Resilience – a Meta competence

In conversations with others regarding the competencies necessary for survival in a changing world, resilience is often mentioned as a top priority. The pace of change today is fast, challenging and often unexpected. Change may be welcomed by some people but by many others change is perceived as an unwelcome visitor. Thoughts and emotions may combine to create a sense of inertia and a lack of energy in individuals and reacting to events rather than responding to them may result in many people discharging on drugs or alcohol. Many may experience thought paralysis and/or general feelings of being “stuck” and out of control.

Medical Frame

The rise and use of prescription drugs – often of little value, other than the benefits of a placebo - reinforce the notion of a quick fix solution to a complex problem. The rise of therapy in all its forms reinforces the notion that coping with stress and the demands of change is in itself a medical problem. Seeing the issue in this way - as a medical problem – will result in answers framed in a medical context. While for some responding to life’s stresses may require a medical intervention e.g. in dealing with trauma, for many others we need to start with a different frame of reference. That reference I believe is an educational one. When the issue is learning the intervention will require an educational response.

Learning is the Key

I believe the vast majority of individuals can learn to be more resilient in the face of adversity. If we frame the challenge as an educational one then the answers are about learning. Learning about resilient individuals, how they think and how they act becomes a first step in modelling such individuals.

There are many people who have demonstrated tremendous resilience in the face of childhood obstacles and life’s negative events, yet who still remain productive, energetic and motivated – it is about these individuals that we should seek to learn from. One of the best ways to learn anything is to teach it, so in learning about
resilience, what it is and how to develop it, do so with the aim to teach it to others. This practice will reinforce your own new learnings and will help embed new ways of thinking, managing emotions and acting from your conscious mind into your unconscious mind. When this learning is internalised and becomes an unconscious process you will respond differently to events, you will respond quickly and effortlessly and in alignment with your goals and intended outcomes.

What is Resilience?

Wikipedia notes: “Resilience is the positive capacity of people to cope with stress and catastrophe. It also includes the ability to bounce back after a disruption. Thirdly, it can be used to indicate having an adaptive system that uses exposure to stress to provide resistance to future negative events. Commonly used terms, which are closely related within psychology, are "psychological resilience", "emotional resilience", "hardiness", "resourcefulness", and "mental toughness."

A simple yet effective definition of resilience refers to our ability

“To remain healthy, energetic, at full capacity & in problem solving mode for as long as possible, and as long as necessary.”

If you were to develop strong resilience skills and techniques what outcome(s) would that get for you?

Your answers to that question may have something to do with your health, relationships, productiveness, capacity building and/or general happiness. Whatever outcome you focus on, the benefits of becoming more resilient ought to be empowering and personal to you.

Faces of Resilience

For most of us resilience may be about overcoming some childhood obstacles that we encountered. Childhood disappointments and negative events can help write our personal life script that we later play out in adulthood. It is also about the things we do to help us through the day to day adversities we face. For some it could be making that presentation or going for that interview or something more serious – the loss of a job or relationship. Resilience may also be about “bouncing back” after failure. Research has indicated resilience is also though about “reaching out” and seizing opportunities, remaining positive and being committed to taking action.

The key

The empirical research demonstrates that

More than genetics...............  
More than intelligence..........  
More than any other factor.....

It is our THINKING STYLE AND BELIEFS
That determines who is resilient and who is not.
Resilience is a tangible emotional intelligence competence. When we are resilient we need to work in all 3 emotional intelligence domains – cognitive development, emotional development and behavioural development. The following model from 6seconds.org is their model of emotional intelligence.

![Emotional Intelligence Model](image)

The 6seconds organisation define emotional intelligence as

“Emotional Intelligence is consciously choosing thoughts, feelings and actions to create optimal relationships with yourself and others.”

The definition stresses the importance of consciously choosing our thoughts, feelings and actions and is an important concept if we are to develop resilience. Resilient individuals accept the fact that they can essentially choose what they think, how they feel and what actions to take.

