

Putting the Resilience Back into Resilience: Leading in a Challenged World

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Outline

- The context we live in
- What is resilience?
- Need for a need for a new perspective
- How resilience really works
- Practical implications for leadership and coaching.
- Results of our first research foray

We live in a challenged world



Both the direction and the pathway are unclear

Some more real world critical challenges facing us....

- Covid-19 Delta, Omicron
- Increasing stress and illness
- Increasing loneliness and suicide rates
- The “great resignation”
- Gallup suggests 70% of workers in the US are unhappy or don’t care for what they do.
- Algorithmic approaches to decision making
- Increasing hyper-individualisation.
- Loss of privacy and big data
- Are you depressed yet?

- Are these emerging trends our concern as leaders and coaches?

Discussion

- In this challenged and challenging world, what does it mean to be resilient?
 - What questions does this view mean we don't ask?
 - What assumptions are we making?
- What is the role of the coach and our peers?

How well are coaches doing at helping leaders face the challenges facing them?

How well are leaders doing at facing these challenges?

- Lehman Brothers
- Goldman Sachs
- Anderson Consulting
- AMP
- Morgan Stanley
- RBS
- Enron
- Energy companies
- Tobacco
- Financial services
- Mining, coal, oil
- Politicians.....



Where were the coaches? Where were the peers?



If nothing changes.....



Working in a challenged and challenging world needs the wisdom of Einstein...

“A problem cannot be solved with the same level of thinking that created it.”

Albert Einstein

How do we move to next level thinking and perspectives?
How do we help our clients build bigger perspectives.



What has this got to do with resilience?



What is resilience?

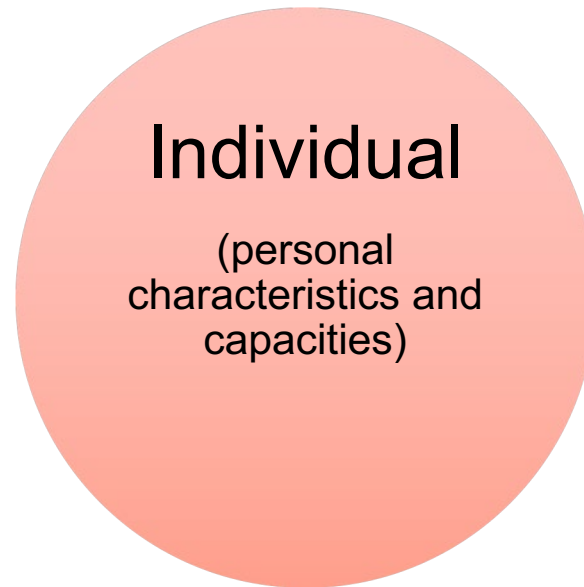
- Comes from the Latin verb resiliere, or ‘to leap back’
- OED definition:

‘Being able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions’

