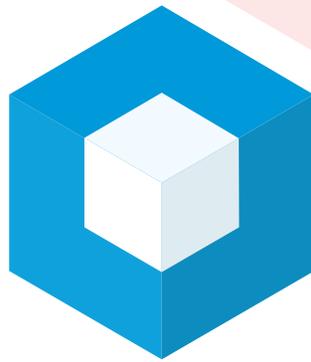


BRIEF INTRODUCTION



The R2 Resilience Program[®]

Standard Manual for Workplace Settings



RRC - Evaluation
and Training Institute

r2.resilienceresearch.org



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What is Resilience?*

Resilience is a dynamic process that describes how we interact with the world around us to become our best selves. When we think about resilience, we shift our focus from the things that cause mental illness and behavioural problems, and instead focus on how we survive and thrive when we have the resources we need for success, even when we experience exceptional hardship and stress.

Most commonly, however, resilience is thought of as an individual's ability to overcome adversity on their own. A better, and more current definition of resilience, emphasizes instead both an individual's capacity to cope with stress (e.g., their attitude towards life, or personal talents) as well as their capacity to find and make use of the resources they need to build and maintain their well-being. Understood this way, families, employers, communities, schools, and governments all have a role to play in providing the supports people need. This relational understanding of well-being is the cornerstone for a social and ecological understanding of resilience which is sensitive to people's culture and the opportunities they have to live their best lives.

There are times, though, when it looks like people succeed all on their own. They appear "rugged", with the motivation, personality, or talents necessary for success. The idea of individual "ruggedness" does not, though, properly explain why some people do well while others struggle when exposed to the same misfortune.

It is helpful to think about resilience as the process of doing better than expected when we are both *rugged* and *resourced*. People who have the right mindset, the right talents, and the right social, economic, and institutional supports inevitably show more resilience. These two aspects of resilience work together. For example, having lots of resources (e.g., good quality health care, a supportive workplace, safe housing, education, family supports, and a vibrant community) helps us feel more optimistic, motivates us to stay healthy, and improves our self-esteem. Likewise, people who have a strong sense of personal meaning, self-esteem, and optimism are more likely to see opportunities when they arise and take advantage of them. They are also more likely to have larger social networks and be better at asking for what they need. Being rugged and resourced means that we have everything we need to cope during difficult times.

* The R2 Resilience Program is the result of collaboration between Dr. Michael Ungar and staff and colleagues affiliated with the Resilience Research Centre.



The R2 Approach

There are two types of protective factors that contribute to resilience:

- The **rugged qualities** that reside within all of us.
- The **resources** that we need when facing adversity.

Rugged protective factors are changeable internal qualities, such as our level of self-esteem, optimism, mindfulness, and our ability to set goals and think critically. Resources can include experiences of control, meaningful relationships with others, access to services and supports, structures and routines, and a positive peer group at work.

These two aspects of resilience are the foundation of the R2 Resilience Program. The R2 model of resilience avoids blaming people who do not succeed for problems they may not be able to change. It reminds us that personal qualities are only half the reason we do well. Without an environment rich in resources, individual “grit” or “ruggedness” can only take us so far, especially if one has experienced systematic barriers to personal development such as racism, poverty and other forms of oppression, or personal challenges like a learning disorder or an early experience of trauma. To address these challenges both strong personal qualities and supportive people and institutions make the difference between individual success and failure.

Case Study of a Rugged Resilience Factor: Motivation and Perseverance

A long-term care facility needed to address the waning motivation and perseverance of its employees after months of increasing stress resulting from larger than usual caseloads, understaffing and concerns about personal health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff reported feeling overwhelmed, under-appreciated and, not surprising, unmotivated. In addition to providing employees an extra two days of vacation over the summer months, the workplace decided to implement the R2 Resilience Standard Manual for Workplace settings. Leaders at the workplace offered employees a module focused specifically on motivation and perseverance. Employees were educated about the importance of setting regular routines to help them maintain their mental health. The workplace also implemented an organizational recognition program to help employees feel a greater sense of belonging and commitment to their work teams. Workers learned about the Employee Assistance Plan and the many supports available to them should they need to talk to someone about their personal or on-the-job challenges. Employees also learned key strategies to help them avoid negative self-talk.



Case Study of a Resourced Resilience Factor: Relationships with Coworkers, Family and Community

A large financial management company had been receiving complaints from staff about workplace culture and conflicts between staff members. To help staff work better together, team leaders used the R2 Resilience Standard Manual for Workplace settings to offer a lunch and learn series of workshops specifically focused on relationships between co-workers, family supports, and employees' contributions to their community. Leaders spoke about the importance of having supportive relationships both inside and outside the workplace which help boost staff members' self-esteem, confidence, and feelings of self-worth. The workshops help staff members feel more connected to one another in positive ways, while helping individual employees develop better communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Staff also learned that asking for help from others on their team wasn't something one should be ashamed of and that having people to rely on when obstacles occur can alleviate stress on the job.

Is it Better to be Rugged or Resourced?

Rugged Individual



Problems



When problems are few, we can rely on ourselves to solve our own problems

When we have few problems, rugged individuals can usually overcome most of life's challenges by changing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours on their own.

Resourced individuals, however, have more tools to cope when they experience many problems in many different parts of their lives at the same time.

Resourced Individual



Problems



When problems are many and complex, we need lots of resources to cope effectively



Resilience Factors in this Manual

A detailed review of the literature identified 26 rugged qualities of individuals who show resilience and another 26 resources which are known to be foundational in the lives of people who recover, adapt, or transform their surroundings and themselves when stressed. Through a series of consultations with employees in different workplace settings, ten factors (five rugged qualities and five resources) were selected as the basis for this manual. The content was then used in a number of trials with a Fortune 500 company that makes personal care products, a long-term care facility for seniors, a human services organization working with families in crisis, and a large provider of health care services.