### Keys to staying Resilient

**What is Resilience?**

Our ability to remain healthy, energetic, at full capacity & in problem solving mode for as long as possible and as long as necessary. Managing you **thinking**, your **emotions** and taking **action** are the keys.
5 Keys to Resilience

1. **Always think in positive outcomes**

Many people think in problem terms when addressing issues in their life. For example they ask themselves: Whose fault is it/ who is to blame? The focus is on what is wrong. These questions can make us feel worse and make us be less resourceful. Instead change your focus to an outcome orientation. Ask yourself:
- What outcome do I want?
- What do I want to happen?
- What will I see, hear and feel when I get it?
- How will I know when I have the outcome?

Neuro-Linguistic programming suggests you can make the outcome picture in your mind stronger by turning up the brightness, making it colourful, bringing it closer to you. Also you can see the picture both as a dissociated picture, where you look at yourself in the picture and also as an associated picture where you see the picture out of your own eyes.

Have fun and see if you can make the outcome more compelling by focusing on what you want rather than on what you don’t want. The unconscious cannot process a negative so always think in terms of what you want. The internal dialogues you have with yourself are powerful and often are ones we accept to readily without challenge. Challenge this dialogue by saying what you want to happen, keep it positive. Develop positive inner dialogues with yourself, take time to recognize your internal dialogues and recognize the link between your thoughts and the emotions that they can create.

**Link between thoughts and emotions**

![Link between thoughts and emotions diagram](image-url)
Our thoughts are linked to the emotions we feel and the actions we take. The following illustrates this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When we feel</th>
<th>Our thought often are</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Someone has violated our rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>About loss - real or imagined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>We violated someone else’s rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety/fear</td>
<td>About a future threat</td>
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This link between our thoughts, emotions and actions is a fundamental principle in learning to be more resilient. Applying the A.B.C model of adversity - belief – consequence will help you to create more positive emotions by challenging and changing your beliefs. Here is how the A.B.C model works:

Adversity: Loss of business
Belief: “What will I do if I don’t get any more work?” (implications for future: another negative thought)
Consequence: anxiety/fear – behavioural action: paralysis

Adversity: Loss of business
Belief: “What specific outcome do I want?” What do I need to do differently?” (implications for future will be to do a different action)
Consequence: interested – behavioural action: a new approach

2. **Take positive action and challenge yourself to stay at the cause side of events.**

Often people are said to be at “cause” or at “effect” as follows

- **At Cause:** When you operate at cause you don’t make excuses. You take responsibility and ask” What do I need to do?” Or “What lessons do I need to learn?” You take charge of shaping your future in a proactive way.
- **At Effect:** When you are at effect you have given up your personal power, you often make excuses, offer justification and blame others. You can’t see you have any options or choices and are likely to be taking the role of victim or passive observer of your experiences.

Where are you in different situations you face right now? Are you at cause or at effect? The game plan is to allow you to be at cause for more aspects of your life – empowering yourself and others along the way.

a. **Tune into your language: Read the statement below & identify if the person is at cause or at effect.**

1. Not now, I’m giving myself time to consider my reply
2. You make me so angry, no wonder I’m stressed out.
3. Sorry, he made me do it.
4. Thank you. I would like to come- I need to find out about the trains.
5. I have to spend my weekend visiting my parents the make me feel guilty.
6. I’ve a mortgage- I have to do this job.
7. What can I learn from what happened?
8. I need to focus on my goals if I want to create my future.

**Tip:** Listen to your internal dialogue, thank it for its positive intention and then interrupt the pattern and quieten the words so that you can think calmly and access your more creative self – that part of you that can help you come up with new choices. You can break the dialogue through activities such as breathing exercises, meditation and by repeating positive phrases to yourself. Simple affirmations such as “I’m good enough” “I live in a healthy body” “I choose my own life” can help break the cycle. Replacing the noisy chatter with a clearer, simpler *at cause internal dialogue* can get you back in control.

b. Think of a situation you find challenging and examine what you say to yourself – your internal dialogue. Notice 3 things you might be thinking if you are “at effect” and 3 things you might be saying to yourself if you are “at cause.” Fill in the table below – as you do so notice the effect this choice has on you.

