Chapter 20

Coaching for Resilience and Well-being

Personal resilience has been described as the capacity to maintain or recover high levels of well-being in the face of life adversity (Ryff et al.,1998) and research suggests that coaching can support resilience. Grant et al. (2009) found that a Solution Focussed coaching programme enhanced manager resilience, despite this not being the aim of the intervention. Therefore coaching already appears to be having an effect on resilience, even when this is not the stated aim, so it is important that coaches appreciate the possible impact of their current work, and how they might effectively enhance resilience or well-being when required. A number of texts have emerged to support coaches that draw from a number of alternative philosophical approaches (Pemberton, 2015, Green & Humphrey, 2012, Cooper et al, 2013) but despite the numerous models covered, many issues remain in relation to resilience and well-being in the coaching context. This chapter will summarise a selection of the existing approaches, whilst highlighting some of the remaining knowledge gaps and cover four areas:

- Defining Well Being and Resilience.

- Conceptualisation of Resilience.

- Models informing coaching for Resilience and Well-Being.

- Future Research Directions**.**

Defining Resilience and Well-Being

While coaching interventions are often aimed at individuals dealing with challenges and stress (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2006), the common coaching paradigm adopted is to treat resilience as a pro-active capability. This is preventative rather than curative, to help individuals buffer the effects of adversity and challenge, so they can remain flexible and sustain performance. Coaching for resilience can therefore be relevant to many contexts such as those dealing with organisational change or personal health issues. Yet there is potential confusion about what is meant by resilience and well-being. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, in relation to contracting, since in order to deliver an outcome there needs to be clear agreement on what is required. Secondly, an individual who is felt to be lacking resilience or well-being might be more likely to need referral to other services. Much has been written about the need for coaches to be aware of the mental health boundary (Bachkirova & Cox,2005) so the lack of clear and agreed definitions of resilience and well-being may make referral decisions more difficult for coaches.

Definitions have generally evolved from research based in the clinical or developmental field emanating from a curative paradigm. It was this focus on the 'disease model' that led Ryff (1989) to highlight the lack of work being done on psychological well-being and optimal human functioning, arguing that the absence of illness did not equate to the presence of wellness and that a new approach was required. The resulting multifactor model was an attempt to define the core dimensions of well-being (see Table 1).

Dimension	Indicators of high functioning	Indicators of low functioning
Self-Acceptance	Possesses a positive attitude towards the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life.	Feels dissatisfied with self; is disappointed with what has occurred in past life; is troubled about certain personal qualities; wishes to be different than what he or she is.
Positive relations with others	Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others; capable of strong empathy, affection, intimacy; understands give and take of human relationships.	Has few close, trusting relationships with others; finds it hard to be warm, open and concerned about others; is isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships; not willing to make compromises to sustain important ties with others.
Autonomy	Is self-determined and independent; able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; regulates behaviour from within; evaluates self by personal standards.	Is concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others; relies on judgements of others to make important decisions; conforms to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.
Environmental mastery	Has a sense of mastery and competency in managing their environment; controls complex array of external activities; makes effective use of surrounding opportunities; able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.	Has difficulty managing everyday affairs; feels unable to change or improve surrounding context; is unaware of surrounding opportunities; lacks sense of control over external world.
Purpose in life	Has goals in life and a sense of directness; feels there is meaning to present and past life; holds beliefs that give life purpose; has aims and objectives for living.	Lacks a sense of meaning in life; has few goals or aims, lacks sense of direction; does not see purpose of past life; has no outlook or beliefs that give life meaning.
Personal growth	Has a feeling of continued development; sees self as growing and expanding; is open to new experiences; has sense of realizing his or her own potential; sees improvement in self and behaviour over time; is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness	Has a sense of personal stagnation; lacks sense of improvement or expansion over time; feels bored and uninterested with life; feels unable to develop new attitudes or behaviours.

Table 1: Six dimensions of psychological well-being adapted from Ryff (1989)

The ability to maintain well-being through difficult times has been partly attributed to the capacity to remain resilient (Fava & Tomba, 2009) but there has been more debate on how to define resilience.