Rugged Qualities for workplace resilience:

- 1)  **Flexibility** – the ability to adapt to changes by applying multiple strategies based on the situation. Being flexible requires us to recognize our beliefs, gather evidence to dispute or support our beliefs, and use the knowledge we gained to challenge how we see problems.
- 2)  **Motivation and Perseverance** – the ability to continue behaving in ways that benefit us during difficult times. Motivation and perseverance mean getting back up after failing and continuing to try in the face of challenges.
- 3)  **Help-Seeking** – getting help from others when we are experiencing a problem, feeling troubled, or when we encounter a stressful circumstance. Help seeking is actively looking for solutions to our problems.
- 4)  **Mindfulness and Self-Regulation** – the ability to be present and aware of ourselves during a difficult time. Mindfulness and self-regulation mean understanding and accepting what happens and having control over our responses.
- 5)  **Self-Efficacy and Confidence** – the ability to see ourselves as people who are worthy and capable. Self-efficacy and confidence is the degree to which we value or like ourselves, and how much one believes in their capacity to complete a task.



Resources for workplace resilience:

- 1) **Regular Routines** – the ability to create predictable, reoccurring interactions or events that help us to feel safe and optimistic about the future.
- 2) **Opportunities to Use One's Talents** – knowing our strengths allows us to understand the things we excel at and use our skills to contribute to the wellbeing of others. Talents are things we can do well, with a high likelihood that we will succeed.
- 3) **Cultural Practices** – the practices that are collectively held and sometimes repeated over time. Cultural practices can offer us a meaningful life, result in higher self-esteem, and connect us with our community.
- 4) **Relationships with Co-workers, Family and Community** – having positive relationships with others helps us feel like we belong to a community and increases our self-efficacy. Our social capital is the network of relationships that we build over time that is available when we need help dealing with a crisis.
- 5) **Fair Treatment** – socially just access to the resources we need to live our best lives. Fair treatment means that we respect the rights of ourselves and others to be safe and have opportunities to realize our potential.

How to Use the R2 Resilience Program[®] Manual

This manual contains a series of modules, one for each of the ten resilience factors which are relevant to workplace settings. It is important, when trying to build resilience, that both rugged qualities and resources are emphasized. Rugged factors alone are not enough to protect an individual from adversity. Resources are needed to build rugged factors and provide support during times of adversity.

The ten modules in this manual can be used in any order. Some factors may be more relevant to certain workplaces. For example, cultural practices may be more important for multinational companies than local employers. The order of the modules can also be rearranged to suit existing health and wellness education programs. While all ten factors are important, it is not essential that all ten modules be completed. For the program to work, however, we strongly recommend that employees receive an equal number of modules focused on ruggedness and resources.

The modules provided in this manual are for management and leaders to use; they contain instructions and background information not always of interest to employees. The activities included in each module are for employee use. They can be used exactly as described here or modified to fit different workplaces. For example, activities might have to be broken up over multiple days for some employees, depending on work schedules. Activities may also be taken as starting points and used as inspiration to create new ones to suit specific employees. Workplace leaders using this manual will be in the best position to decide which exercises are right for their staff and what additional activities should be introduced.

Finally, it is important to understand that resilience takes time and is not a linear process. While this manual is intended to help managers enhance resilience among their staff, building resilience is a life-long pursuit. Employees can be expected to begin to incorporate the language of resilience into their vocabulary and thinking, to identify the rugged qualities they possess, and to acknowledge the resources they already have (or can find) which are meaningful to them.

How to Use the R2 Resilience Program[®] Modules

At the start of each module, you will find the key learning objectives for that resilience factor. Each module contains a brief overview of the resilience factor, how to develop it, and how it relates to resilience. This will be followed by a scientific summary, which pulls together research on each factor and resilience. The R2 program is an evidence-based approach, which means we created the modules based on the evidence and best practices available in the literature. This background information may be useful for employers to understand the value and complexity of the subject. It may also be useful to employees to understand why they are learning about a particular factor.

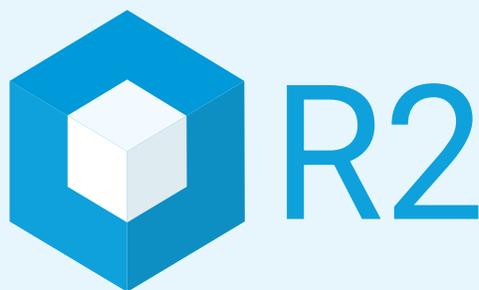
Each module also includes a standardized measure from the research literature, which can get employees thinking about the resilience factor in a personal way. Each measure also provides a baseline for assessing that resilience factor. Employers may choose to administer the measures at both the beginning and end of the program to assess change in employees' level of resilience. For some modules, a series of sensitizing questions have been included that may be used as discussion starters.

Finally, case studies are also provided as a practical guide to how to implement these resilience factors in your workplace along with activities for putting each factor into practice.

Please Note:

The following pages contain a sample of the contents of a rugged factor module from the R2 Standard Manual for Workplace Settings. The sample module begins with a brief summary of the science behind each learning module. This is followed by a sample of the lesson plans tailored to staff. Other lesson plans are available upon purchase of the R2 Standard Manual for Workplace Settings.

Please contact rrc@dal.ca or R2's client relations manager Alexis Wheeler at alexis.wheeler@dal.ca to learn more about the R2 Resilience Program[®] and how it can be implemented in your setting.



SAMPLE RUGGED FACTOR

Learning Module: **Flexibility**

Facilitator Manual



Key Learning Objectives

- Learn the concepts of 'cognitive flexibility' and 'coping flexibility.'
- Understand how flexibility impacts resilience.
- Learn strategies and activities to improve flexibility.
- Learn how to facilitate flexibility in workplace settings.

What is Flexibility?

