, most events and behaviours are controllable because the workplace is a controlled community, unlike ordinary domestic life which is often exposed to uncontrollable events.

The workplace is controlled by managers. It is they who can create the working environment where events and behaviours that run the risk of causing stressful reactions can be eliminated.

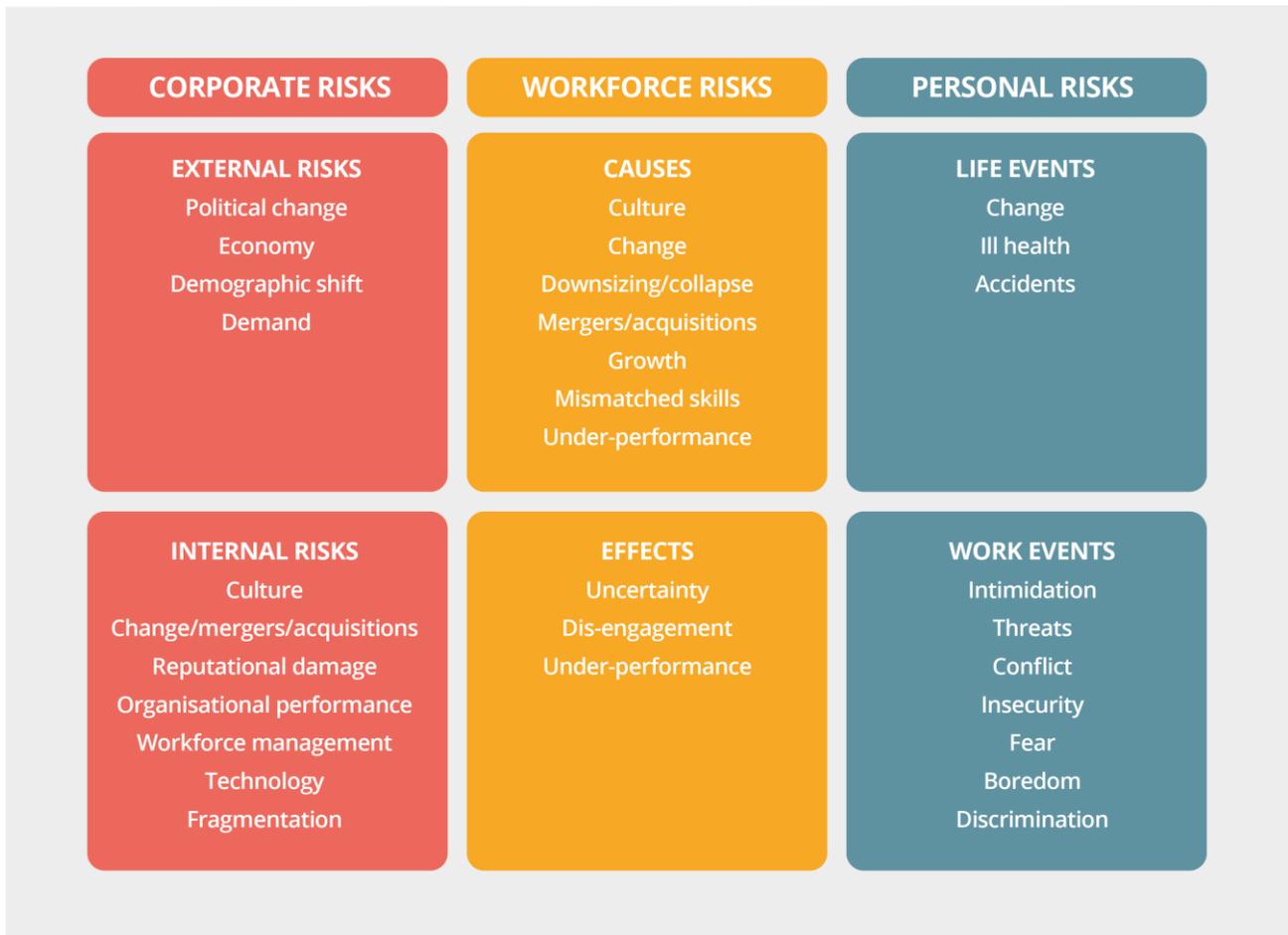
Risk

Analysing risk is an essential activity as risks have not yet turned into actual events.

