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Individual Resilience in a Volatile Work Environment

Abstract

This chapter is set out to understand the way in which individuals build and maintain their resilience when facing a volatile work environment. We studied this question qualitatively in an S&P 500 company where the company faced major business changes during a time when employees faced work-related restrictions. We described practices that individuals do to maintain or inhibit their psychological resilience. Interestingly, we found that individuals were able to adopt positive framing of the situation across tenure, seniority levels and involvement in the business change. We also found that the inhibitor for individuals to reframe their situation was related to being unable to rest. Increased working hours and a lack of work-life boundaries inhibited individuals' pathways to resilience. Building on the findings, the chapter will conclude with managerial implications. First, the findings highlight that both direct managers and senior managers play an important role in shaping individuals' meaning-making processes, and their narratives could encourage subordinates to demonstrate optimism around the challenge. Second, organizations can consider interventions such as instituting long and short breaks, and mindfulness training to mitigate the negative impact from lack of rest.

Keywords: resilience, volatile context, uncertainty, organizational change, stress

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Introduction

"In light of the turbulent economic, political, and technological environment that organizations are currently operating in, the ability of employees to recover and even excel in the face of adversity has important consequences for contemporary workplaces"

(Fisk & Dionisi, 2010, p. 168).

The speed at which business environments are becoming increasing turbulent puts significant pressures on both organizations and the individuals within. For organizations, pressures on growth and operating margin drive them to changes such as focusing on cost reductions (Howell, 2016) or strategic decisions to enter new markets and develop new skillsets (Gulati, Nohria, & Wohlgezogen, 2010). For individuals, those organizational changes are often associated with ambiguity and increased workload, and as a result, individuals may experience stress and burnout (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997), as well as a variety of perceived resource losses including threats to self-esteem, job losses (Nadler, 1982), loss of power or rank (Callan, 1993), or change in company culture (Mirvis, 1985).

With stress being associated with decreased productivity, increased turnover, and sickness absence (Baltzer, Westerlund, Backhans, & Baltzer, 2011; Williams, 2003), it can clearly have a highly undesirable impact on the revenue-generation of a company (Conner & Douglas, 2005). This has resulted in an increased interest in individual resilience as a vital factor of change success and how organizations can develop and maintain individuals' levels of resilience during turbulent times (Bardoel, Pettit, De Cieri, & McMillan, 2014; Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Resilience is the capacity to rebound or bounce back during adversity (Luthans, 2002) and the "*most important positive resource to navigating a turbulent and stressful workplace*" (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009, p. 682). Studies have found that resilient individuals can leverage their psychological resources to protect themselves from the negative effects of stress (Robertson, Cooper, Sarkar, & Curran, 2015),

proactively prepare for hardships (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008), and increase their capacity to learn from adversity and take these learnings into their next challenge (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000; Waugh, Fredrickson, & Taylor, 2008). Resilient individuals are more likely to welcome new experiences, be more adaptable and more emotionally stable during time of constant change (Avey et al., 2009). Resilient individuals also reduce the negative impacts of stress on organizational productivity brought about by organizational change. As such, resilient individuals have long-term benefits both to themselves as individuals and to their organizations (Rice and Liu, 2016).

While individuals may have the capacity to reframe or recover from stressful events, they may not always have access to the practices they leverage to assist in mitigating adversity. For example, individuals may not always be able to socialize with others or exercise to reduce their stress due to their physical fitness. An extreme case of this situation was exemplified during Covid-19 when social interactions were restricted. Likewise, when individuals faced sustained and compounding challenges, they could feel further drained and exhausted (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). In addition, resilience is context-dependent and can varyingly correspond to multiple aspects of life (Pietrzak & Southwick, 2011; Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014). Assuming that resilient individuals will always have the capacity to maintain their resilience level seemed to be an erroneous assumption. It is therefore important to know what individuals do to maintain their resilience when their pathway to resilience is blocked.

To investigate this question, we conducted a qualitative study, looking at individuals' practices to maintain their resilience when the studied company was under major business change during the time where individuals' usual pathways to resilience were limited due to Covid-19 restrictions. This served as an extreme case, but provided good context to gain insight about what individuals do when they are less resourceful in maintaining their

resilience (Siggelkow, 2007). The structure of the chapter is as follows: first, we will review the literature in enhancing individual resilience. After presenting the methodology and findings, we conclude with practical implications. We summarized practices that paved individuals' way to resilience and the managerial interventions that could assist individuals to combat their stress during turbulent times.

Enhancing Individual Resilience

How do individuals build their psychological resilience and thereby increase their ability to bounce back in turbulent environments? While there are debates on the development of resilience – whether resilience is trait-like (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten & Obradovic, 2006) or could be developed (Bonanno, 2004; Masten & Reed, 2002; Youssef & Luthans, 2005), more recent research suggests that resilience depends on individuals' capacity to effectively utilize their internal and external assets and resources (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Windle, 2011). Organizational interventions such as professional development opportunities, open communication with management, opportunities to contribute towards organizational decision making, performance feedback, compensation and benefits are useful not only at the point of stress but before a stressful event by priming a workforce's ability to better cope with the stressors emanating from change (Britt, Shen, Sinclair, Grossman, & Klieger, 2016; Shin et al., 2012). However, these interventions are costly (Meyers, Woerkom, & Bakker, 2013).