Flexibility is a higher-level cognitive process that helps individuals to adjust their behaviour, make decisions, evaluate strategies, prioritize tasks, and cope with challenges. Flexibility plays a key role in critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving as it helps individuals see diverse perspectives, think creatively, and adapt cognitive and behavioural patterns to meet the demands of the current situation. These processes are important for resilience. The main way that flexibility helps individuals overcome adversity is by allowing them to utilise and evaluate multiple strategies to choose the most effective one(s) to handle stress, overcome a challenge, or solve a problem. This aspect of flexibility is often called 'coping flexibility,' and it is defined as the ability to evaluate the meaning of a stressful situation and formulate flexible coping strategies under changing circumstances.

Another aspect of flexibility is 'cognitive flexibility,' which refers to an individual's ability to shift their thoughts or actions according to the demands of the situation. Cognitive flexibility involves an awareness that in any given situation there are options and alternatives available to them; a willingness to be flexible and change as the situation demands; and confidence in one's ability to adapt. Cognitive flexibility requires two processes: inhibition and shifting. Inhibition is the ability to suppress an initial response and to stop oneself from processing irrelevant information or responding to unnecessary stimuli. Shifting is the ability to switch focus back and forth between things that matter and things that don't. An inability to inhibit irrelevant stimuli or shift focus can lead to an increased tendency to ruminate, or repetitively go over a thought or problem without completion.

Coping and cognitive flexibility positively impact individuals' resilience. A flexible interpretation of stressful situations helps individuals find positive meaning and opportunities for growth in the situation, while an inflexible approach is associated with depression and anxiety. Flexibility in choosing coping strategies means individuals are more effective at overcoming adversity. Individuals with better coping flexibility have been found to have lower anxiety, depression and psychosomatic and stress-related symptoms, and a better quality of life, long term.

Coping flexibility is a critical contributor to resilience because coping strategies and processes are not universally applicable and effective. An effective strategy when facing one type of adversity may not be as effective, or may even be harmful, when facing a different adversity. For example, problem-focused coping refers to taking direct action to modify a stressor. It is effective when the stressor is something within an individual's control. However, when the stressor is not within an individual's control, problem-focused coping can be ineffective and even damaging to one's wellbeing. A better strategy when facing an uncontrollable stressor is emotion-focused or meaning-focused coping, which attempts to either change one's emotional reaction or one's interpretation of a stressor. Flexible coping allows an individual to better evaluate which strategy is needed for their current situation, and it helps the individual evaluate the effectiveness of their chosen strategy and switch to a new strategy, if necessary, without feeling defeated or overwhelmed by the failure of their first coping attempt.

Coping flexibility can be improved by focusing on the three stages of coping: evaluation, repertoire, and monitoring.

- Individuals' evaluations of stressful situations can be improved by helping them recognize a wider range of options available to them when facing stressors, as well as helping them to find more positive meaning in stressful situations.
- Individuals' repertoire (or collection) of available coping strategies can be improved by teaching them a diverse range of coping strategies and by providing instruction to these individuals on how to implement multiple strategies at once.
- Individuals' monitoring and adaption of their coping strategies can be improved by showing them how to use the feedback from previous strategies to improve the effectiveness of that strategy, and by providing individuals with help and support, so that they feel comfortable and confident implementing a new coping strategy if a previous one didn't work.

Cognitive flexibility can be improved by increasing individuals' inhibition and shifting skills, which can be done by teaching emotional- and self-regulation and improving other executive functions, such as attention control. Cognitive flexibility can also benefit from improving individuals' confidence, or self-efficacy, in their ability to be flexible.



Flexibility and Resilience

Flexibility has been examined in the literature by its different variations: cognitive and coping. Cognitive and coping flexibility have been found to engender resilience through positive adaptation, a sense of control, self-efficacy, and lower symptoms of stress and depression (Park et al., 2015; Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012; Burton et al., 2012; Lam & McBride-Chang, 2007; Wei et al., 2019).

Specifically, coping flexibility has been found to moderate psychological distress after a traumatic event. The ability to flexibly use coping strategies is important in preventing pathological reactions (Burton, et al., 2012). Flexibility in evaluating previous effective strategies (feedback) and the willingness to adapt alternative strategies are associated with more adaptive outcome in a stressful event. The use of multiple coping strategies is needed in order to reduce psychological distress (Kato, 2015). Park et al. (2015) found that individuals with higher cognitive flexibility report lower depressive symptoms after traumatic experiences. By focusing on present and future goals, but at the same time not avoiding the traumatic experience itself, which requires flexibility, individuals are able to cope with their traumatic experience better and thus prevent PTSD and depression. Coping flexibility is also related to optimism. Optimistic individuals are more flexible using coping strategies based on demands and can also better adjust their goals. In adversities, being optimistic and flexible lowers perceived life stress and improves individual's life satisfaction and psychological well-being. In turn, flexible individuals with lower life stress and better life satisfaction are also more optimistic (Reed, 2016; Hanssen et al., 2015).

Genet and Siemer (2011) found that cognitive flexibility and flexible affective processing (switching back and forth in processing affective and non-affective stimuli), independently affects individual's resilience. Flexibility in affective switching when working on a difficult task is associated with trait resilience. Genet and Siemer (2011) argue that activation of a new task is a less crucial trait resilience compared to inhibition of irrelevant task. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused general and peritraumatic distress, individuals' emotional and behavioural awareness and their ability to intentionally decide their own actions helped foster a sense of well-being. Doing actions which align with one's values provides a sense of awareness and gives meaning to the situation (Kroska et al., 2020).