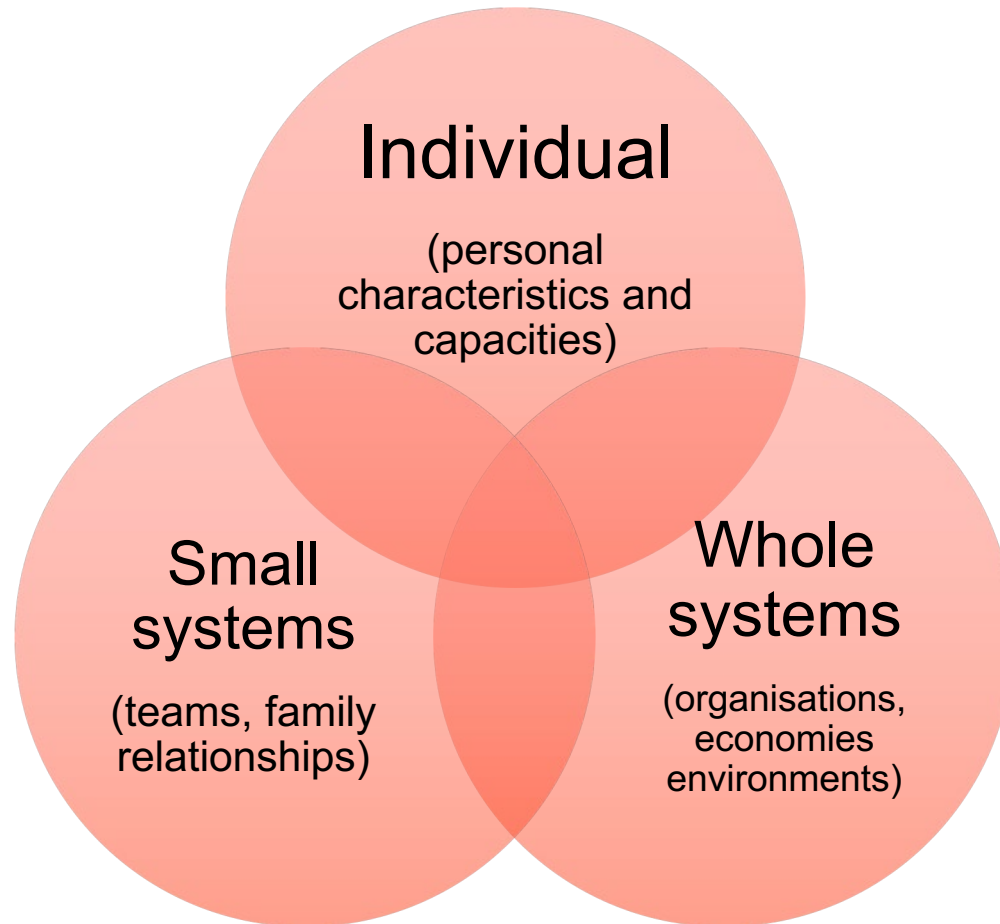
Resilience – the standard view

- Resilience is typically seen as a personal characteristic upon which people differ - the individual differences approach
- Resilience programs seek to teach people the cognitive and emotional management skills that make them “resilient”
- Wagnild and Young (1993) Resilience is “the characteristic of an individual which facilitates adaptation and moderates the negative impacts of stress.”
 - “This is made up of stable personal factors including: reflectiveness, positive responsiveness to others, above average intelligence, equanimity, self-reliance, meaningfulness, a wide range of personal and social activities and interests, perseverance, and an optimistic and energetic approach to life”. Denovan, Crust, and Clough, (2016) Resilience at Work – p.135

Our view of resilience – An individual capacity



The world view in our approach to resilience



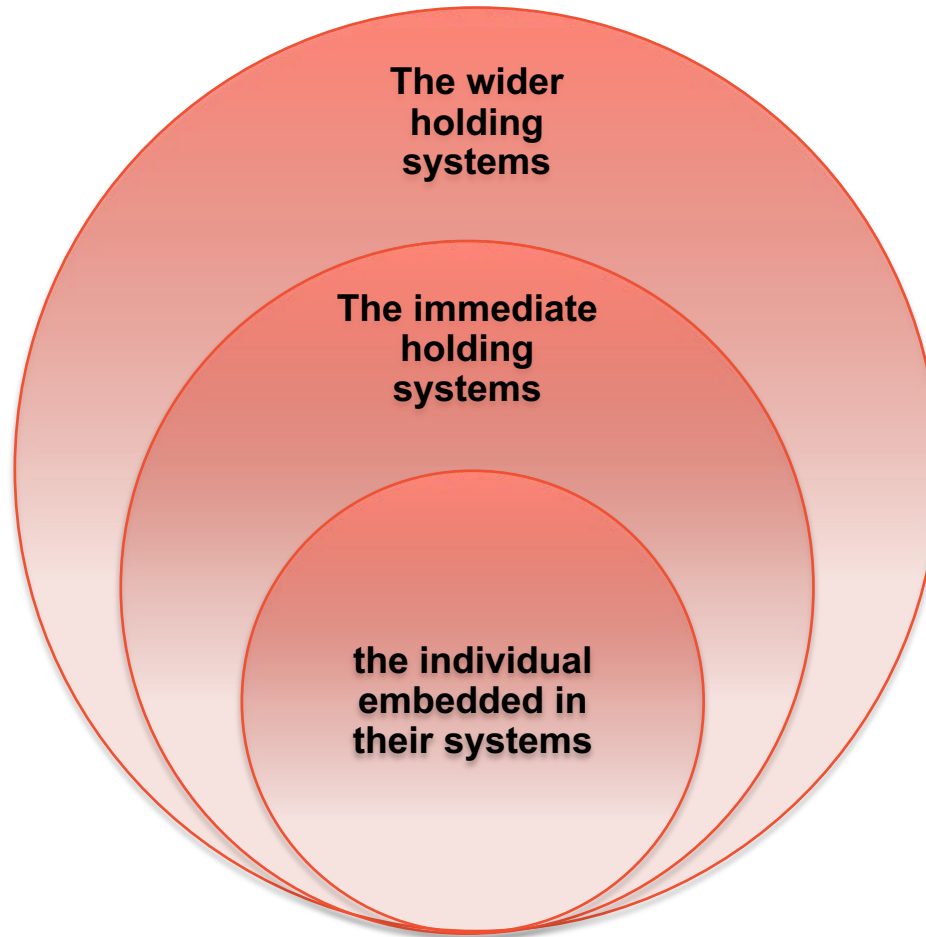
But do resilience programmes actually build resilience?