You can begin to work out how to bring risks under control by working out all the possible scenarios that will mitigate the risk from turning into harmful events.

In the following image are some common risks facing organisations and the workforce.

You should ask yourself which risks are genuinely uncontrollable and those which you and your managers can control, but, probably, don't.



Threats

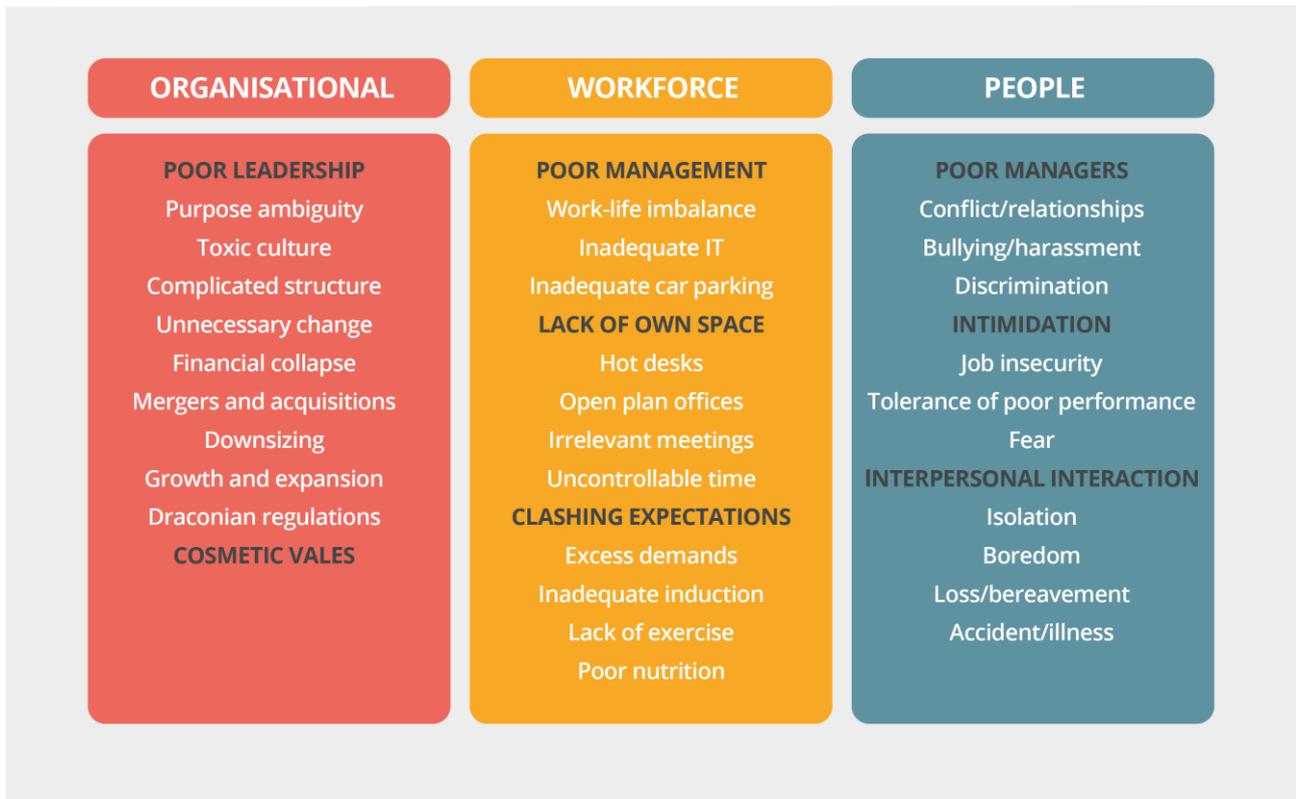
Threats happen; they are real. They are frequently risks that have been 'allowed' to turn into threats.

They require you to take steps to ensure you do not experience strain or stress.

