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WHAT IS RESILIENCE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Resilience is a way of combating stressors in your life. We define it as people's developable capacity to adapt to change, adversity, and stressors in a way that not only allows them to bounce back, but also to grow and improve from the experience.

Research shows that the relationship between stress and performance takes on an inverse U shape – moderate levels of stress are healthy and improve productivity while too much or too little stress is damaging to performance, sometimes severely. Statistics that are emerging from the American Psychological Association paint a clear picture – employees are experiencing a heightened, and even dangerous, level of stress.

- 69% of employees report that work is significant source of stress.
- 51% of employees say they are less productive due to stress. For example, they have difficulty focusing on tasks, they make more errors, or miss deadlines.
- 52% of employees say that stress impacts career decisions. That is, they have considered or made a decision about their careers such as looking for a new job, declining a promotion, or leaving a job based on workplace stress.
- #1 – Job pressure is the top cause of stress in the United States.
- SIX – Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, accidents, lung disease, liver disease, and suicide.

While stress is nothing new, in today's workplace a high level of personal stress has become the norm. When people are feeling overwhelmed, they are unable to cope with adversity and are often paralyzed by inaction. This decreases productivity and increases other personal and organizational costs like health care and expenses related to absenteeism.

Stress and adversity are not going to disappear, so a person's ability to become more resilient to life's challenges is more important than ever. Research shows that highly resilient people respond to challenges with flexibility, bounce back from challenges, and even find opportunities within workplace stress. They perform more effectively in their jobs, are healthier, more engaged with their work, and have higher commitment to their organizations. The good news for employees and organizations is that resilience can be learned and developed.

TRACOM's Adaptive Mindset for Resiliency™ Concepts Guide teaches people about the sources of their stress, their response patterns to stress, and practical strategies for altering those responses. The guide is based on decades of research on resiliency, as well as new and groundbreaking research in neuroscience. You will gain insights about yourself and learn about concrete ways to buffer yourself from workplace stressors. You will be able to use these skills immediately to enhance your resilience and improve your job performance.



Resilience Benefits Exercise

Based on what you've learned about resilience so far, answer the following questions:

- What are your most stressful challenges at work?

- If everyone on your team enhanced their resiliency, what would that look like on a daily basis?

- What do you hope to get out of this session?

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Which emotion(s) do you see expressed on this person's face?



This face is designed to be ambiguous – it is a mix of both positive and negative expressions and can be interpreted either way. Interestingly, however, most people interpret this face negatively rather than positively. This is an illustration of the negativity bias. The negativity bias is the idea that we are hard-wired to focus on negative, unpleasant information compared to positive information. There is a lot of research to support this negativity bias.

- In one study, researchers showed participants positive, negative, and neutral stimuli and found that electrical activity in the cerebral cortex was strongest in response to negative stimuli. So, we are wired to focus on negative information.
- This negativity bias is even evident in our language. For example, of the 558 emotion words in the U.S. English Dictionary, 62% of them are negative and only 38% of them are positive. And, of the most common emotion words that people use, 70% of them are negative. This means that we have a more complex and varied way of conceptualizing negative feelings compared to positive ones.

This negativity bias has a strong influence over us. Even when we experience a lot of positive events in our day, one negative event can dramatically alter our moods. Negative events are more likely to draw our attention and have a stronger, more long-lasting impact on us. This negativity bias means we often feel overwhelmed by challenges, we see threats where none exist, and we fail to see opportunity in adversity. In short, the negativity bias keeps us from being as resilient as we can be.

All is not lost, however. Our brains have evolved to counter this negativity bias and generate more positive brain circuitry. On the next page, you will see what I mean.



on our report, we immediately imagine the worst – we experience this wave of anxiety and fear. Because of our emotional brains, we are attuned to find threats where none exist, we interpret events in negative and self-limiting ways, and we feel overwhelmed. This portion of our brains inhibits us from behaving with resilience.