- Robertson Cooper Sarkar and Curran (2015) in a systematic review of resilience training found:
 1. “Most programmes utilize a cognitive-behavioural approach to developing resilience.”
 2. “Despite conceptual and theoretical support for resilience training, the empirical evidence is tentative, with the exception of a large effect for mental health and subjective well-being outcomes.”
 3. “At this stage, there is no definitive evidence for the most effective training content or format, but it would appear wise to include an element of one-to-one training and support based on individual needs.”

So what is the problem?

- I think we have a faulty understanding of resilience for two main reasons:
 1. When we see it as simply a feature of the person that is mostly, if not entirely psychological, we focus in the wrong place and the wrong unit of analysis.
 - This is an error of category. Resilience is a relation between the person and the environment, not a characteristic of the person.
 2. We look at outcome and mistake it for what produces the outcome (in a Forrest Gump circular kind of way)
 - Resilience is as resilience does
- These lead to decontextualizing resilience

What if we saw resilience with a systems perspective?



The dark side of resilience?

- Our current models of resilience:
 1. Place the responsibility for meeting organisational challenges on the individual.
 2. This leads to blaming the victim
 3. Worse still, when we buy into this model (and most of us do) we end up blaming ourselves.
 - We have bought the cult of the individual
 - A type of auto-exploitation that makes matters worse and blocks effectively addressing the issue. (Byung Chul Han)

Resilience - a systemic view

- Resilience is a relation between a subsystem (person, team, organisation etc.) and the environment in which they are challenged.
- It requires the possession of redundant resources and capacities that can be brought to bear on the challenge.
 - These redundant capacities are made up of both internal and external resources that are sufficient to the challenge being faced (across the whole time-frame of that challenge)

Hence:

- Building resilience is about building resource-full environments. And the internal capacities that help us access the external resources needed to face the whole set of challenges to be found in the context.

Relation or property?



Systems theories that support our view:

1. Fitness landscapes (Kaufman)



The landscape



The challenge



capacity in order to deal with the challenges of our
increasingly changing landscapes
additional capacity?



thin ourselves
for any challenge, so



2. Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety

- Also known as the first law of cybernetics.
- Stated simply (but not so helpfully) Ashby's law says:

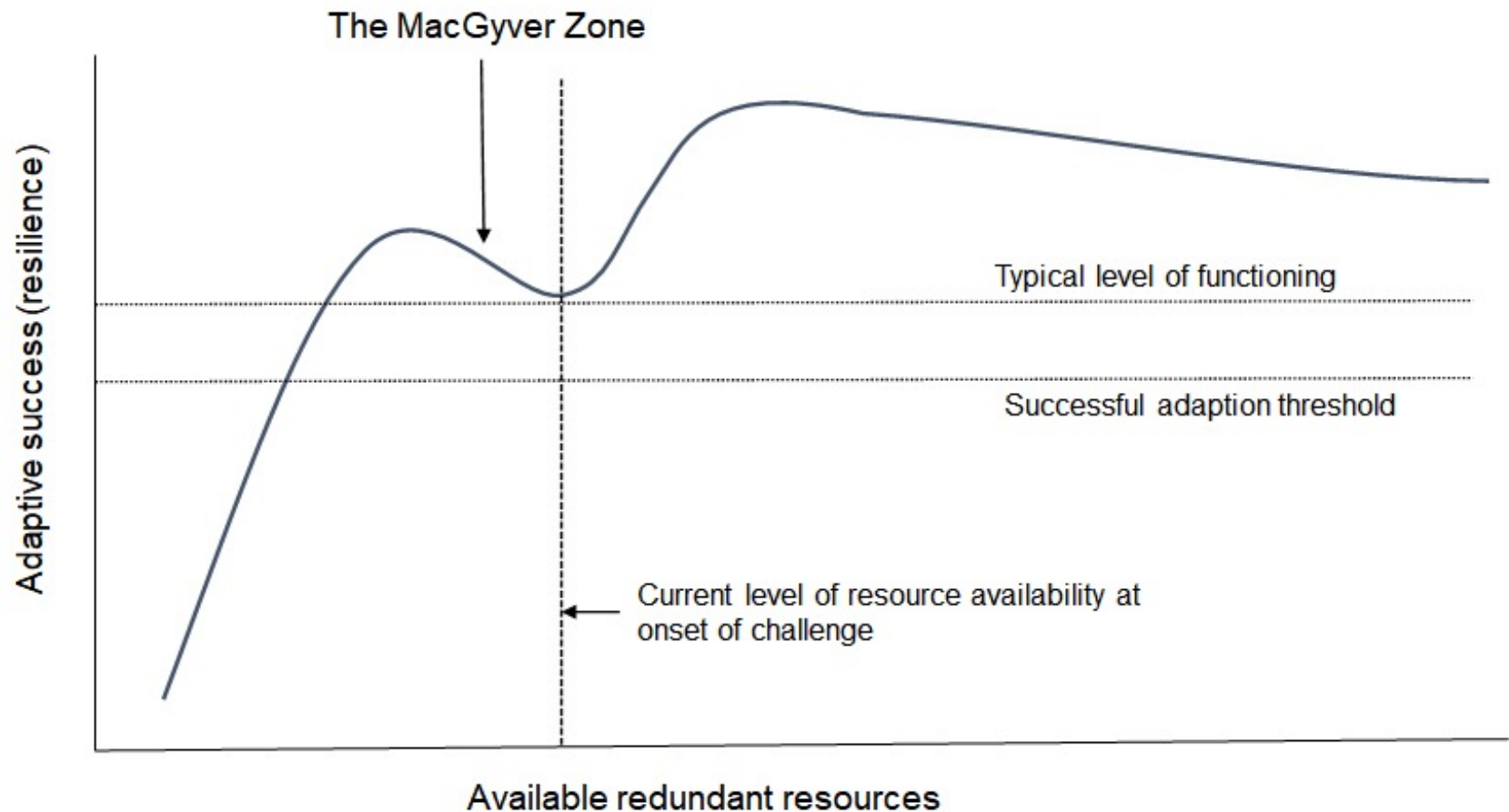
“Only variety can absorb variety.”

- In other words, if a system is to be able to successfully meet the diverse challenges presented by its environment, then it needs to have a repertoire of responses that meets the full range of challenges it faces.

Implications for practice in a rapidly changing world

- We need redundant resources.
- Both internal and external resources are necessary
- Internal resources (knowledge, creativity, optimism, persistence etc) *function to enhance access to external resources* - provided they are available
 - They **moderate** the relationship between the person/group and their challenge.
- External resources (time, money, social networks, infrastructure, employment, etc) are necessary to meet the challenge
 - they **mediate** the relation between the person/group and the challenge.

