

# The resilience inventory: Seven essential skills for overcoming life's obstacles and determining happiness

*Whether you think that you can, or that you can't, you are usually right* - Henry Ford

How resilient are you? How well do you react to unexpected challenges and conflicts? The Resilience Inventory draws together 15 years of research and proven techniques that can help improve the capacity of individuals to handle life's inevitable surprises and setbacks. The inventory can help to evaluate the impact of thinking on emotions and behaviour. This is based on the premise that it is not simply what happens to us, but how we respond to what happens to us, that has the greatest effect on the trajectory of our personal and working lives.

## **Resilience: What's in a word?**

In the early 1990s Dr Martin Seligman, alongside three of his colleagues - Lisa Jaycox, Jane Gillham, and Karen Reivich - developed a skills-based depression prevention programme known as the Penn Resilience Programme (PRP). Karen and Andrew Shatte continued this work in applied settings drawing on Seligman's 1970s work around causal attribution and explanatory style. However, the roots of resilience go far deeper.

In 1942 Aaron Beck entered the Psychiatry programme at Yale University. Trained in the Freudian psychoanalytical techniques prominent at the time, he was bemused to find that his patients didn't want to talk with him about their dreams or problems with their parents. The very reason that they had sought therapy was that they wanted to talk about now - to share their thoughts about themselves, their world, their future and how that

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*Rachel Jackson & Chris Watkin*  
*Hay Group*

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made them feel now. Beck made the vital connection between the worlds of thought and emotion and he began to work with his patients to address not the fundamental origins of those emotions, but the thoughts and beliefs in the moment that sustained and fed those emotions over time (Beck, 1967). It was Beck's cognitive therapy model, coupled with Martin Seligman's research (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995) and the theories of Albert Ellis, which really underpinned the PRP.

The PRP was successful and gained funding from the US National Institute of Mental Health. In 1994 corporate America got wind of this new programme and a Fortune 100 company in the then turbulent healthcare industry asked the team at Penn University to help them build the resilience of their workforce. In response to this need, Adaptiv Learning Systems (ALS) was formed, through which Andrew Shatte and Karen Reivich, among others, now deliver training in the corporate arena across the US.

## **Understanding resilience**

Resilience is fundamentally underpinned by the concept that it is not so much the hard times we face that determine our success or failure as the way in which we respond to those hard times. In particular:

- the accuracy of our analysis of events;
- the number of alternative scenarios we can envisage;

- the ability to be flexible;
- the continued drive to take on new opportunities and challenges.

Although many of the external pressures on our resilience can neither be controlled nor reversed – the rain will continue to fall, the market will often be slack and we will never be able to regain those lost hours spent in traffic jams – evidence suggests that our internal thinking processes can both moderate the impact of these adversities and provide a valuable resource in moving forward from them, focusing on the things we can control rather than those we cannot.

Imagine the following scenario. You've just come back to the office following an important sales meeting. You think it went well, but when your phone rings your client tells you they have decided not to go with your proposal. Your first thought is 'I messed up', shortly followed by vivid memories of the mistakes you made during the presentation. You then remember another incident several months back when the same thing happened and you amend your thinking to 'I'm no good at selling'. Later that day, you realise you've forgotten to send a sales proposition to a different client. In the course of one bad day, you're now able to say with confidence 'I am just useless at everything!' Imagine the impact on your confidence and sales activities for the next month.

But what if you changed your thinking pattern? What if you noticed the general slump in sales across the business, took account of your 40 successful sales proposals year to date, recognised how you excel at negotiating the final deal and just carried on through the day with a realistic view of your chances of success, taking what you did right in those situations to aid you in the one you're facing now, rather than spending that time in helplessness?

The key to resilience is the ability to recognise your own thoughts and structures of belief and harness the power of increased accuracy and flexibility of thinking to manage the emotional and behavioural consequences more effectively. This ability can be measured, taught and improved.

## Measuring resilience

Working in partnership with Adaptiv, we have built on our experience of working with Daniel Goleman (1998) to produce the 360° Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), to develop a similar diagnostic tool to measure individual resilience – the Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI). The RFI is based on the original self-score test developed by Reivich and Shatte(2002). It is a 60-item, multi-rater 360° feedback instrument, which provides self, manager, direct report and peer perspectives on the seven factors identified as underpinning resilience (see Table 1).

As a 360° tool, the RFI acts as a mirror for individuals to understand and recognise some of their non-resilient thoughts and behaviours. Many individuals will be all too aware of their own low levels of resilience. For them, the RFI offers increased clarity about which areas of the model may offer most leverage in turning the corner into renewed resilient thinking and behaviour. For others there is a chance to benefit from the feedback they receive from reports, peers and managers to increase resilience further – or even to come to terms with potential areas of risk where their resilience may not yet have been tested.