Individuals who are inflexible and struggle to use the right coping mechanism when responding to a stressor are prone to psychopathologies (e.g., depression and anxiety disorders). A loss of flexibility aggregates a person's continuous low mood and their inability to get pleasure from their environment, which are major symptoms of depression. *Continued...*

Inflexibility in responding to fear and anxiety are found in individuals with anxiety disorders (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Failure to control or change unpleasant thoughts or emotions (experiential avoidance) are associated with poor psychological functioning, psychological distress, stress symptoms, somatisation, and problematic health behaviour (Francis et al., 2016). Individuals who ruminate (repetitively going over a thought or a problem without completion) are inflexible and have difficulties in switching task sets (Whitmer & Banich, 2016). In contrast, individuals with better coping flexibility tend to have lower anxiety, depression, psychosomatic and stress-related symptoms (Fresco et al., 2006; Cheng, 2009; Kato, 2015). Cheng et al. (2007) found that people with higher coping flexibility have lower anxiety and better quality of life, long term.

Metzl (2009) found that flexibility varies across culture and is more prominent when other privileges and resources are not available. For example, people with originality and flexibility had lower clinical stress and higher life satisfaction after Hurricane Katrina. Flexibility supports the resilience process while originality improves problem-solving and motivational elements following Hurricane Katrina (Metzl, 2009). Flexibility and creativity are used to process the event, such as through arts, and are used in the reconstruction process. Being flexible also helps individuals cope with situations that cannot be dealt with using a single strategy and restricted resources. Metzl (2009) found that these traits are more common among African Americans and people with greater income disparity.

Key Concept #1: Cognitive Flexibility – Inhibition and Shifting

- Inhibition is the ability to control automatic or impulsive responses as well as the ability to ignore irrelevant stimuli. Inhibition allows us to take the time to respond to stressful situations with reasoning, creativity, and flexibility. It also helps us focus on the task at hand and not get distracted.
 - Employees who find themselves often checking their phones, talking to coworkers, or thinking about personal issues may struggle with inhibition. Employees with good inhibitory control will be better at their jobs.
 - Poor inhibition can also make us more impulsive, impact our communication as we may find ourselves often interrupting others, and make us more prone to mistakes.
 - Additionally, some people naturally dwell on negative thoughts or on anxiety-inducing thoughts; improving their inhibitory control can help them ignore these thoughts and improve their wellbeing.

- Shifting – which is also called cognitive or attention shifting, is the ability to switch between different stimuli, actions, or strategies. It is a major part of the ability to adapt behaviour and thoughts to new, changing, or unexpected situations. Strong shifting skills allow individuals to adapt quickly to changes or new situations, tolerate unexpected complications or problems, and transition from one activity to another easily.
 - An inability to shift attention, thoughts, and behaviours is called cognitive rigidity. Cognitive rigidity is the inability to change one’s behaviour, thoughts, or beliefs when they are ineffective. It is the feeling of being stuck in one way of thinking or one way of doing things.
-

Activities:

➤ A Flexible Role Model

➤ Attention Training Technique (ATT)

➤ My Repertoire of Coping Strategies

➤ Identifying the Stressor and Best Coping Strategy

A Flexible Role Model

*Individual process

No materials needed

Intent:

This activity asks employees to identify someone in the workplace (or in their personal life) who they look up to for their ability to be flexible. Employees should write down the flexible attitudes and methods that the individual demonstrates and attempt to practice those attitudes and methods in their own life. The aim of this activity is to give employees an opportunity to study someone who is flexible so that they can learn new or different flexibility strategies.

As an optional component, employees could begin a mentorship relationship with their role model, if that is feasible.

🎧 Attention Training Technique (ATT)

*Audio attention exercise

Materials:

- ATT audio file – available on Soundcloud (<https://soundcloud.com/jono-roberts/sets/attention-training-technique-atty-meta-cognitive-therapy-adrian-wells>), currently only in English
- Headphones

Intent:

The Attention Training Technique (ATT) was developed by Adrian Wells (1990) as a component of metacognitive therapy for depression and anxiety. Recently, studies found that ATT has the potential to improve attention flexibility (Barth et al., 2019; Callinan et al., 2015; Fergus et al., 2014). The original intent of ATT was to increase individuals' ability to shift their attention away from internal and non-relevant stimuli, such as ruminative thoughts, and toward relevant stimuli. While ATT has been effective at increasing this ability, and thus improving individual's anxiety and depression symptoms, it has also been found to improve attention and cognitive flexibility (Barth et al., 2019; Callinan et al., 2015; Fergus et al., 2014).

ATT consists of actively listening and paying attention by following along with the ATT audio file. ATT has three phases and takes approximately 12 minutes to complete. The first phase focuses on selective attention and asks the listener to focus on individual sounds and spatial locations as instructed, while trying to reduce distractions. The second phase involves quickly switching attention between different sounds and spatial locations. The final phase involves dividing the individual's attention to listen to as many simultaneous sounds and spatial locations as possible.

The aim of ATT is to follow the instructions irrespective of what may be occurring in your mind or body. Internal events, such as sensations, thoughts, or emotions should be treated as additional sources of noise that are not given attentional priority. The aim is not to distract from, avoid, or suppress thoughts or emotions. They should be allowed to occupy their own space without diverting one's attention away from the listening tasks. In this way, ATT shares some similarities with mindfulness practices. To see improvement, it is recommended that ATT be practiced twice a day for an initial period of four weeks. It is also recommended that individuals listen to the audio file using headphones.

For more information on ATT: <https://mct-institute.co.uk/attention-training-technique/>

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Key Concept #2: Coping Flexibility

According to Bonnano and Burton (2013), there are three components of coping flexibility:

- The first component of coping flexibility involves evaluating the situation, referred to as *context sensitivity*. Context sensitivity is the ability to understand the demands and opportunities of a situation and choose an appropriate coping strategy. It is possible to improve an individual's flexibility in evaluating the situation, such that they see stressful situations in a more positive light, including opportunities for growth.
- The second component is an individual's *repertoire of strategies*, which refers to a person's available strategies and their ability to utilise various strategies to accommodate a wide range of demands and opportunities.
- The third component is *feedback monitoring*, the ability to gather feedback on the effectiveness of a strategy and improve one's coping. This component involves both internal feedback on how well a strategy helps an individual cope, as well as feedback from the social environment on the effectiveness of the strategy.