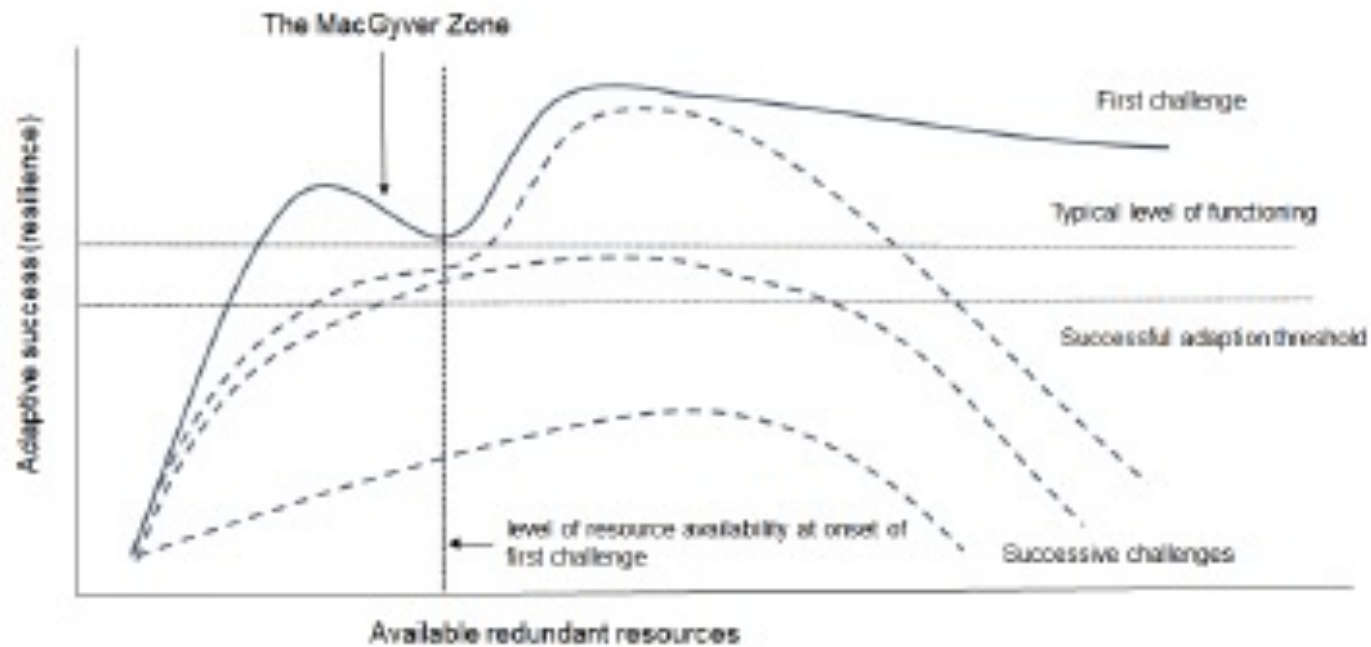
Resilience in practice – How does it work



The impact of multiple challenges

Figure 2

Putative Changes in the Resilience Curve as Multiple Challenges are Encountered.



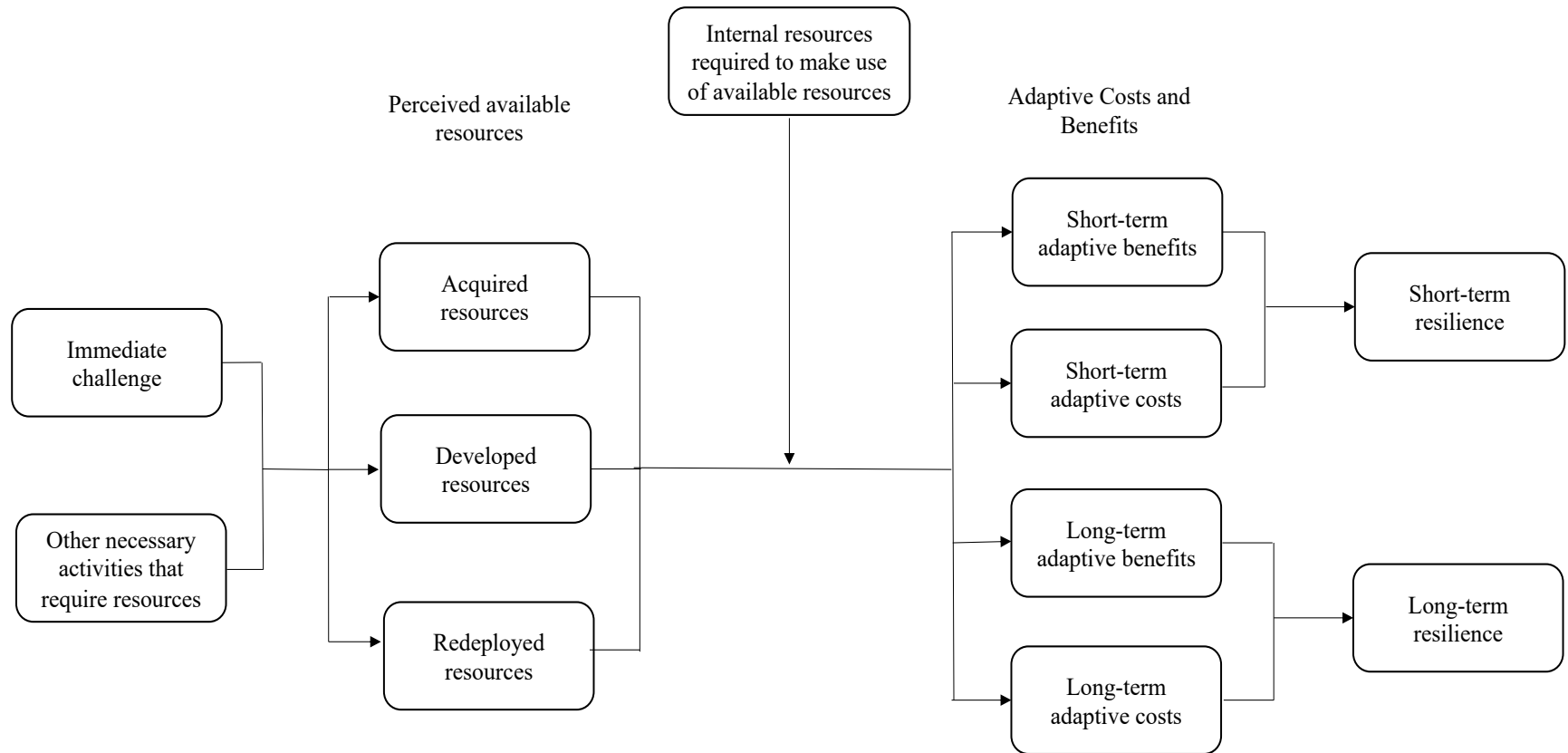
Practical things we can do as leaders and coaches.