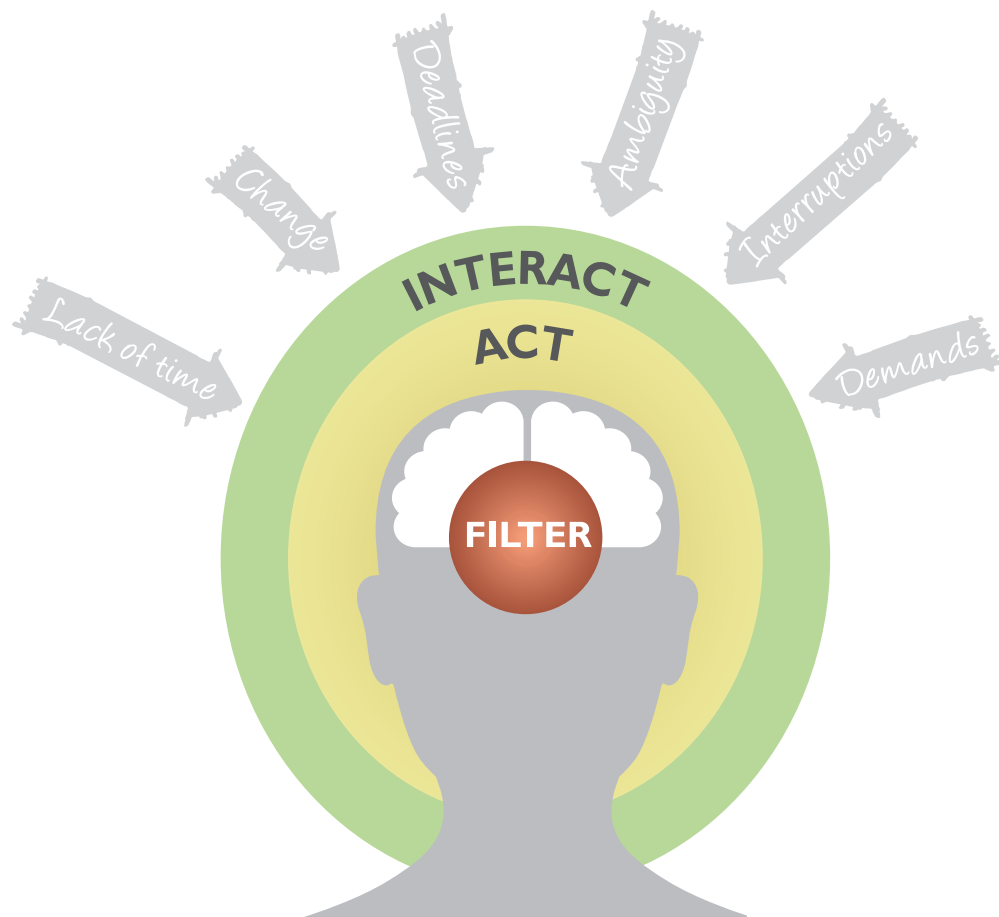
Later in evolution, we developed the neocortex. This is the gray wavy matter that we picture when we imagine the brain, and it is responsible for maintaining higher-level mental functions in humans. The most well-developed portion of the neocortex is the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex helps us to be logical, rational, and solve problems. It's conscious and deliberate and operates at a slower rate compared to the emotional brain, but it is critical to who we are and it is the part of the brain that we wish was in control more often. The good news is that there are direct neural connections between the prefrontal cortex and the emotional brain. This means that we can use the prefrontal cortex to manage and exert control over our emotional brains, thus building resiliency. In this guide, you will learn strategies that will allow you to slow down and use your logical system to control your emotional system.

First, however, let's turn to your Resiliency Route (Pages 18 and 19). Consider your strongest amygdala trigger at work – that is, your top source of stress. For example, you might be stressed by your workload, a tense relationship with a particular coworker, or the ambiguity of your assignments. What is the resulting emotion and intensity (on a scale from 1-10)? How do you behave in response to this stressor? Ideally, how do you hope you would respond to this stressor?



THE RESILIENT MINDSET MODEL™

Resilience is comprised of nine characteristics, which can be categorized under a broader three-dimensional framework: 1) how you filter information, 2) how you act in response to challenges, and 3) how you interact with others.



On the following pages, you will find an explanation of each of the nine characteristics of resiliency as well as a description of what a high level of each characteristic looks like.



STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING RESILIENCY

It's important to understand that all of these resiliency elements are developable. In the chart below, we highlight six fundamental strategies for enhancing resilience. These strategies are particularly effective because they target multiple elements of resiliency at once. Therefore, the efforts you invest into each of these strategies can develop your resiliency on multiple levels.

	CAB/CAR	Mindfulness	Act "As If"	Gratitude	Giving	Goal Setting
Personal Responsibility	✓				✓	✓
Realistic Optimism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Personal Beliefs		✓		✓	✓	
Self-Assurance	✓		✓			✓
Self-Composure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Problem Solving	✓	✓				✓
Goal Orientation	✓	✓				✓
Courageous Communication	✓		✓			
Social Support	✓			✓	✓	



PATTERNS OF AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS ARE DRAINING

The first step toward correcting your automatic thoughts is recognizing and naming them. Research shows that there are several common categories of automatic thoughts. Following, you will find a brief description of each category. You will notice that these categories are each associated with a character ("Disastrous Diane," "Rosey Ray," and so on). Together, these characters create the acronym DRAINING. This is because these thought patterns drain our energy, suck our enthusiasm, and leave us with fewer resources to manage challenges.

Take a few moments to study these characters and their thought patterns. Likely, you use certain thought patterns more than others. When you become aware of your most common categories of automatic thoughts, you can more rapidly correct yourself and generate more positive responses to stress.