Threats that are important to you personally are those which you perceive as threatening your

own survival. It is these that places your mind on alert, and which triggers off your reactions. It is these for which your resilience is important in preventing you from experiencing strain and stress.

You should ask yourself which threats have you experienced from the lists in the following image. Then ask yourself - 'could these threats have been prevented in the first place?'

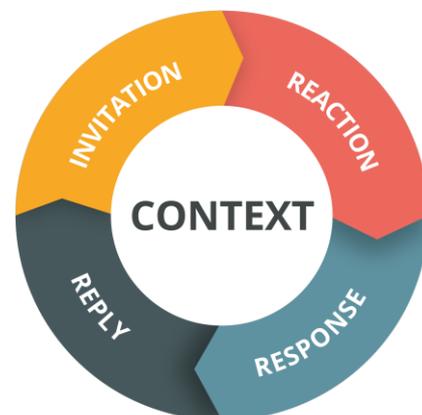


Where does resilience fit in?

In order to understand more fully where resilience fits, it is helpful to describe the processes involved in the way that we react to challenges and threats.

The processes involved in reacting to challenges

A normal cycle of actions and re-actions involves the context, an invitation to respond, a reaction, a response and a reply.



Context

Everything takes place within a context.

You will experience multiple contexts in your work, and most contexts have a direct link to the culture of the workplace.

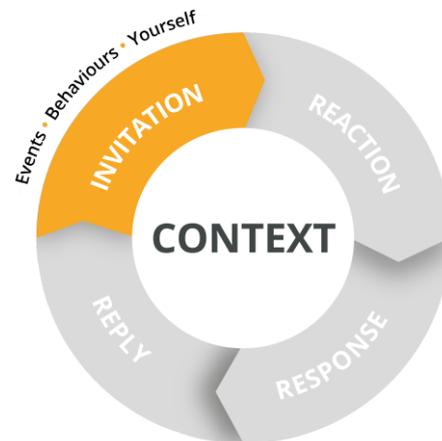
Culture influences everything. It influences your react to events.

You can have the same event in a toxic culture as a positive culture. In a toxic culture your reaction to the event is likely to be less resilient than a positive culture because your motivation to cope with the event may be diminished as you perceive less personal benefit from expending energy on dealing with the challenge.

This is because you work out how you need to behave in the culture for you to survive and not stick out as a target for other people's observation. This is largely because of fear; fear of the repercussions of being different.

For example, when you enter a meeting at work, especially if it is with people you don't know, you work hard to establish how you should behave, and what your boundaries of behaviour might be. If you are fearful of being different you will blend with other behaviours. If you are not fearful of repercussions, or you are in a situation where individual contributions of any kind are encouraged and accepted without humiliation, your boundaries of behaviour will be more flexible and you may decide to stick out and make a challenging observation. If everyone is encouraged to make challenging observations you no longer stick out.

An essential part of the process of being resilient is to work out the cultural context.



Invitation

Occasionally, there are challenges that you will react to with strong feelings and emotions. It is often an event or behaviour that seems out of context.

If you perceive the event as a challenge to your survival, your mind will place you on alert and you'll start the process of evaluating what is going on.

Such challenging events are invitations for you to react. You can accept or reject the invitation.

However, the closer you perceive the event to be a threat, the stronger is your imperative to react. Some invitations are very hard to ignore.



Reaction

Your immediate reaction to an invitation will be impulsive and emotional. This is unavoidable.

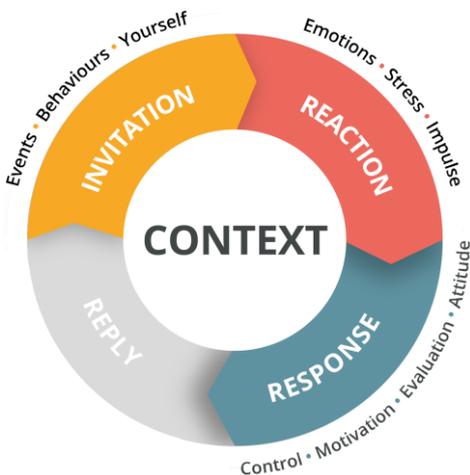
However, it is at this point that your strength of mind is required because emotions can dominate your thinking and reactions, and if they do, they make you lose mental control, making it difficult for you to think rationally and access strategies for dealing with the event at the time.

mental evaluation of the event, and help you form an attitude towards the event, which, in turn, helps you dig out a strategy for dealing with the event and providing a reply.