My Repertoire of Coping Strategies

*Individual or group activity

Materials:

- Paper and pen/pencil, notes app, word document, or other method of creating a list

Intent:

This activity asks employees to document their current coping strategies. Employees should be given 10-15 minutes to think of how they tend to respond to stress and the strategies they employ to cope with stress (this can be made specific to work-related stress or kept more general).

If possible, we recommend turning this into a group activity so that once individuals have created their lists, they can talk with their co-workers about their strategies. They may realize they forgot to add a strategy to their list or be inspired by their coworkers' strategies. This is a way of building their repertoire of coping strategies. Encourage your employees to share why their coping strategies are useful and in what contexts they work.

Share the following information on problem-focused, emotion-focused, and meaning-focused coping:

- *Problem-focused coping* involves strategies that try to manage stress by actively addressing the problem. For example, if an employee is having issues with their boss, a problem-focused coping strategy would be to go to HR.
 - Problem-focused coping is most effective for problems that are within our realm of control. However, when the problem is not within our control, trying to use problem-focused coping strategies can be ineffective and make individuals feel a distressing lack of control, leading to worsened health and wellbeing. An example of an uncontrollable stressor could be the return to in-person work after COVID-19; using problem-focused coping in this situation could lead to greater rumination and prolonged feelings of anxiety and stress.
 - Some examples of problem-focused coping include evaluating the problem and brainstorming possible solutions; asking co-workers or family for advice on how to solve the problem; confronting the source of the problem; or learning new information to better deal with the problem.

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- *Emotion-focused coping* encompasses strategies that attempt to change or reduce the negative emotions associated with stress.
 - Emotion-focused coping is best suited for stressors outside of our control, such as the grief of losing a co-worker. In that situation, using emotion-focused coping strategies to process the pain and grief, celebrate the life of the co-worker, and seek comfort in others are more useful than focusing on what could have prevented the loss.
 - However, emotion-focused coping can be ineffective or even harmful when used in situations within our control. For example, if an employee receives negative feedback on their job performance from their supervisor, an emotion-focused response might attempt to minimize the discomfort and distress caused by the negative evaluation by not thinking about the evaluation or by minimizing the importance of the job. These responses would not help the employee do better at their job.
 - Some examples of emotion-focused coping include distraction – doing something enjoyable, relaxing, or creative to increase positive emotions; emotional disclosure – expressing strong emotions by talking or writing about them; meditating; turning to spiritual or religious beliefs; or seeking comfort from co-workers or family.
- *Meaning-focused coping* involves strategies that try to find a positive meaning in the stressor or change the initial evaluation of the stressor. Like emotion-focused coping, meaning-focused coping is most useful when facing uncontrollable stressors, such as natural disasters, death, or trauma.
 - Recent studies have proposed meaning-focused coping as an alternative to emotion-focused coping when facing uncontrollable stressors and suggest that it may result in better outcomes (Gou et al., 2013).
 - Some examples of meaning-focused coping strategies are accepting that the traumatic event happened; trying to identify benefits of the trauma or stressor; or incorporating the stressor into one's world view or life story as a source of meaning.

Employees should try and identify which of their coping strategies are problem-focused, emotion-focused, and meaning-focused. If employees find that most of their coping strategies fall under one category, they could seek out ways of learning new methods of coping with stress from their co-workers or workplace resources. If this is a group activity, employees can learn new coping strategies by talking with each other. Emphasize that some strategies work better in different situations.

This activity gives employees a strategy document they can refer to when they are faced with stress. It shows them all the ways they can cope with stress, which can help them feel confident in their coping skills. It will also encourage employees to continue to build and improve their coping repertoire.

🎯 Identifying the Stressor and Best Coping Strategy

*Individual or group activity

Materials:

- Access to “Regulating Stress” webpage from Lumen Learning: <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/waymaker-psychology/chapter/regulation-of-stress/>

Intent:

This activity further explores the concepts of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping as well as controllable and uncontrollable stressors, which can help employees better understand how to choose the most effective coping strategy for each new situation. Begin the activity by opening the “Regulating Stress” webpage from Lumen Learning’s Introduction to Psychology course. The webpage gives an overview of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping and the role of perceived control in responding to stress. Understanding the relationship between perceived control and wellbeing can help employees better understand how to choose a coping strategy depending on the controllability of the stressor. The webpage includes questions to increase individual’s engagement with the material.

After employees have gone through the webpage, we suggest having a group discussion on what employees learned. We have provided some questions to facilitate the discussion, but you are free to deviate and create your own questions as well.

Discussion questions:

- How do you think coping flexibility interacts with perceived control during a stressful situation?
- How can you figure out whether a stressor is within your control or not and which type of coping strategy to use?
- What is an example of a controllable stressor you may encounter at work? What is an example of an uncontrollable stressor?
- Can you think of a time when you used a problem-focused coping strategy with a controllable stressor? What happened?
- Can you think of a time when you used a problem-focused coping strategy with an uncontrollable stressor? What happened?

- Can you think of a time when you used an emotion-focused coping strategy with a controllable stressor? What happened?
- Can you think of a time when you used an emotion-focused coping strategy with an uncontrollable stressor? What happened?