- Efficiency is the enemy of resilience - we need redundancy in time, energy and other resources.
 - We should be trying to create resource-full environments
- Diversity builds resilience because diversity is diversity of perspectives, capacities and resources
 - we need each other to get through a challenging world.
- Learn from nature - exploration is as important as exploitation
 - 3M, Google and others have learnt this lesson
- The individualist world view is dangerous, and mistaken
 - Covid proves this.
- Build resources you don't need right now.

3 Pathways to redundant resources

1. We can access resources we currently possess and are not being used (Acquired resources).
 - This has opportunity costs – we cannot use those resources for other things
2. We can liberate resources that we are currently using elsewhere (redeployed resources)
 - This has direct costs – we lose the benefits gained from the other areas from which we borrow resources
3. We can create or develop new resources (developed resources)
 - This has direct costs – we have to put resources into resource development.

Resilience - a path analysis



Please note: correlations will exist between each of the perceived available resources and each of the adaptive benefits and costs. These paths have been collapsed to aid clarity.

The first research evidence - Katie Foulkes (2020)

- 7 participants held up by others to be mentally tough, optimistic and resilient (Olympic athletes).
- An interpretative phenomenological analysis approach
- How did these elite athletes handle the transition to life after elite sport?
- The results confirmed that access to appropriate redundant resources facilitates adaptation to the challenge
- The key findings point to a need to shift from the popular individualistic perspective of resilience to a perspective that enables an understanding of resilience that is more nuanced, relational and systemic.

One participant.....

- “I genuinely believed that if they [referring to the governing sporting body] were considering who would transition well, they would have looked at my set up and thought ‘she’s got it all together’. But I didn’t plan for needing surgery straight after finishing my sporting career”.
- “I had planned that I would be financially okay for three months post the Olympics. But when that became six to nine months, I effectively had zero dollars in my bank account and had lost the privilege to be able to take the time to choose where I wanted to work. I took the first paying gig, which was completely undervaluing myself and my experiences, but it was due to desperation”.

Some key findings

- Access to a broad range of external resources combined with a proactive approach to the continual acquisition and development of resources was associated with adaptive success.
- Furthermore, even when the athletes had access to appropriate resources to meet the challenges at hand, the moment that resource depleted, so too did adaptation.
- For instance, in spite of saving money for the challenge of athlete transition, one athlete described that their savings account depleted quickly when they were faced with the additional challenge of a significant injury that required hospitalisation. This resource depletion went hand in hand with a reduction of opportunities and decisions – and, in turn, adaptation.
- the majority of participants were ‘blind’ to the presence of resources and the role they played in successful adaptation.
 - Until these resources were threatened (for example, diminishing bank account balances). Then the role of these external resources became salient and were mobilised for adaptive success.

Summary

- These findings illustrate that both internal and external resources play a role in adaptation. Specifically, it is access to external resources that makes the difference for adaptation, however internal resources make that access possible.

Discussion



- Any thoughts, questions or comments you would like to share?

Thank you for listening.

- If you would like to contact me:

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