Many authors note ambiguities in how researchers approach the concept of resilience (Zautra et al. 2008, Luthar et al. 2000) and highlight that research sometimes measures the process and sometimes the outcome. For example, Smith et al. (2008) included questionnaire items that asked about outcomes, e.g. 'I tend to bounce back quickly from hard times': Yet others measure the processes that might increase the chances of such an outcome, asking questions such as 'I feel that I am optimistic and concentrate on the positives in most situations' (Baruth & Carroll, 2002). This led Zautra et al. (2008) to call for resilient 'outcomes' to be clearly differentiated from the

'processes' that are likely to increase the 'likelihood of those outcomes' (p45). They also highlight two potential definitions of resilience, the first being 'recovery' and the second being 'sustainability'. They argue that while recovery ensures survival it may not be enough to support well-being and that sustainability, with a focus on the continued positive pursuit of goals, is essential to resilience. Such an approach would more clearly align with Bonnano (2004:20), who argues that 'resilience reflects the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium' and should be distinguished from the idea of recovery. It might be argued that coaching should in fact be more concerned with sustaining performance than with recovery, and in helping clients to learn and grow from adversity that is defined as *Thriving* (Carver,1998).

Researchers also frequently claim an increase in resilience despite using very different conceptions of the construct. Orzech et al. (2009) used the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) 'to measure a form of psychological resilience' (p216). By contrast, Wanberg and Banas (2000) measured personal resilience using four items from the Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Similar issues arise in coaching, where many studies demonstrate an increase in 'resilience' following coaching, yet use different measures to evidence the effect. Franklin & Doran (2009) used the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) (Friborg et al. 2005), Sherlock–Storey et al. (2013) used the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PsyCap) (Luthans et al.,2007), and Grant et al. (2009) employed the Cognitive Hardiness Scale (Nowack,1990). Each of these scales reflects a very different conception of resilience as the RSA has a strong focus on social aspects while the PsyCap (Luthans et al. 2007) addresses the internal factors of confidence (self-efficacy), optimism, hope and resilience.

This disparity means that it is hard to draw conclusions from empirical research to inform practice. Many studies claim an 'increase in resilience' and it is easy for practitioners to adopt approaches and techniques based on limited investigation. It is often only in the depth of the methodology section that it clear 'what' was actually measured as an indicator of resilience. The coaching field would therefore benefit from more clarity in relation to the definitions used in practice. It may be that in the coaching context it is more appropriate to aim for thriving and sustainable performance based on a process definition of resilience, rather than a recovery outcome focus. This would be more in keeping with the definition of coaching as a developmental process rather than a remedial intervention (Bachkirova, 2011).

Conceptualisation of Resilience

The debate in relation to definitions is further confused by the alternative conceptualisations of how to approach the topic of resilience, which I would argue falls broadly into three categories, asset, systemic and developmental. Much research attempts to identify the personal attributes within the individual that support resilience and can be termed *asset approaches*. However resilience is affected by aspects outside the individual such as positive relationships (Masten & Reed, 2005) which are reflected in *systemic* approaches, these included factors outside the individual and imply a level of dynamic interaction between elements.

Both *asset* and *systemic* approaches attempt to sub-divide resilience into discrete element, in contrast to the *developmental* approach that takes a more holistic perspective. The following section expands of each of these alternative conceptualisations.

Asset approaches

Asset approaches are based on the premise that a set of attributes within the individual can be defined and (usually) measured to determine resilience. Whether these attributes are nature or nurture is the topic of some debate.

Block & Kremen (1996) proposed a trait theory of resilience, termed Ego-Resiliency, defined as a personality characteristic that does not presume exposure to adversity and is a relatively stable characteristic. Scores on the Ego-resilience scale (Block & Kremen, 1996), show positive correlations with Extraversion and Openness and negative correlations with Neuroticism (Fredrickson et al.,2003).