As a defining principle, we believe that simply enhancing individual awareness using the RFI as a mirror is not enough. The RFI is not a tool to be used lightly or in isolation for recruitment or assessment decisions. It is an instrument primarily for raising self awareness and as a means of engagement with the resilience concepts during a development or coaching programme. The factors on which individuals receive feedback are also scaled competencies that can be developed, and we believe that guidance and support in that development path is key to building individual and organisational resilience.

## Resilience development programme

A development programme based on the RFI focuses on seven key skills proven in both clinical and corporate settings to boost resilience. These do not map one-to-one against the seven factors, but are used flexibly across the model to boost resilience overall.

**Table 1. Seven factors of resilience**

1. *Emotion regulation* – the ability to manage our internal world in order to stay effective under pressure. Resilient people use a well developed set of skills that help them to control their emotions, attention and behaviour.
2. *Impulse control* – the ability to manage the behavioural expression of thoughts emotional impulses, including the ability to delay gratification explored in Daniel Goleman's work in Emotional Intelligence. Impulse Control is correlated with Emotion Regulation.
3. *Causal analysis* – the ability to accurately identify the causes of adversity. Resilient people are able to get outside their habitual thinking styles to identify more possible causes and thus more potential solutions.
4. *Self-efficacy* – the sense that we are effective in the world – the belief that we can solve problems and succeed. Resilient people believe in themselves and as a result, build others' confidence in them – placing them in line for more success and more opportunity.
5. *Realistic optimism* – the ability to stay positive about the future yet be realistic in our planning for it. It is linked to self-esteem but a more causal relationship exists with self-efficacy and involves accuracy and realism – not Pollyanna-style optimism.
6. *Empathy* – the ability to read other's behavioural cues to understand their psychological and emotional states and thus build better relationships. Resilient people are able to read others non-verbal cues to help build deeper relationships with others, and tend to be more in tune with their own emotional states.
7. *Reaching out* – the ability to enhance the positive aspects of life and take on new challenge and opportunity. Reaching out behaviours are hampered by embarrassment, perfectionism and self-handicapping.

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### *Seven skills to boost your resilience*

1. *ABC* – Learning to recognise the impact of your 'in the moment' thoughts and beliefs on behavioural and emotional consequences of adversity
2. *Thinking traps* – Recognising the errors in thinking we are often unaware of; for example, jumping to conclusions.
3. *Detecting icebergs* – Building an awareness of the deep-seated beliefs we have of how the world works and how this can impact upon our emotions and behaviour.
4. *Calming and focusing* – Finding ways to step back from adversity, create breathing space and think more resiliently.
5. *Challenging beliefs* – A process by which the breadth and thus accuracy of our understanding of events can be enhanced, leading to more effective and sustained problem-solving behaviours.
6. *Putting it in perspective* – Learning to stop the spiralling of catastrophic thinking and turn it into realistic thinking.
7. *Real-time resilience* – Putting it all into practice

in the moment; this skill is reliant on mastering the others and offers a 'fast skill' which does not rely on having the time to think through a resilience reaction in depth.

These seven skills fall into three basic categories (see Figure 1):

- Three key skills to *analyse your beliefs* in order to build your awareness of how these beliefs can impact upon your resilience (ABC, Thinking traps and Detecting icebergs);
- One skill to *transfer your attention* in the moment to enable you to get on with the task at hand in a resilient way (Calming and Focusing)
- Three skills to *change your beliefs* and begin to challenge the way that your thinking can lead you away from resilience (Challenging Beliefs, Putting it in Perspective and Real Time Resilience);
- There is also a distinction between *thorough* skills which require some time commitment, and *fast* skills which can be applied to boost resilience in the moment.

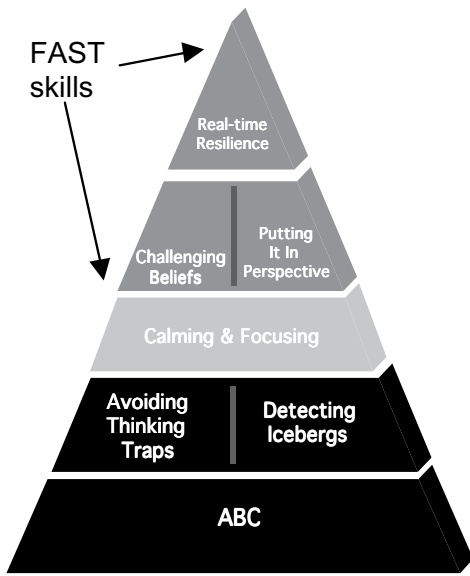


Figure 1.