1. **Disastrous Diane:** Giving greater weight to the worst possible outcome, imagining it is worse than it is, and magnifying the likelihood it will occur.



DISASTROUS DIANE

- » "If I lose my job, I will die."
- » "If I don't do well on this presentation, I will become the laughing stock of my office."

2. **Rosey Ray:** Being unrealistically positive. Minimizing the negative and magnifying the positive.



ROSEY RAY

- » "I'm not going to worry about what's going wrong on this project. Let's just keep moving forward; it will all work out."
- » "My team keeps making mistakes, but they'll learn eventually."

3. **Assuming Amber:** Assuming the worst without evidence.



ASSUMING AMBER

- » "I know if I take the lead on this project, it will just fail."
- » "I'm not going to ask for a promotion because I know my boss won't give it to me."

4. **Internalizing Ike:** Seeing yourself as responsible or more involved in negative events than you really are.



INTERNALIZING IKE

- » "My boss seems irritable today; it's all my fault."
- » "My employee is struggling at work; I'm a terrible manager."

5. **Naming Ned:** Giving yourself a negative label or title.



NAMING NED

- » "I'm incompetent at my job."
- » "I'm king of the losers."

6. **Indicting Ivan:** Putting all of the responsibility on others for negative events.



INDICTING IVAN

- » "My team did poorly on the presentation. It's all their fault."
- » "I didn't meet the deadline because our vendor kept messing up."

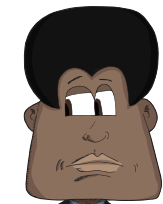
7. **Negative Nigel:** Magnifying the negative and minimizing the positive.



NEGATIVE NIGEL

- » "How can I enjoy this family dinner when I was criticized at work?"
- » "We met our goals this year, but we'll never meet next year's projections."

8. **Generalizing Gerald:** Thinking that isolated negative events apply to your entire life. Making sweeping statements. Coming to a general conclusion based on a single incident.



GENERALIZING GERALD

- » "I always make mistakes."
- » "No one likes me."

DEVELOPING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness: focusing attention and awareness on the present moment.

“When you sit on that jetty and stop to pay attention to the warmth of the sun on your skin, you soon notice the breeze, too... Noticing more information lets you see more options, which helps you make better choices, which makes you more effective at work.”

— David Rock, *Your Brain at Work*

Humans spend inordinate time reliving the past and ruminating about the future. Our brains are constantly producing repetitive, often negative, thought patterns about self and others that are unhelpful. The network of brain regions that generate this thinking originally evolved to help us plan tasks, review the past and improve future behavior. However, as the brain evolved, some of these brain functions could go too far and cause rumination and suffering. One way to combat this tendency and take a break from the default busy state of the brain is to practice mindfulness – living in the moment. When you’re mindful, you focus on the present experience, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them as good or bad.

People who meditate demonstrate dominance in the brain’s left hemisphere, a pattern of activity associated with feeling safe and comfortable in the world. Meditation has also been shown to reduce stress, enhance empathy, slow the aging process, and sharpen the mind, improving attention, memory, and abstract thought.^{3, 4, 5, 6}

Give Mindfulness a Try

Instructions:

- Find a quiet, private place where you can be undistracted for a few minutes.
- Sit comfortably, with your back straight but relaxed.
- Relax your eyes and gaze 3-6 feet in front of you.
- Focus your awareness on your breath, staying attentive to the sensations of the inhalation and exhalation, and start again on the next breath.
- See thoughts and sounds that come to mind as a distraction – let them go and return your attention to your breath.



ADAPTIVE MINDSET™

FOR RESILIENCY

Excerpts from
**Self-Perception
Questionnaire**



TRACOM® GROUP

THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY®

Adaptive Mindset for Resiliency Self-Perception Questionnaire

Instructions

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each statement. To the right of each statement, place an 'X' in the column corresponding to your response. Only mark one column per statement. Be honest with yourself and consider whether others would evaluate you the same way.

EXAMPLE	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I set goals to help me move forward.		X				
2. I monitor my progress on goals.				X		

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Version 1.1

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
1. People are responsible for their own success at work.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. People will get out of work what they put into it.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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3. Whether or not people succeed at work depends on their talents and motivation.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
4. Even if a situation is challenging, I maintain hope.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

5. I am optimistic while staying aware of potential problems.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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6. Considering my circumstances, I am an optimistic person.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
---	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
7. I feel connected to causes larger than myself.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

8. My personal values provide me with comfort.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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9. I believe everything happens for a reason.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
---	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
10. I believe I have the qualities I need to be successful.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

11. I can successfully meet demands.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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12. I can successfully overcome obstacles.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>Slightly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
13. Others would describe me as someone who productively manages stress.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

14. Others would say I am a calm person.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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15. No one knows it when I am under pressure.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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