Reply

Mental control has enabled you to determine a measured response to provide a reply to the original invitation.



Response

Taking mental control requires you to be motivated to take control of the situation, so the strength of your motivation will trigger your

Evaluating a threat or challenge

Part of the process of forming a response to an event is to evaluate the event itself.

This requires your strength of mind to take control of the processes of evaluation. If there are lingering emotional reactions at this point they need controlling. Controlled emotions form part of the evaluation process but should not dominate the outcome.

The stages in evaluation



Context

Everything takes place in a context. You need to understand the context to know how to evaluate what's going on and, eventually, how to reply.

Emotional reaction

The first thing that happens after an event has occurred is that you will react emotionally, possibly stressfully, and always on impulse. Depending on your emotional reaction you will need to force the emotion into submission in order to complete the evaluation and decide what to do next.

Objective information

You will gather as much objective information as you can. Sometimes you might be affected by the strength of the emotion and find trying to get hold of facts is really hard. However, objective information is a vital ingredient in working out what to do. For example, you are surrounded by a herd of cows. It makes a difference if there are 9 compared to 30 in

determining whether or not you have a chance of survival. If you are shocked by the cows, you'll find it difficult to count how many there are.

Appropriate/timely

You will make an assessment about whether the event or behaviour is appropriate and timely for the context you are in. For example, someone clapping in the middle of a quiet part of choral music in the Albert Hall will place everyone on alert, although it's probably not threatening. Most will think this is entirely inappropriate as it's the wrong time. Applauding musicians is accepted as normal, but not in the middle of a performance.

Fairness

You will be working out if the event or behaviour is fair and reasonable in the context. If you think it is fair, you'll decide to have a different attitude than if you think the event is unfair. For example: 'My boss always tells me off in public if I'm late. She never does that to anyone else who's a latecomer. It's most unfair'.

Expectation/anticipation

You work out the end game – what you would like and expect to happen. You do this for several reasons – it gives you hope; it gives you the basis for a plan; it gives you motivation to do something; and it gives you a purpose.

Experiences/skills

At this stage in your evaluation, you will be wondering if you have the skills and experiences to deal with the situation. If you think you have, this will influence your motivation for doing something and forming a robust attitude to pump up your energy to get on with it. If you think you haven't, this will influence you the

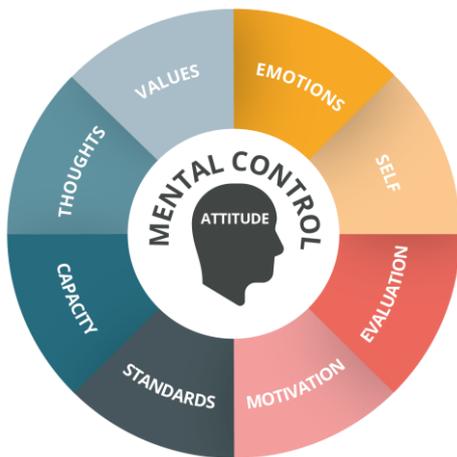
other way, and may make you feel helpless in the situation.

Social proof

You may decide to consult others in a similar situation to yourself. You will find that you'll adopt the opinions of the crowd and do what the crowd does, rather than developing an entirely independent opinion of your own, based on your own reasoning.

Forming your attitude to a threat or challenge

What goes into making you 'YOU'?



Your resilience is dependent on your attitude to the challenge.

You can choose to be resilient or not depending on your attitude.