Such findings raise questions about the degree to which coaching may be able to influence resilience as a more stable trait-resilience might suggest certain genetic determinants. Some authors highlight that Serotonin levels may be the genetic mechanism (Pemberton, 2015) linked to resilience, but another mediating variable has been suggested by Schäfer et al., (2015) who found that high trait resilience was positively correlated with the ability to control attention. It was hypothesised that those with high attention control would use that ability to focus on the positive as an adaptive emotional response to adversity. Yet the high attentional control group attended to both positive and threat stimuli. It was the low control attention group, who tended to focus on the positive stimuli. This unusual finding was explained as:

'more trait resilience might be characterized by confronting themselves with threat and being afterwards able to attend to other tasks at hand (due to high attentional control abilities). In contrast, for those with low attentional control it may be more

adaptive to avoid threat possible because they have difficulties in disengaging their

attention from threat and engaging in other tasks at hand' (Schäfer et al.2015:138)

This finding aligns with the work of Coutu (2002), who proposes that resilient

leaders attend to reality without a 'rose tinted' perspective, and also display ingenuity and

the ability to make meaning from difficult situations. This might suggest that helping

clients control their focus of attention can support resilience and may explain why

mindfulness training has proved effective (Spence et al. 2008).

Asset factors identified as relevant go well beyond traits, and include constructs

such as cognitive flexibility, optimism, positive future orientation, hardiness, self-

understanding, interpersonal understanding, internal locus of control, high self-esteem,

emotional control, sociability, active coping, spirituality and many more (Skodol, 2010,

Kent & Davis, 2010). For Reivich and Shatté (2002) self-efficacy, emotion regulation,

impulse control, causal analysis, realistic optimism, empathy and 'reaching out' are the

seven critical factors making up resilience. Alternatively, Clarke and Nicholson (2010)

identify five overarching themes important for leadership resilience, these were

optimism, freedom from stress and anxiety, individual accountability, openness and

flexibility and problem orientation. Cooper at al. (2013) list a number of measures

appropriate for the working context (p43-46) and a selection of commercial on-line

resilience measures are also now available that can be used in coaching. E.g. i-resilience

report, Resilience quotient, the Resilience Scale, although published empirical support for

their validity remains limited.

Some academic work does propose more empirically validated strategies that can help direct the work of the coach and a review by Jackson et al. (2007), proposed the following strategies for developing individual resilience:

● Building positive professional relationships and networks

● Maintaining positivity

● Developing emotional insight

● Achieving life-balance and spirituality

● Becoming more reflective.

In trying to identify factors relevant for coaching Sherlock-Storey et al. (2013) implemented a coaching programme to educate and develop seven resilience areas: Goal setting; Explanatory style; Using strengths; Social support; Self-care; Self-efficacy; and Attaining perspective. The programme used a workbook, reflective activities, a learning log and consisted of three 90 minutes coaching sessions over six-weeks. This more structured approach led to increases in reported resilience post coaching.

When reviewing the literature, the high number of attributes listed generates questions about the scope of the construct and how to make sense of it since such lists often include attitudes, skills, traits, some that might be considered states and even virtues (Richardson, 2002). By contrast, this breadth also suggests that coaches can work with resilience in many different ways and that perhaps a meta-model would be more appropriate to guide the work of the coach.

Systemic approaches

Despite the extensive work on individual characteristics many argue for a more dynamic approach as evidence suggests resilience involves the integration and interaction of not only internal psychological and biological indicators but also factors external to the individual such as social support (Kent & Davis, 2010). One approach that seeks to explain the dynamic interrelationships is the 'conservation of resources model' (Hobfoll, 2002). In proposing a theory to explain diverse reactions to stress Hobfoll (1989) advocated that individuals act to build and to conserve 'resources'. Resources are aspects important to the individual and can include such things as mastery, self-esteem or socio-economic status. If the environment threatens the depletion of such resources then it is experienced as stress. This more dynamic model therefore treats resilience as part of the wider process of maintaining well-being and could explain how normally resilient individuals might experience depletion of resources due to inadequate recovery or replenishment time.

Such a perspective aligns well with Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) Theory that provides a 'useful non-linear approach to thinking about organisational change and the wellbeing of individuals embedded in these systems' (O'Conner & Cavanagh, 2013:1). Such a perspective was used to evaluate a leadership coaching programme where well-being, goal attainment and transformational leadership behaviours all saw improvements after coaching. The evaluation showed a 'ripple effect' where secondary gains were evident from those not actually being coached (O'Conner & Cavanagh, 2013). Such effects suggest that simple linear relationships of cause and effect are inadequate

when addressing well-being and resilience. This might imply that trying to deconstruct, list and measure a set of attributes is an inappropriate way to address resilience.