Strategies for Flexibility

1. Move about – both aerobic activity (physical activity that increases your heart rate such as brisk walking, running, swimming, cycling) and dancing have been associated with increased flexible thinking. Try walking or bicycling to work if that's feasible, or going for a walk, run, or bike ride after work. Don't forget to move about while you work – stretching and just moving your body about in a way that feels good can help your focus and flexibility.
2. Be present – being present in the moment has been associated with greater flexible thinking. Try and focus on what's in front of you – what is the task at hand? Focus on what the person you're talking to is actually saying rather than your own thoughts or response. Focus on your breathing and your senses – what can you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste? Many good advice and ideas come from mindfulness practices; as well, meditation been found to bolster cognitive and coping flexibility.
3. Try something new – go out of your way to have a new experience or learn a new skill. You can do this by getting involved in new activities, going somewhere you've never been before, or talking to someone new. Seek out new experiences and don't be afraid to be bad at something new.
4. Change up your environment – go for a walk, try working in a different spot, or add something new to your workspace. A change in our environment can encourage changes in our thinking as well.
5. Have fun – make time for the things that make you happy and try and incorporate that into your workday. You could listen to music or an audiobook on the way to work, take your lunch outside for lunch, or chat with your co-workers on your break.
6. Challenge your ideas – talk to people from different backgrounds who may see the world differently; exchanging ideas and perspectives can help you both grow. You can also seek out ideas that you disagree with and try to understand where they are coming from.

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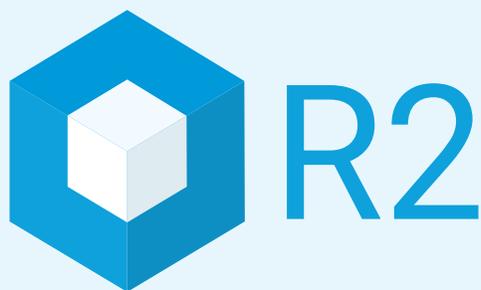
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Please Note:

The following pages contain a sample of the contents of a rugged factor module from the R2 Standard Manual for Workplace Settings. The sample module begins with a brief summary of the science behind each learning module. This is followed by a sample of the lesson plans tailored to staff. Other lesson plans are available upon purchase of the R2 Standard Manual for Workplace Settings.

Please contact rrc@dal.ca or R2's client relations manager Alexis Wheeler at alexis.wheeler@dal.ca to learn more about the R2 Resilience Program[®] and how it can be implemented in your setting.



Learning Module: Opportunities to Use One's Talents

Facilitator Manual



Key Learning Objectives

- Understand what it means to have opportunities to use one's talents, how one can seek out these opportunities, and when to act upon them
- Understand how opportunities to use one's talents increases resilience
- Learn about your talents and how to best use them in workplace settings
- Learn activities and strategies to grow your unique talents

What are Opportunities to Use One's Talents?

To properly understand this resource and why it is so important to have opportunities to practice one's talents, we have to understand what we mean by talents. In the literature, talents are defined as the abilities and skills that come natural to a person. Talents can become strengths when they are recognized, practiced, and developed. A strength can be understood as the ability to provide consistent, excellent performance when doing something. Everyone has natural talents, capacities, skills, and potential; however, many people may not be aware of their talents, or they may not use or develop these talents for various reasons. Identifying and using one's talents can give one confidence when facing uncertainty or adversity. Having opportunities to use one's talents helps individuals recognize, appreciate, and develop their talents. These opportunities can come from our environment or from other people, but employees can also seek out and negotiate for opportunities to use their talents. Some people may struggle identifying their talents or finding the motivation to use and practice them; as such, these people may need more support from others to seize the opportunity to grow their talents.

An individual's belief that they can use their talents to improve a situation is called strengths self-efficacy. To be motivated to use their talents, individuals need to believe that their talents positively impact society, thus strengths self-efficacy is necessary for employees at work. At the same time, strengths self-efficacy is an important outcome of having the opportunity to use one's talents at work. Like self-esteem and self-efficacy, strengths self-efficacy contributes to individuals' resilience by giving them the confidence to tackle adversities and use the full range of their abilities to succeed.

Continued on following page...

Workplace settings can be crucial places for individuals to discover their talents and develop their talents into strengths. When employees are supported to use and develop their talents at work, they feel more connected to their work and appreciated as individuals with a unique skill set. The experience of being recognized for their talents or strengths can improve employees' self-esteem, energy, and coping skills, as well as help them turn work challenges into opportunities for growth.

Giving individuals opportunities to use their talents is easier than working with employees to improve their weaknesses. Workplace settings can increase individuals' opportunities to use their talents in multiple ways. For example, workplaces can help employees identify their strengths through strength-based inventories and conduct regular performance evaluations between managers or team leaders and employees to discuss employees' talents. This can help employees recognize their strengths and how they fit into the workplace. This can also improve managers' or team leaders' understandings of employees' strengths so that they can better allocate work tasks that tap into those strengths.

Workplaces can take a mutual-aid approach to teams. In the mutual-aid framework, individuals use their strengths to the advantage of themselves and others. By creating teams where each employees' strengths are recognized and used, team members can contribute to the group in unique and complimentary ways. Mutual-aid groups can acknowledge and use members' strengths in the following ways:

- Recognizing and praising individual's contributions to the group.
- Sharing the responsibility equally between group members.
- Encouraging members to explain their ideas and feelings so that each member is contributing equally.
- Encouraging all members to contribute ideas when the group needs to make a decision.
- Supporting individuals who may have trouble speaking up in giving their opinion.
- Hearing out all ideas, opinions, and differences to identify all outcomes and implications from a decision.
- Allowing members flexibility in their roles so that they can better explore and develop their strengths.

Managers and team leaders can adopt a transformative leadership style, which involves providing employees with motivation, opportunities for development, personal consideration, and a positive example to follow. Transformative leaders aim to instill a sense of purpose and belonging to the workplace setting in employees; they often go beyond just giving employees feedback on their work.

Some suggestions to become a transformative leader include:

- Be a role model for your subordinates.
- Act in ways that show you are open to changes. This can help your subordinates know that you are open to their ideas and suggestions.
- Pay attention to your subordinates demands, potential, achievements, and strengths. Build relationships based on these considerations.
- Create a supportive environment at work by providing the space for your subordinates to brainstorm, discuss, and contribute to problem solving at work.
- Show your subordinates a future vision of what they are going to be.