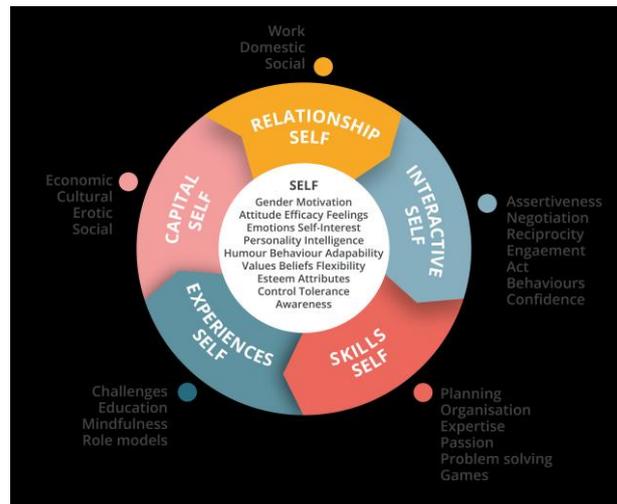
Your attitude is the stance you adopt towards the challenge.

Your attitude is created from a number of influences on you, not least the answer to the question 'what's in it for me?' to be resilient.

The influences on you have been accumulating throughout your life.

What follows explains these influences. You will need to make notes about yourself in relation to each influence, so you can understand yourself better, and know where your general attitude comes from.

Self



Experiences self

This is about all the experiences you've had in your lifetime; how you received them; the manner in which you approached them; what you learnt; whether you needed help to cope with them and how useful they have been since you experienced them.

Skills self

This is about all the practical and social skills you have accumulated in your lifetime. It is easy to forget some skills that haven't been used for a long time, but they may become useful at some stage in the future, and it's always helpful to remind yourself just how skilful you are.

Interactive self

This is about how you interact with others; the approach you adopt for different people in different circumstances. How successful are you at dealing with difficult behaviours, or people who won't do what you want them to do?

How confident are you when meeting someone new to you, or entering a room full of strangers, or being asked to give a vote of thanks at a party?

Relationships self

You have different forms of relationships from the intimate to the superficial, and each has an influence on you and how you might view the world. The important thing about relationships is the time required to ensure they are successful. This is entirely idiosyncratic, but people very important to your own success and happiness are people you might need to spend more time with than those who are simply interesting to be with.

Capital self

This is about everything you have accumulated and know you possess. It is, also, about whether you are satisfied with what you have accumulated to date and if you need to do more.

Economic capital is about the resources you've accumulated and if you are happy with these.

Cultural is about your level of success and happiness derived from cultural activities – sport, music, watching films, theatre, and so on.

Erotic is about the degree to which you feel success and happiness about your attractiveness and whether you wish to be more or less attractive to others.

Social is about the degree to which you derive success and happiness from your relationships with social institutions – your team, club, neighbours, church, pub and so on.

Your emotions

Emotions can get in the way of a reasoned response to an invitation to reply to a difficult event or challenging behaviour. This is because emotions are a dominant feeling that always occur as the first reaction to an event; they need taming to enable you to think of a reasoned response.

The following are some common emotions that arise from experiencing a challenging event:

- Anger
- Fear or being scared
- Sad
- Happy or glad
- Disgust
- Surprise

Think of the emotions you most often experience. Think about how you try to control your own emotional reactions to situations. Do you, for example, try hard to calm yourself down by pausing for a couple of seconds or longer before you react? Or are you a very sensitive person, prone to tears when confronted by a challenge?

Your personal values

Your values drive you. Your beliefs and core values frame the way you see the world and respond to it.

Values explain why you feel great about some things and uncomfortable about others; they

provide the benchmark against which you can measure how you feel about the environment you are in, and what you need to do about it, if anything.

Discovering your core values adds to your self-awareness, and provides you with greater understanding about yourself, your thoughts and your actions.

The list below shows some personal values which many wish they have. Discovering your personal values, however, is not about those values you'd like to have but the ones that drive you on a daily basis. Which ones, on this list, drive you on a daily basis?

- Knowledge
- Wisdom
- Power
- Ethical Standards
- Independence
- Accomplishment
- Recognition
- Security
- Responsibility
- Creativity
- Justice and Parity

Thoughts, feelings and attitudes

Once you are born, you are conditioned and driven to survive. The implications of this are that:

- You are motivated by self-interest to survive.
- You cannot survive on your own; you have to interact with others.
- You are motivated to interact to survive.