While seeing resilience as a dynamic process helps represent some of the complex interactions, the challenge becomes how to synthesise and simplify such a perspective in order to make it useful to practitioners. However, this lens could explain why apparently resilient individuals can still face issues. If resilience is simply a set of assets, once learnt these should always be available, but if resilience relies on a dynamic system then assets alone might not ensure resilience in all circumstances. This might suggest that resilience is more transient, which questions the value and use of measures to identify the presence or absence of resilience at a particular point in time.

Developmental approaches

A more holistic approach is advanced from a developmental perspective. Resilience is seen as 'relative, emerging and changing in transaction with specific circumstances and challenges' (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). The entity does not just adapt to new circumstances and add new skills; rather it learns to become more adaptable when it meets new challenges. The process of re-construction itself becomes easier with experience, as the system becomes more malleable.

Richardson (2002) describes this holistic view of resilience as a self-actualizing force grounded in Transpersonal Psychology integrating the body, the mind and the spirit, best characterised as a self-organising system. Such approaches see development not as an 'additive affair, human development is transformational' (Henning, 2011). Such a view shows synergy with the cognitive-developmental approach to coaching (Bachkirova, 2011).

Henning refers to a 'disruption' (2011:445) as 'disequilibrium' that marks a transition between adult developmental stages and is characterised by a 'dilemma-and the desire to solve it'. Resilience, she argues, is the ability to weather this developmental disequilibrium. This requires a breaking down of the existing meaning making structures and she suggests four ways to support the development of resilience: Acknowledging the current developmental stage, healing the past, maintaining helpful relationships and learning about oneself and the surrounding world.

It is clear that at present there is little shared understanding of how resilience is conceptualised that may bring confusion for both coachees and clients. This is partly due to the very different contexts and paradigms from which this research emanates, but may indicate that resilience research needs to be clearly contextualised. Such contextualisation would minimise misunderstandings and bring some coherence when working with resilience. However, at present coaches are working from many different philosophical standpoints and some of the most common models used are summarised in the next section.

Models informing coaching for Resilience and Well-Being

Cognitive Approaches

Cognitive Behavioural approaches propose that the attitudes and beliefs individuals hold are simply habitual way of thinking and behaving, so are rarely examined or questioned. From this perspective:

'Resilience comprises a set of flexible cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses to acute or chronic adversities.......While

many factors affect the development of resilience, the most

important one is the attitude you adopt to deal with adversity'

(Neenan,2009:17)

The cognitive approach advises the coach to work with the client to 'dispute' and question the validity of these attitudes and beliefs. The objective is to help the client out of their habitual 'pessimistic automatic thoughts' to consider alternatives and thus choose an interpretation that generates a more helpful consequence, referred to as 'performance enhancing thoughts'. The aim is to establish a more balanced or objective evaluation of the adversity, and to create thoughts that will help move the client forward, promoting flexible thinking, self-acceptance and high frustration tolerance. One suggested tool to achieve this in coaching is 'Resilience Enhancing Imagery' to promote 'Resilience Enhancing Thinking' (Palmer, 2013). However empirical research assessing the value of such cognitive techniques remains limited outside the therapeutic setting. While ideas have been extrapolated to coaching, little research has been conducted to specifically evaluate the value of these principles in a coaching context to address resilience and well-being. One notable exception is Grant et al. (2010) who applied a cognitive-behavioural solution-focused approach in a randomised controlled trial with teachers and found increases in resilience. The programme delivered 10 coaching sessions over a 20 week period, focussed on goal attainment, leadership style, stress, resilience and well-being.

Many models promoted in practitioner literature adopt cognitive elements and positive psychology in particular builds on these principles to advocate that a change in the focus of thinking can result in greater well-being.

Positive Psychology models

Positive Psychology is defined as 'the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people' (Gable & Haidt, 2005) and has many concepts that can be of value to coaches working with resilience and well-being.

Flourishing is indicative of psychological well-being and has five elements: positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A), known as PERMA (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA framework has been the basis of well-being programmes in schools (Kern et al., 2015) together with the Penn Resilience Programme (PRP) (Brunwasser et al., 2009). The PRP has shown significant success in reducing occurrences of depression in schools (Gillham et al., 2007) and in military contexts (Reivich et al., 2011) using cognitive behavioural principles to teach the 'skills' of resilience. The programme includes; problem solving, self-efficacy, self-regulation, emotional awareness, flexibility, empathy, strong relationships and an optimistic explanatory style.