Opportunities to Use One's Talents and Resilience

There has been a movement in recent years towards a Strength Perspective, which focuses on conscious and continuous efforts to grow and develop talents. The literature finds that focusing on nurturing existing talents is more likely to result in personal growth and realized potential, whereas focusing on shortcomings and problems can decrease individuals' confidence and their decision-making and problem-solving skills (Weick et al., 1989).

The Strength Perspective has shown benefits in the workplace. Knowing employees' talents and providing them opportunities to use their strengths contributes to their self-development and job satisfaction (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2017). Lavy and Littman-Ovadia (2017) looked at the relationships between employees' opportunities to use their strengths at work and various work-related outcomes. They found that employees who could use their strengths on-the-job experienced more positive emotions at work, which then increased their overall job satisfaction (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2017). Other research has found that being able to use one's talents or strengths increases their self-efficacy and decreases stress-related work absenteeism (Arnold et al., 2007). Having one's talents align with one's work also increases active involvement in decision-making and problem-solving processes (Bühner et al., 2008). Using their strengths during their work provides employees with opportunities to self-improve and experience mastery, which will improve performances at work (Bakker & von Woerkom, 2018).

Having the opportunity to use one's talents at work can bolster employee's self-efficacy and help them find meaning in their work. In the literature, the term, 'strengths self-efficacy' was coined to specifically refer to a person's belief in their ability to handle a situation by implementing their strengths (Tsai et al., 2013; Lane & Schutts, 2014). *Continued on following page...*

Strengths self-efficacy and opportunities to use one's talents are associated with increased feelings of hope, achievement, and life satisfaction (Clifton et al., 2006; Yuen et al., 2010; Lane & Schutts, 2014). Strengths self-efficacy among athletes has also been found to help them recover from a traumatic experience, such as a significant injury (Savage et al., 2017). An awareness of one's talents and an opportunity to use them at work can also help employees find purpose and meaning in their work, which contributes to greater wellbeing (Hood & Carruthers, 2016).

Key Concepts

Key Concept #1: Identifying Talents

- Many individuals may not know their talents and strengths or just not feel a strong connection to them. For employees to use their talents to benefit their resilience, they must be aware of their talents, feel a sense of ownership over their talents, and have those talents integrated into their self-identity. It is also necessary for individuals to link their successes to their talents; they should understand how using their talents will benefit them.
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Exercises:

➤ **Self-Reflection Exercise**

➤ **The Reflected Best Self Exercise**

➤ **Three Strengths Exercise**

➤ **Awareness of Goals, Progress, Strengths and Accomplishments**

➤ **Leisure Activities that Utilize Strengths**

➤ **Mutual Aid Co-worker Group**

Self-Reflection Exercise

*Self-directed reflection

Materials:

- Reflection questions
- Paper & pen or computer to write down your answers to the reflection questions.

Intent:

These questions have been adapted from Clifton and colleagues (2006) to help individuals identify their talents and their motivations for developing these talents. Taking time to think critically about your talents, motivations, and opportunities to develop those talents can help you strengthen talents and find opportunities to continue to grow them.

The questions do not have to be answered in order and you do not have to answer all of them. You can choose the questions that stick out the most to you or complete them in the order they are presented. You also do not have to do them all at once; you could begin a habit of answering one question a day. We suggest writing down your answers since writing your thoughts can help you organize and expand on them. It is also useful to have a record of your thoughts that you can refer to as you develop your talents.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is the signature talent that you use most frequently?
2. What is the signature talent that you develop the most?
3. Which talent do you want to develop more?
4. What are the first things that come to mind when you think about developing your talents?
5. What are some of your future goals or dreams?
6. Which of your talents do you believe have the most important roles in fulfilling your goals?
7. What talents do you feel are being developed through your work?
8. What sort of tasks are easiest for you?
9. In what areas have you gotten compliments before?
10. How have your signature talents helped you succeed in the past?
11. Can you think of a time you experienced adversity, and can you think of any talents you developed from that experience?

The Reflected Best Self Exercise

*Process of gathering, analysing, and reflecting on your strengths

Materials:

- Something to record the feedback in Step 1 – a voice recorder or notebook & pencil.
- Writing implements – paper and a pencil/ pen, or a computer.

Intent:

Roberts and colleagues (2005) developed the Reflected Best Self exercise to help people identify their full potential by soliciting input and reflecting on their talents. The goal of this exercise is to help individuals identify their talents and integrate them into their self-identity by reflecting on other people's perceptions of them. This exercise consists of three steps:

1. Collect feedback about your strengths from a variety of people who know you well. This can include coworkers, family, friends, mentors, or others. Ask them to provide examples of moments or stories when your strengths were meaningful to them.
2. Analyse the stories shared with you and find patterns and themes. These themes are your top strengths. Examples of common themes include adaptability, perseverance, curiosity, or courage. This step can help you see how your strengths function in your daily life.
3. Write a description of yourself that summarizes the information from the previous stage along with your own observations. Try and write this self-image in narrative form rather than bullet points; writing a narrative helps foster ideas in your mind and can help you draw connections between your identity, actions, and strengths.

Key Concept #2: Strengths Self-Efficacy

- Just as important as recognizing one's talents is feeling confident in one's ability to use those talents consistently and for the benefit of oneself and others. Strengths self-efficacy is crucial for individuals to be able to find and act upon opportunities to use their talents.
- Bolstering your strengths self-efficacy is also useful for your resilience as it helps us feel confident that we can use our strengths to adapt and overcome adversities.

Three Strengths Exercise

*Worksheet

Materials:

- Three Things Worksheet

Intent:

This activity helps individuals reflect on their strengths and the specific instances where they were able to use their strengths for a positive effect. The worksheet asks individuals to think of three strengths they used in the past week, what they used that strength to achieve, and how they felt using that strength. By reflecting on these aspects of their strengths, individuals are prompted to connect their strengths to their accomplishments and positive emotions. The goal of this activity is to help individuals feel more capable and willing to use their strengths in the future.