- You live, constantly, in the context of organisations (two or more people with a common aim).
- You are the principal cause of psychological distress (by your behaviour in your interaction with others).
- You are good at false attributions (attributing to others some characteristics that you imagine, in order to prepare yourself for a possible challenging situation, but which frequently turns out to be false).
- You are prone to exaggeration because you need to project yourself in a stronger way to capture the attention of others, so you are in the best position to survive. You can also exaggerate the opposite, by hiding away so that others don't notice you. You choose what to do according to your evaluation of the situation, and what you want to achieve.
- Psychological wellbeing is about how you feel and not about your health. Feeling well is essential for your survival as it provides you with the means to think clearly. However, it is virtually impossible to discover from others how they feel. You reveal your truer feelings when you feel secure. In a situation when you rely on your resilience to cope you are unlikely to reveal how you feel. You may exaggerate your feeling of being strong to help you survive the event successfully.
- You act in order to adapt to each situation so that you can survive and thrive.

Knowing that you can act means you know you can learn a new script and act in a different way. This is necessary in strengthening personal resilience.

Your capacity to be in mental control

There may be situations where events occur in a context which prevents you from creating the mental space to think and be in control. Your capacity to be in mental control will be influenced by:

- **Culture** – whether it is a positive or negative culture, one that you feel secure enough to be able to think for yourself, or one where you are fearful, panicky and when emotions dominate your capacity to think clearly.
- **Manager behaviour** – whether your manager is supportive and encouraging or dominating and intimidating. If the latter, your capacity to think clearly is diminished by the fear the manager generates.
- **Working environment** – whether the environment is something you notice because it's so poor, or a place where you can relax and think clearly.
- **Resilience** – whether or not you have degrees of flexible strength of mind.

Standards

You are influenced in your attitude by certain standards that you've adopted during your life to date.

These may include:

- Family standards
- The law
- Professional standards
- Society standards
- Religious standards

You should think about the standards you apply. They may be closely associated with your personal values, and may contribute to your

beliefs, which are your opinions about which you are certain.

Like personal values, the standards you adopt may drive your decisions and actions. They may make you feel comfortable and uncomfortable in different situations. They help you form judgments about events.

Motivation

Motivation is the marriage between being enticed to do something with your openness to being enticed. If the two come together, the strength of your motivation will be high.

If you are challenged by an event, your motivation to deal with it will depend on whether you are enticed by the possible outcome. This is the 'what's in it for me?' question.

If you're not open to being enticed it will be because you cannot see a future that benefits you. For example, a challenging event in a context of a toxic working culture will probably not entice you to deal with the challenge because the 'normal' after dealing with the challenge is a toxic culture. You choose not to be positively resilient, but to adopt passive resilience simply to survive but you won't thrive.

Some of the influences on your motivation, when evaluating a challenge and forming your attitude to it, may include your expectations relating to:

- Job satisfaction
- Reward
- Positive working environment
- Success
- Self esteem
- Promotion

- Career opportunity
- Enjoyment
- Purpose
- Pleasure

Evaluating challenges

When we come to evaluate challenges and form an attitude towards them, we are influenced by the elements described. They come into play at different stages in the evaluation process.

We evaluate challenges by trying to understand the challenge and make meaning from it in a way that enables us to decide what to do.

We see challenges in their context. Understanding the context is essential, as it helps to formulate attitude.

We have an emotional response to the challenge. Controlling the emotion to prevent a 'knee jerk' response is important, although emotions need to be expressed at some stage. A 'knee jerk' response may not be the most effective attitude in the circumstances.

We try to establish as much evidence about the challenge as possible. We seek objectivity to help formulate an attitude.

We assess the challenge in terms of appropriateness and timeliness – two idiosyncratic elements that we use to determine whether the challenge is something to pay attention to or not – important aspects of attitude.

We work out what will happen when faced with the challenge. We try to anticipate the outcome.

We draw on our experiences to see if we have overcome something similar in the past. We,

also, draw on our skills to see if we have skills to address the challenge.

We work out if the challenge is fair – this plays to the psychological contract, an unwritten contract between people based on fairness.

