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Resilience Practices

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In the words of Winston Churchill, "When you're going through hell, keep going." Britt, Shen, Sinclair, Grossman, and Klieger (2016) note several traits (e.g., individual resources), environmental factors (e.g., unit, family, and community resources), and processes (e.g., seeking help from others) that help individuals to "keep going" in the face of adversity. I would argue that the third category, which I would suggest be expanded to *practices*, is the most important going forward. Unfortunately, psychologists often tend to focus the most effort on the first two: traits and environmental factors, which often leave individuals feeling helpless because both are largely outside of their control. In the face of adversity, people instead want to know, "What can I *do* to keep going?" This is not to say that traits or environmental factors are not important. They are. However, the most powerful work in resilience will promote personal agency (Bandura, 2001) and confidence in one's ability to develop resilience (e.g., a growth mindset; Dweck, 2006).

Why Practices?

Resilience practices are important because they operate in the space between genetic predispositions and environmental determinants (see Figure 1). This is the region of agentic choice where actions and learned habits have the potential to grow and expand over time (Bandura, 2001; Wood & Neal, 2007). "Practices" is a noun (a skill that is developed) and simultaneously points to the verb (to exercise a skill repeatedly to improve one's abilities); that is, practices can be learned through practice. Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, and Hoffman (2006) have documented, for example, the critical role that practice plays in the development of expertise, especially *deliberate practice* (i.e., intentionally working to improve on tasks beyond one's current level of com-

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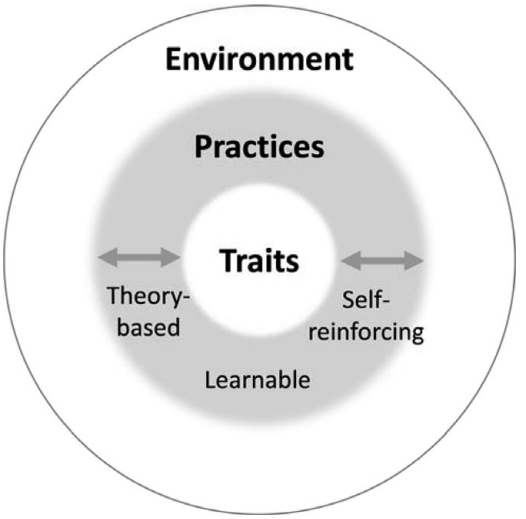

Figure 1. Resilience practices in the context of environment and traits.

petence). Their research suggests that extended deliberate practice (10 years or 10,000 hours) trumps and ultimately transcends raw talent.

Research in life satisfaction provides another great model of the role that resilience practices can play in the context of traits and environmental factors. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) note that traits account for up to 50% of the variance in one's life satisfaction; environment accounts for 10%, leaving 40% unaccounted for: a space where learned practices such as gratitude, leveraging one's signature strengths, and forgiveness can operate to boost one's life satisfaction. People with a resting life satisfaction that is low can adopt practices that temporarily elevate their life satisfaction levels. As long as they engage in the practices, their life satisfaction is elevated (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). The same could be true for resilience practices. Some people may have a low capacity for resilience through no fault of their own because of genetic predispositions or negative environmental conditions. Yet, resilience practices can be adopted that fill the gap and increase their cumulative resilience capacity.

Finally, practices are important because they have the potential to help *all* employees expand their resilience. As industrial–organizational psychologists, there is a temptation to take the easy way out and to default to traits, sorting people into the haves and have nots and creating systems that help organizations find the people with high resilience. (Of course, we would use the more acceptable term "high potentials" in our quest to sort out the "good" ones.) Britt et al. note the conceptual and practical problems in doing this. In addition, the most profound impact we can have on organizations is to find

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ways to help all employees increase their resilience capacity. Organizations where all employees are resilient are more likely to survive the shocks that are common in today's dynamic environment. A society where everyone is resilient is likely to serve the world better.

Practices in Action

If resilient practices are so important, this begs the next question: What are the practices that are likely to have the greatest potential to increase employee resilience? Taleb (2014), in his book *Antifragility*, provides a thought-provoking way to frame the question. He suggests that systems under stress fall into three groups: (a) fragile systems that fracture and break down under pressure (e.g., a glass vase), (b) robust systems that are unchanged under pressure (e.g., a rock), and (c) antifragile systems that improve under stress (e.g., muscles that require stress to remain healthy and atrophy under low stress). The most promising resilience practices are likely to be in the second and especially the third group because they lead to system sustainability, growth, and system improvement over time.

Criteria for Antifragile Resilience Practices

Three properties are likely to characterize resilience practices that are antifragile: They are theory based, they can be learned, and they are self-reinforcing under stress. First, theory-based practices are "good bets" because they explain *why* the practices work and *how* they should be crafted (Walton, 2014). Theories also direct attention toward additional practices that should be considered. Second, the most powerful resilience practices are ones that can be learned and developed. They should be within the learner's control. For example, growing evidence suggests that error management practices (i.e., actively encouraging learners to look for and make errors so they can learn from them) can be learned and in turn lead to better performance and an increased capacity to solve future problems (Keith & Frese, 2008). Furthermore, practices like error management can operate at the organizational level (Van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005). Finally, the practices should be self-reinforcing; that is, engaging in the practices should make it more likely that individuals will engage in them again in the future. For example, feedback seeking is likely to be a powerful behavior that will help individuals navigate through stressful situations, adapt to change, and perform well (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015). But seeking and receiving feedback can also be a negative experience leading people to avoid it. There are approaches, however, such as the feedforward interview (Kluger & Nir, 2010) that should be self-reinforcing over time.

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Table 1. Theory-Based, Learnable, Self-Reinforcing, Practices To Increase Resilience Capacity (Examples)

Cognitive
• Growth mindset & learning orientation (Dweck, 2006)
• Error management (Keith & Frese, 2008)
• Implementation intentions (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006)
Behavioral
• Stimulus control & cued response (Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009; Neal, Wood, & Quinn, 2006)
• Feedback seeking (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens, & Sackett, 2015; Kluger & Nir, 2010)
• Deliberate practice (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, & Hoffman, 2006)
Affective
• Meditation & spiritual coping (Kaplan, 2001; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004)
• Emotional coping strategies (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004)
• Social support (Cohen, 2004)

Promising Antifragile Resilience Practices

Table 1 lists several additional cognitive, behavioral, and affective practices that are promising. For example, Dweck's (2006) growth mindset is a good example of a *cognitive* resilience practice. Research suggests that individuals who set learning goals and adopt a growth mindset are much more likely in the face of failure to maintain high effort, remain persistent, and seek future challenges. *Behavioral* practices such as stimulus control (e.g., checklists for medical teams) provide ways that individuals in highly stressful environments can reduce cognitive load and perform well (Gawande, 2009; Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009). Checklists can be learned and can become self-reinforcing as they lead to successful outcomes. *Affective* resilience practices such as meditation and spiritual coping have been shown to promote emotional regulation and well-being (Kaplan, 2001; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004).

Going Forward

We are entering a time in history where resilience is more important than ever, and industrial–organizational psychologists have the opportunity to be in the forefront of this work, to carry Churchill's banner forward, and to help *all* individuals to increase their resilience capacity and "keep going."

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