Some individuals may struggle to think of their strengths and past instances when they used them. In this case, it may be useful for them to do some of the previous exercises first, or to ask friends, family, or coworkers for help. Talking about one's strengths with others can help show the person that they do possess strengths that are recognized and appreciated. We would encourage coworkers to discuss their strengths with each other and ask for input.

Worksheet on following page...

Three Strengths Worksheet

List three strengths you exhibited in the past week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What did that strength help you accomplish?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How did it make you feel to use that strength?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Awareness of Goals, Progress, Strengths and Accomplishments

*Worksheet or conversation with manager

Materials:

- Awareness of Goals, Strengths, Progress, & Accomplishments (AGSPA) Worksheet

Intent:

This activity can be completed both independently by filling out the worksheet, or as one-on-one discussions between managers and employees based on the prompts on the worksheet. It asks employees to think about a large-scale goal they are working towards. The goal can be related to their career or personal development. The next step of this activity asks employees to think about how much progress they have currently made towards their goals and what are the steps or accomplishments they have achieved to get to where they are. The final step involves employees looking at what strengths have contributed to their accomplishments. By thinking about strengths in the context of their accomplishments, it is easier for employees to see how they have already used their strengths positively. Looking back on previous successes can inspire employees to continue using their strengths to reach their goals. As well, now that employees have the steps laid out before them, they can plan the next steps to reach their goals and think about what strengths they can tap into to achieve them.

Worksheet on following page...

Awareness of Goals, Progress, Strengths and Accomplishments (AGPSA) Worksheet

Goal:

How close are you to accomplishing this goal?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Steps you took to get to this point (accomplishments):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Strengths that you used to achieve those accomplishments:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Leisure Activities that Utilize Strengths

*Worksheet

Materials:

- Leisure Activities that Utilize Strengths Worksheet

Intent:

According to Hood and Carruthers (2016), leisure activities are a great way to discover, use, and grow strengths. This activity aims to help you determine what leisure activities you can do to grow specific strengths you are interested in developing. The worksheet can serve as a guide to get you thinking about the leisure activities you could try out. This activity can be completed independently, or you can team up with coworkers to commit to a chosen leisure activity together. Completing this activity can help you practice finding opportunities to use your talents.

Worksheet on following page...

Leisure Activities that Utilize Strengths

Directions: Think of a few strengths you currently possess that you would like more opportunities to practice and develop. Then brainstorm as many leisure activities as possible that may tap into that strength. Finally, decide on one or two activities that you will set time aside to do in an effort to practice that strength.

Strength	Leisure Activities
<i>Example 1.</i> Judgement/ Critical Thinking	Puzzles, crosswords, Sudokus, trivia nights, book club...
<i>Example 2.</i> Patience/ Prudence	Knitting, golfing, yoga, gardening ...

Mutual Aid Co-worker Group

*Ongoing team activity

Materials:

- A method of recording group members strengths (e.g., a shared web document or pencil and paper to create a document that can later be photocopied and shared).

Intent:

One way to find opportunities to use your talents in workplace settings is to discuss your strengths with your coworkers. In this activity, you will form a group with your coworkers, where each member is aware of other members' strengths so that they can turn to them for assistance in that area when they need it. In this way, each member is given the opportunity to use and develop their strengths in service of their coworkers. Group members also receive the support and assistance of other members as they use their strengths.

If you work within a team, we suggest doing this activity with those same team members. If you do not work within a team, you can complete this activity with colleagues who are also interested in developing their strengths.

Once you have assembled your group, each member should describe their top three strengths and some work-related tasks or situations in which those strengths are beneficial. It is up to the group how they want to keep track of each group member's strengths, but we do suggest keeping a record that is easily accessible to all members. This way when a group member runs into a problem and requires assistance, they can find someone else in the group that has a strength in the area they need help in. For example, if Nadia says that one of her top strengths is social intelligence and Jordan encounters an interpersonal problem with a client, where he cannot understand what the client needs, he could ask Nadia to use her awareness of other's motives and feelings to help mediate the situation. Other benefits of discussing your strengths with a group include the sharing of ideas to grow strengths, finding roles and tasks that fit group members' strengths, and helping members develop other strengths.

This activity is meant to create ongoing support between group members.

Continued on following page...

Strategies for Discovering and Developing Talents

1. Journaling – writing a daily journal can help you recognize the talents you did not know you had, as well as reflect on instances where you used your strengths. Amabile and Kramer (2011) found that writing a daily journal helped people develop their talents over time. The literature suggests that writing down experiences provides insights into the talents one uses daily and the outcomes of using those talents. It can be especially useful to write down traumatic or stressful events to see the event from a different perspective, including recognizing the strengths you used to survive or the new talents you developed because of the event.
2. Positive self-talk – self-talk is the internal narrative you tell yourself; a mix of conscious and unconscious beliefs and biases held about yourself and the world. Positive self-talk involves showing yourself compassion and celebrating your strengths and achievements. It may involve thoughts like, “I can do better next time,” and “I choose to learn from my mistakes.” Positive self-talk can help improve strengths self-efficacy.
3. Trying new activities – trying new things, even if we’re not immediately good at them, can tell us a lot about our natural talents and strengths. Leisure activities are a way to discover new skills and develop ones you were already aware of. For example, failing at something, but then trying again anyways for fun can help you develop your perseverance.
4. Think about the ‘why’ – why are your top strengths important to you? Why do you gravitate towards actions that use those strengths? See if you can connect your strengths to a larger value system in your life.
5. Celebrate your successes, no matter how small – celebrating your successes encourages you to continue to develop new talents and turn them into strengths. It can also help you better recognize how your talents contribute to your accomplishments and make you feel more confident.

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