**My Cause and Effect Internal dialogue**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“At Effect” internal dialogue</th>
<th>Replacement “at Cause” internal dialogue</th>
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3. **Check for thinking biases and dispute them or simply distract yourself. Practice realistic optimism.**

Remember there are many thinking biases that we may adopt without conscious awareness. We have identified:

- Jumping to conclusions
- Tunnel vision
- Mind reading
- Personalising
- Externalising
- Over generalising

**Beliefs disputation**

Remember you can dispute your beliefs by asking the following questions. The challenge is to maintain a realistic optimism.

- Evidence: What evidence do I have for thinking this?
- Alternatives: What alternative explanations could there be for this?
- Implications: What are the implications for me of holding onto this?
- Usefulness: How useful is it for me to hold onto this belief?

These are powerful questions, that when applied allow you to maintain a realistic optimism in the face of adversity. Working with another individual can help facilitate your thinking. Martin Seligman identified the concept of explanatory style as an important concept where we see events in personal, pervasive and permanent terms. Of the 3 concepts Seligman identified whether you see things as permanent is probably the most important choice we make in staying resilient.

4. **Develop heart coherence, practice mindfulness and “soak” yourself in experiencing positive emotions.**

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**Flow: Engaging the parasympathetic nervous system**

- Experiencing positive emotion: Feeling appreciation, care & compassion.
- Neural circuit activated: limbic system to the left pre-frontal cortex.
- Coherent signal from heart.
- Release of oxytocin & vasopressin.
- Systems entrained.
- Feeling hopeful, optimistic, at peace or excited—engaged.
- Systolic & diastolic blood pressure decreased.
- Increased secretion of immunoglobulin A and natural killer cells.

Boyatzis
Experiencing positive emotions is a way to strengthen your ability to cope with stress and develop resilience. Work by the Hearmath organisation has proven the positive link between positive emotions and enhanced cognitive processing. Practicing some sort of relaxed meditation whether it is the Heartmath “freeze frame” technique or relaxed “Centering” is a useful daily practice. The link between our heart and brain adds weight to the notion that the heart is a key player on our ability to think well. Developing “heart wave coherence” is a fundamental principle of developing resilience. For more information visit: www.heartmath.com.

5. **Nourish others by developing a resonant leadership style remembering you are “emotionally contagious.”**

Daniel Goleman in his writings on emotional intelligence identified the difference between a resonant leader and a dissonant leader. The latter creates a “toxic” emotional climate, the former a nourishing supportive climate. Both are largely based on the fact that our emotions are contagious.

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**Emotions are contagious**

- The brain has an ‘open loop’ system
- We are ‘wired’ to pick up subtle clues from one another

*Resonance is contagious...so is dissonance*

The brain operates in an open loop system meaning we are wired to “catch” the emotions of others. The leader in the group by the mere fact they are the leader tends to be the most emotionally contagious. Resilience and emotional intelligence become significant to leadership effectiveness and in times of stress and change even more so. Author Richard Boyatzis asks -

**Are you a resonant leader?**

- Are you inspirational?
- Do you create a positive, hopeful emotional tone?
Are you mindful—authentic and in tune with yourself, others, and the environment?

These are challenging questions for individuals and organizations today however when our health and happiness are at stake they are questions worth addressing. This positive aspect is summarised by William James:

“The most important discovery of our time is that we can alter our lives by altering our attitudes”

**Resilience really is a learned capability.**

Hugh Russell

[www.thinking.ie](http://www.thinking.ie)

**Recommended reading:**

- The Resilience Factor: Andrew Shatte & Karen Reivich
- Learned Optimism: Martin Seligman
- From Chaos to Coherence [www.heartmath.com](http://www.heartmath.com)