The principle underlying this approach is that positive emotion can activate resources that contribute to well-being and resilience (Folkman, 2008). The Broaden and Build theory (Fredrickson, 2009) identifies three consequences of experiencing positive emotion that create an upward spiral supporting well-being. Firstly, we become more creative and are able to see a broader perspective on situations. Secondly, we are more able to build intellectual, physical, psychological and social resources, as we become more open to learning and are more likely to form relationships. Thirdly, positive emotion can 'undo' the effects of stressful experience as positivity can quell

cardiovascular activation caused by negativity. Consequently, the ability to generate positive experiences has been suggested as a mediator to increase resilience and well-being (Fredickson et al., 2003). It is not that resilient individuals do not experience negative emotions, but they are able to offset the impact by creating positive interpretations and it is suggested that positive experiences should outnumber the negative by 3:1 for best impact. Many interventions have been shown to help generate positive emotion (Lyubomirsky, 2011) and the concept of Hope (Lopez et al., 2004) and optimism (Seligman, 2003) provide useful tools for the coach to consider.

There will be times when a positive focus might be inappropriate, and coaches need to beware of directing the conversation, however this work does suggest that conversations about positive experiences can be valuable. Extensive literature is available on using strengths as a basis for positive coaching conversations (Linley et al., 2009) and the Feed Forward techniques has been shown to be an effective tool (McDowall et al.,2014). There is additional support for the value of asking clients to describe positive success stories from the concept of *capitalization*. Gable et al. (2004) found that 'communicating personal positive events with others was associated with increased daily positive affect and well-being, above and beyond the impact of the positive event itself' (p228). This effect was enhanced when others were perceived to respond actively and constructively. Since coaches will generally respond 'actively and constructively' this has clear implications for the value of eliciting positive stories or discussing strengths in coaching.

Another model with strong links to positive psychology is the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM) (Oades & Anderson,2012) that is described as a 'person-centred strengths based' approach (Oades et al.2009:25). This emphasises working with strengths

and values but the strong focus on collaboration, autonomy and developing a 'growth-mindset' fits well with a coaching approach. The two guiding principles are that recovery is an individual process so it encourages personal responsibility for well-being, and that collaboration should support the growth of autonomy. This autonomous and self-managed approach is consistent with coaching principles so could prove valuable for coaches wishing to work with resilience.

Self Determination Theory

The importance of promoting autonomy gains further support from Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) which can also contribute resilience and well-being coaching. As outlined by Spence and Deci (2013), SDT proposes that "human beings have a set of universal, fundamental psychological needs, the satisfaction of which are essential for healthy development, vital engagement, effective behaving, and psychological well-being" (p.90). The three basic psychological needs include:

- Autonomy – the need to feel one's behaviour is freely chosen
- Competence – the need to feel one is capable of operating effectively in their environment
- Relatedness – the need to feel well connected to others

One consequence of basic need satisfaction is a feeling of personal well-being (Bernard et al., 2014). As such, SDT has been proposed as a guiding framework for enhancing well-being in coaching (Gabriel et al., 2014) and for highlighting the importance of values enactment (Sheldon & Krieger, 2014) to support intrinsic motivations. Spence and Deci (2013) also detail ways the coach can support autonomy,

competence and relatedness in clients, whilst noting that the need for autonomy is considered primary because it helps people act in ways that lead to satisfying psychological outcomes. In contrast, Bernard et al. (2014) found that competence showed the largest impact when measuring mindfulness and subjective vitality as indicators of well-being. There would therefore seem to be much to learn about how to make best use of SDT in coaching for resilience and well-being since both autonomy and competence may play an important role. The third basic need - relatedness - seems less controversial as social support has been identified as key to enhancing resilience in a variety of contexts (Wilson & Ferch, 2005, Jackson et al., 2007).