During a development programme, participants follow a journey through these skills (pioneered during the original Adaptiv PRP programme), learning how to apply the right skills at the right time, as illustrated in Figure 2.

### The value of resilience

Results of running the RFI development programme in the corporate arena have been impressive. At Edward Jones Investments in St Louis, a group of investment representatives attended a 12-hour resilience programme over a weekend as the final part of their licensure as brokers. This group went on to outperform their peers in measures of total client assets under management and gross commission by almost 2:1 at one, three and nine months following the intervention.

At Sprint, the Kansas-based global integrated communications provider, a sample group of 15 customer sales representatives (CSRs) outperformed a control sample on four measures of call

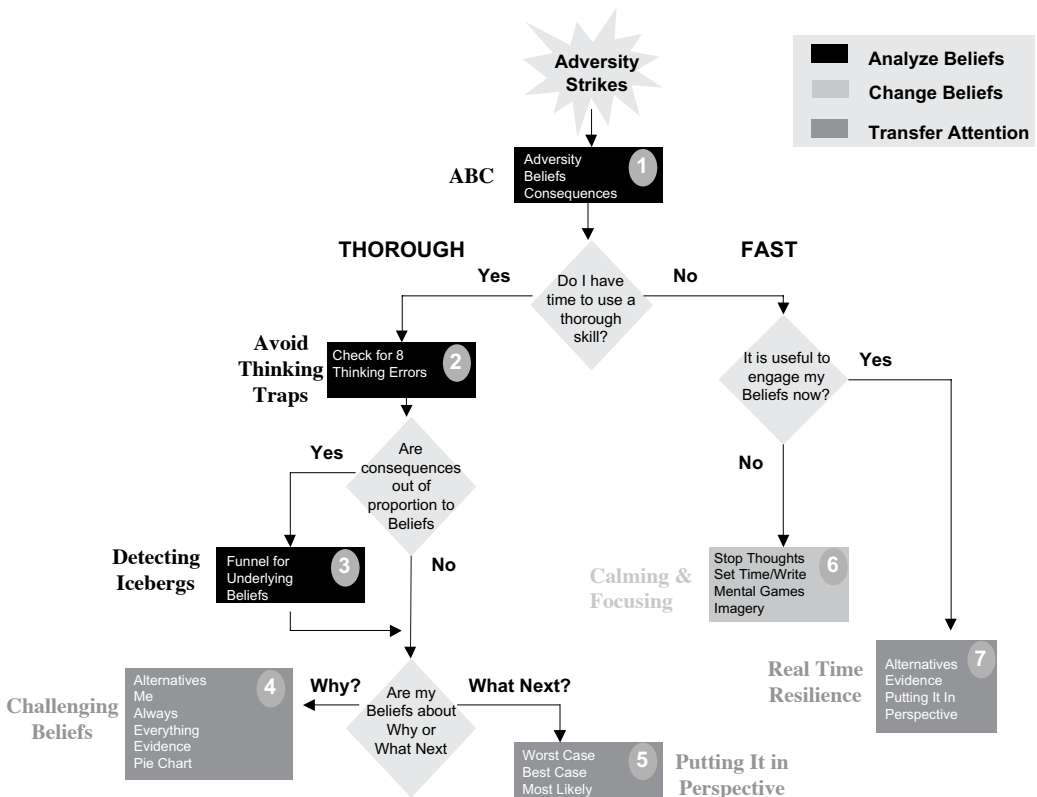


Figure 2: A diagrammatic overview of Adaptiv Training - How to apply the right skills at the right time.

and sales effectiveness in the three months following training on just five of the seven resilience-boosting skills. In fact, following this intervention Sprint concluded a single training programme with 15 participants could increase CSR performance by 17,250 true calls per year.

Adaptiv have also worked with companies as diverse as Merrill Lynch, Verizon, Microsoft, US Marine Corps, Pharmacia and Penn Athletics - with equally successful results across the board.

Dean Becker, president and CEO of Adaptiv, has accounted for the success of of RFI-based development programmes in the *Harvard Business Review*: 'More than Education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience determine who succeeds and who fails. That's true in the cancer ward, it's true in the Olympics, and it's true in the boardroom' (Coutu, 2002).

For details of the RFI Accreditation programme see *The Psychologist* or contact Hilary Pienaar at the Hay Group on +44 207 856 7155

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## Contact

Rachel Jackson and Chris Watkin consult across the leadership development and coaching arena for the Hay Group, a consultancy specialising in delivering strategy through people. They can be contacted on:

rachel\_jackson@haygroup.com

chris\_watkin@haygroup.com