We find out what others think of the challenge, as this is appropriate to the type of challenge, and take account of their opinion in determining our own attitude.

Deciding what to do



Once you've evaluated and formed an attitude to the challenge, you will decide what you'll do to overcome the challenge successfully.

There are three possible actions to take:

Take action – positive resilience

Your stance might be to take action to do something, or to decide not to take any action because no action would be needed or wouldn't work. Alternatively, you may decide to defer any action until a more favourable time when you know you stand a better chance of dealing with the situation.

Inaction – passive resilience

Your stance is to be inactive because the event is too large for any action on your part to make any difference to you. You could find yourself experiencing learned helplessness when you are overwhelmed by the event or behaviour and wish to hibernate until the situation calms.

Enforced action – passive resilience

Your stance is to go along with being forced or coerced into action. You will do this because the choices available to you are too constricting – not to do what is required may place you at greater risk. For example, when job choices are limited and you become fearful of losing your current job.

How do you strengthen resilience?

The resilience programme is designed to strengthen your flexible strength of mind by making you more aware of yourself, providing you with tools and techniques for dealing with chaos and time poverty, and providing advice on how to strengthen your relationships.

The emphasis is on you, and in helping you explore yourself so you can build your understanding about who you are. You may think you know everything there is to know about yourself, but it will surprise you to find out about aspects of you that have been dormant or you've forgotten. Bringing these to the surface helps you strengthen your mind and your attitude towards challenges.

The programme is designed to provide you with self-confidence through knowing you have strategies in place for dealing with challenges and difficult situations.

Where does resilience fit into the big scheme of things?

Positive resilience is about forming a robust attitude towards events and behaviours, enabling you to tolerate, address and overcome such events without experiencing any significant stress, and without any loss of personal performance.

However, even the most resilient person will struggle under certain conditions – for example, in the workplace, if the culture, style of management and working environment are not supportive of the individual.

Context is everything. We evaluate events and behaviour in their context, and if the context isn't favourable we will form a different attitude to a favourable context. The event itself might be the same, but the context is different. Within the workplace, context is heavily influenced by the culture of the organisation.

So it is important for organisations to try to limit the risk of events and behaviours occurring that may cause stressful reactions and trigger the need for individuals to call on their resilience.

Personal resilience will only help so far. If the context and culture of the organisation is not supportive and helpful to individuals, there is a limit to which personal resilience will have a positive effect in preventing stress.

Calling on your resilience to deal with stress-inducing events and behaviours consumes mental energy that should, otherwise, be focused on being productive at work.

Professor Derek Mowbray

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Derek Mowbray is a Chartered Psychologist and visiting Professor at Northumbria University and the University of Gloucestershire.

Derek specialises in the primary prevention of psychological distress. His work approaches and interventions are well recognised and adopted throughout the UK and internationally. His work in the stress prevention field focuses on the problems at work that may trigger adverse reactions in people, causing them to feel unwell and under intense pressure resulting in under performance.

His approach is to use positive psychology to help organisations create and sustain **'the workplace as a fabulous and high performing place to work'**.

He is the architect of **The Wellbeing and Performance Agenda**, an agenda to transform organisations into fabulous places to work. Within the agenda are the principles of **Psychological Responsibility**, which places on the individual a responsibility for feeling

psychologically well, as well as a responsibility to do no psychological harm to others. He is, also, a sponsor of the method of **'sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation'** as a principle underpinning organisational success and high achievement.

His work and approach is easy to understand, and may be viewed as common sense. However, it is not common practice.

His mission is to ensure individuals have a fabulous experience from work and the workplace.

Derek Mowbray's Guides

If you would like to read more about Derek's work, he has written a series of Guides which are **innovative, practical resources**.

The Guide to the WellBeing and Performance Agenda - ISBN 978-09573835-3-1

The Guide to Corporate Resilience - ISBN 978-09573835-1-7

The Guide to Adaptive Leadership - ISBN 978-09573835-2-4

The Guide to Psychological Responsibility - ISBN 978-09573835-5-5

The Guide to The Manager's Role in Resilience - ISBN 978-09573835-4-8

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