Coaching may also be able to provide the most appropriate type of relationship necessary to support the development of resilience, which needs to encourage freedom and not compromise the sense of autonomy (Flach, 1988). A problem identified by Wilson and Ferch (2005) as the paradox of 'autonomy-community' which they explain as:

> 'The deeper our involvement in creative and transformative relationships, the more likely we are to grow and gain a stronger sense of self-empowerment and self-cultivation' (p51)

Resilience enhancing relationships must therefore support autonomy and build self-esteem, rather than rescue and sympathise. This could indicate that the coaching relationship has a unique role to play in the development of resilience and more research is needed to establish key mechanisms.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy/Training

Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) offers an alternative to the cognitive model by focusing not on changing thoughts, but on learning to accept them. The idea is that when we focus on and try to fight thoughts and feelings we create the very tension we seek to eliminate. This approach argues that by observing the mind and the language it uses we can learn to treat thoughts and feelings as 'passing through'. ACT means accepting thoughts and feeling, choosing a valued direction and taking action (Harris, 2009), this action orientation is in line with the approach many coaches feel is necessary. The central focus of *psychological flexibility*, often highlighted in resilience, makes ACT a potential model that coaches could adopt by working in six domains.

Contacting the present moment	Being psychologically present to the physical world and to our own internal world. Being in the here and now to avoid automatic reactions.
Defusion	Learning to 'step back' and observe thinking rather than becoming 'fused' with it. Observing what the mind is doing and telling us, as if thoughts were on leaves floating down a stream.
Acceptance	Making room for painful feelings and emotions to exist. Without fighting or running away from them, sitting with the pain that can be created.
Observing self	Activating the observing self as distinct from the thinking self. Being able to engage pure awareness to observe as an outsider events and thoughts.
Values	Clarifying values is an important step in creating a meaningful life.
Committed Action	Once values are clear action can be taken in line with those values. This may not be easy but the aim is to achieve 'valued living' rather than trying to avoid unpleasant experience.

Table 2: Acceptance and Commitment Model (Harris,2009)

Moran (2011) suggests that the solid evidence base for ACT and the strong focus on contextualisation makes it an appropriate framework for executive coaching in stressful situations. There are still few outcome studies for non-clinical populations but there is evidence that ACT interventions can reduce levels of stress and burnout (Brinkborg et al., 2011). Despite the limited evidence currently available (Hayes et al., 2006), some authors recommend it as a potential resilience coaching intervention (Pemberton, 2015).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been defined as 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment' (Kabat-Zinn, 2003:145).

Mindfulness therefore shares a number of commonalities with ACT by focusing on awareness and the acceptance of feelings and thoughts. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programmes include training on mindfulness practices and include topics such as stress reactivity, communication skills and self-acceptance. A comprehensive review of mindfulness-based coaching was completed by Virgili (2013), and specific texts related to coaching practice are available (Hall, 2013). Numerous studies show that even brief mindfulness programmes can reduce perceived stress (Klatt et al., 2009), improve burnout symptoms and life satisfaction (Mackenzie et al.,2 006) although this requires significant personal practice that is not always completed by participants (Foureur et al., 2013).

Data from the coaching context is more limited although in a group health coaching context the integration of mindfulness training has yielded positive results on

goal attainment (Spence et al., 2008). Spence et al. (2008) were able to combine

mindfulness training (MT) with coaching and established that mindfulness training had

more impact when delivered before, rather than after coaching. Participants who received

MT before coaching also reported decreases in depression and anxiety as measured by the

Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond,1995) although measures of

well-being did not reach significance levels.

The health setting has been a common testing ground for mindfulness practice and

has shown promising results in promoting resilience in first year paediatric students

(Olson et al., 2015). More extensive research with children and youths suggests a role in

'improving cognitive performance and resilience to stress' although the wide range of

instruments and the diversity of samples in studies means that data should be treated with

caution (Zenner at al. 2014).

Narrative Approach

In times of difficulty the power of narrative has been shown to confer unique

benefits that may account for why leaders report coaching as helping their resilience.

Lawton Smith (2015) completed a qualitative study with eight leaders who had been

coached by seven different coaches to identify to what degree they felt coaching had

helped their resilience, despite resilience not being the stated aim of the coaching

engagement. The leaders interviewed explained that coaching had helped their resilience

in five ways. Firstly, it helped them re-claim their self-belief, constant issues tended to

undermine their inner confidence, leading to self-doubt and a loss of the self-belief.

Talking to a coach helped rebuild that. Secondly, they expressed how they learnt ideas

and techniques, but also that they learnt about themselves. Third, they valued the ability

of the coach to widen their perspective, to help them see things in new or different ways. The fourth item mentioned supports previous research on the value of a supportive relationship. The coaching relationship fulfilled part of that role for leaders, who often feel that they cannot share thoughts and feelings at work and who do not want to burden friends and family. Finally, leaders expressed the value of just having the thinking space. They commented on the value of focussed reflective time and the importance of being able to vocalise concerns, emotions or ideas. The coaching space effectively gave permission for the self-focus that is not usually acceptable in an organisational setting when all discussions commonly have a work-place agenda. All five areas showed overlap and interactions represented in Figure 1.
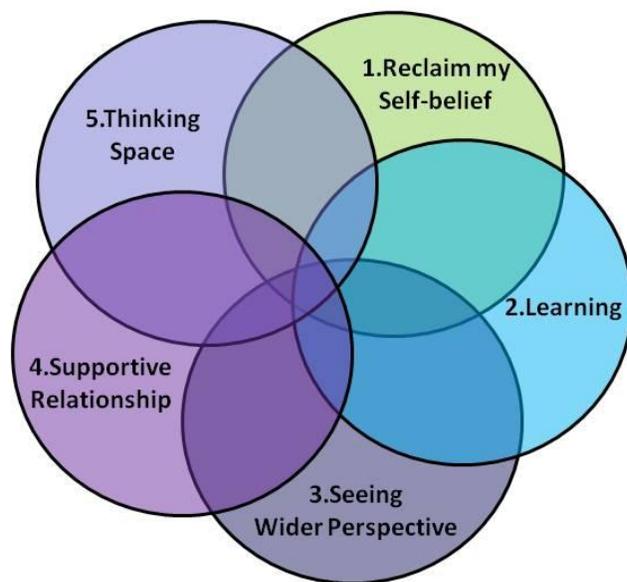

Fig. 1 How coaching helps resilience (Lawton Smith, 2015)

More recent support for these findings come from Timson (2015) who evaluated a more structured coaching programme specifically addressing the resilience of managers in the public sector. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data also identified five themes. Participants highlighted the *pressured environment* under which they were working and the value of many *tools and techniques* that they had learnt. These newly learnt resilient behaviours were helping the participants *move forward*. This group also specifically mentioned the value of the *time and space* that the coaching sessions gave them, and how important the independent supportive relationship with the *coaches* had been.

Both these studies highlight the importance of having someone who can give dedicated time and space, to act as a 'sounding board'. In trying to define why this process can be so valuable Niederhoffer and Pennebaker (2005) suggested that 'not talking about emotional upheaval was ultimately unhealthy' (p575) because suppression of thoughts or emotions, required physiological work, reflected in central nervous system activity. However, expressing emotion in verbal form seems to confer two benefits. Firstly, in order to construct a coherent narrative that can be conveyed to another person the individual needs to order events that give a sense of control. Secondly, once formed, this narrative can be 'summarized, stored and ultimately forgotten' (p576). These cognitive processes give a sense of meaning and closure to potentially difficult events. In order to tell the story to a coach the client is engaged in cognitive meaning making that is, in itself, a valuable process to reduce the emotional impact, but telling the story may reduce the physiological strain caused by inhibition. Once the story is told, this brings a secondary benefit by minimising the potential isolation that can result from secrecy. Therefore, the actual process of coaching is likely to help individual resilience by

supporting meaning making and by creating a social connection that reduces the physiological strain caused by suppression.

Hardiness

One construct often discussed synonymously with resilience but frequently seen as a subset of it, is 'hardiness' (Maddi, 2006) defined as:

- Commitment. The belief that as times get tough it is better to stay involved with people and events around you rather than pulling out.
- Control. The belief that it is better to try and influence the outcomes in which they are involved rather than give up.
- Challenge. The view that, change is a natural opportunity to grow.

Hardiness has been described as 'a pathway to resilience' (Maddi, 2006) and an indicator of mental health (Maddi et al, 2002). Hardy and less hardy individuals seem to experience events in a similar way but those high in hardiness demonstrate higher confidence and self efficacy (Westman, 1990), appraise events as less stressful and engage in more task-focused coping (Delahaij et al., 2010) as opposed to regressive (emotional) coping strategies such as denial or withdrawal (Florian et al., 1995). Despite consistent correlations with numerous positive outcomes (Maddi et al., 2002) the hardiness construct has been criticised on the validity of merging the three subscales into a single hardiness score (Funk & Houston, 1987) and the lack of causal relationships identified. One suggestion is that since hardy individuals believe in their ability to resolve issues they use less energy in dealing with the internal emotions aroused and can therefore focus personal resources on task-focused strategies and as a result perform better (Westman, 1990).

The Mental Toughness model builds on the hardiness construct but adds confidence (Clough at al., 2002) and has been successfully enhanced using a strengths-based coaching approach in the sporting context (Gordon, 2012). Mental Toughness Questionnaire (MTQ48) (Perry et al., 2013) scores have been found to correlate with higher personal well-being and academic performance (Stamp et al., 2015) and in adolescents mental toughness was also found to mitigate high stress and depressive symptoms (Gerber, 2013). Some suggest the MTQ can form the basis for a coaching discussion (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012) to increase self-awareness and personal responsibility.

Future Research Directions

This final section will highlighted a number of potential directions for future research.

Conceptual clarity

Coaching research has generally adapted measures and approaches from other disciplines and it may be time to establish both a definition and a conceptualisation that clearly fits the coaching context. Since coaching is a joint meaning-making endeavour, an interesting research direction would be investigating how coaches and clients make meaning of resilience, as a counterpoint to established psychological definitions that may not reflect the felt experience of resilience for individuals. Creating a shared understanding in the coaching interaction is important to gain engagement from clients and stakeholders, and definitions that focus on sustainability and thriving could help

minimise the chances of disengagement due to coaching for resilience being seen as a sign of deficit.

Relevant approaches for coaching

Numerous models are available, many with limited empirical validation in the coaching context so more research is needed to establish which of the models from other domains are most effective or appropriate for coaching. Many factors have been identified as relevant so it is important to gain an understanding of the respective influence of each, and how they might interact. The coaching relationship also adds another variable. It might be that *any* coaching demonstrates a positive impact, not by virtue of the tools or model used, but simply due to the power of the relationship (de Haan, 2008) and the time and space made available. Further research on the critical mechanisms seems essential to moving forward.

What might be the limits of what coaching can achieve?

Coaching may have a unique contribution to make to resilience and well-being by providing an integrated approach. The coach may work with individual assets such as problem solving skills or reframing, they can provide the social support required and can encourage analysis of the system within which the individual is operating. In addition, the relationship and opportunity for personal meaning making can encourage the more holistic development proposed by the developmental approach. Yet all personal change occurs in a context so there needs to be a clearer understanding of the potential impact of the system. There may be times when the systemic factors mean that a coaching approach is inappropriate or inadequate to generate the desired effect. Well-being and resilience

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will be partly dependent on the system and coaching alone is unlikely to be able to resolve all issues.

The long and wide view

The focus on the broader organisational perspective raises two further potential areas for learning. Firstly, if the system can have an impact on the individual we need to understand more about how the coached individual can impact the system around them so further work on the 'ripple effect' in relation to resilience and well-being would be valuable. Secondly, there has been little longitudinal work to establish how the respective approaches work long term. There is a suggestion that resilience may be a resource that fluctuates so research into long-term outcomes is important. With previous research so focussed on the individual at a specific point in time, it is now time to take the long and the wide view.

Conclusion

Coaching for resilience and well-being draws from many alternative strands of thought and this breadth is creating fragmentation but certain themes are now emerging to guide the work of the coach in this area. While there may be a genetic element, it is clear that coaching can have an impact by helping clients to manage their attention and observe their thought processes. Some thoughts can be questioned for alternative perspectives, while others can be managed and controlled through acceptance. The key is to raise awareness of how the mind is dealing with the information it receives and promote more conscious decision-making. We have also learnt that broader systemic factors such as social support are important, so helping the clients to marshal these resources can be

valuable and starts to build their sense of autonomy and control that has been shown to be

so vital in promoting resilience. The coaching relationship does seem to confer a space to

allow for the personal developmental sense-making that is needed to process challenging

events by giving the time and space for a non-judgemental conversation. Because the

coaching conversation can evaluate alternative perspectives, can draw on positive

experience to rebalance the negative and can respond constructively, it is able to enhance

resilience and well-being.

 Coaching for resilience and well-being is at a relatively early stage of

development and we need far greater understanding of the mechanisms involved and how

to best interact with clients on these issues but we have established that coaching already

has a significant role to play.

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