Proactive and Reactive Pathways to Individual Resilience

At the individual level, the development of psychological resilience has been found to take both proactive and reactive forms (Everly, 2017; Luthans et al., 2006). A proactive approach centers around anticipating a requirement for resilient behavior to enable individuals to "*remain psychologically healthy despite being exposed to an adverse life*

event" (Bonanno, 2004), whereas reactive forms of resilience development enable individuals to find pathways to resiliency as a reaction to a stressful event (Luthans et al., 2006) enabling them to recover quickly from the psychological impact of an adverse life event (Bonanno, Brewin, Kaniasty, & La Greca, 2010).

The development of proactive psychological resilience encompasses three approaches; process, risk, and asset strategies (Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002). Process strategies rely on the cognitive abilities of the individual to influence the ways in which they interpret events and experiences (Masten & Reed, 2002). These involve increasing their psychological capital through the development of hope, self-efficacy and optimism. Risk strategies involve individuals proactively avoiding a circumstance in order to reduce its negative impact. At the time when it is difficult to predict when the stress may be unsurfaced, individuals may try to minimize the negative influence from adversity. This is most commonly manifested through the development of strong social networks which can be drawn upon during adverse life events (Luthans et al., 2006). Asset strategies involve individuals enhancing their personal resources and capabilities through the development of knowledge, skills and/or abilities (Youssef & Luthans, 2005). In the context of organizational change, this can involve upskilling to improve their ability to complete their current role as well as enhancing their employability. In practice, these strategies can be aligned with the ten-point roadmap to resilience (Alvord et al., 2012) which is summarized in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about Here

Individuals can also work to develop their reactive resilience as adversity happens. According to Bonanno (2004), there are four strategies to reactive resilience. These include psychological hardiness, repressive coping, positive emotion and laughter, and self-

enhancement. Psychological hardiness refers to individuals' personality traits which assist them in coping with exposure to extreme stress based on their perceptions of their control over events, their perception of challenge (whether change is an opportunity to learn or change is a threat), and their commitment to involvement as opposed to withdrawing from the event (Bartone, 2000; Kobasa, 1979). Psychological hardiness thereby encourages transformational coping and can be developed through meaning-making processes and be influenced by the behaviors demonstrated by an authentic leader within the organization (Luthans et al., 2006).

Repressive coping refers to individuals avoiding unpleasant thoughts, emotions and memories associated with an adverse life event (Weinberger, 1990). Self-enhancement refers a biased belief that they will almost always find a way to overcome and succeed in an adverse life event (Bonanno, Rennicke, & Dekel, 2005; Luthans et al., 2006; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Positive emotion and laughter assist individuals in reframing an adverse life event (Folkman, 2007; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2007). Self-enhancement and repressive coping strategies are regarded as a more short-term strategy because individuals may be unable to move beyond the source (Maddi et al., 2006).

While much has been said about the different pathways to resilience, less research has been conducted into how individuals develop their resilience when certain pathways to relieve their stress are restricted. For example, individuals might not always be available to visit their supporting circles when they want to. Where studies have been conducted, they have been within the context of extreme environments such as space travel, polar expeditions and submariners (Bartone, Krueger & Bartone, 2018; Brasher, Dew, Kilminster, & Bridger, 2010) where challenges, starting point of challenges, and duration of the events were expected. However, in volatile work environments, challenges are often unexpected. Furthermore, previous studies were mainly based on quantitative data and therefore lacks the

detailed practices which individuals leverage during stressful events (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). The question of precisely how individuals maintain their resilience level when their capacity to relieve the stress is restricted therefore lacked empirical exploration. The present study directly addresses that absence in the literature by conducting a qualitative study in a financial company in the UK where the company was undergoing business changes during the Covid-19 pandemic. This coincided with a period of time when individuals were restricted in their ability to socialize and had limited access to outdoor exercise.

Research Context and Method

The setting for the study is within an S&P 500 financial services company in the UK. During our study year (May 2021), the company was experiencing major business change. The business change, which was focused on leveraging data and technology to accelerate innovation and growth, was planned before Covid-19 and announced to employees in March 2020. Although employees were aware of the prospect of a change in the business, they were not yet fully informed of the impact on the individual when we conducted interviews. At the point of the interview, announcements had been made regarding regional and team divestments as well as books of business which were being purchased by a competitor. In addition, there was a lack of clarity around the future structure, capability requirements and leadership of the business, as well as the extent to which redundancies would be made. In addition, participants had 14 months of working from home due to Covid-19 restrictions. Restrictions also included a reduction in access to face-to-face socialization, hospitality, hotels, gyms, entertainment, travelling and holiday which encompassed a large part of individuals' usual pathways to resilience. This was therefore an ideal setting to gain greater insight into individuals' use of both proactive and reactive pathways to resilience while individuals faced restrictions.

Three types of data were collected: (1) semi-structured interviews were conducted. Senior managers nominated interviewees to enable a representative sample across gender, seniority within the organization as well as the level of involvement in the change program. An initial 22 possible individuals were contacted by email to see if they were interested in participating. A total of 13 interviews were conducted. Due to the social distancing restrictions, interviews were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams, and participants kept their cameras on throughout the interview. Interviews focused on the individual's role in the company, their thoughts about the business change, and their approaches to maintaining their resilience. Interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes. We interviewed informants until interviews failed to reveal new insights (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim which yielded 126 pages of single-spaced text. (2) observation. The first author was able to attend meetings and have informal conversations with informants regarding the planning, execution and integration of the business change which assisted in understanding the changes occurring within the company as well as employee reactions to the change. The first author was also able to have informal conversations with the participants to ensure the understanding was in line with the participants'. (3) Archival material including internal and external communications around the progress of the change such as town hall attendance, internet and intranet announcements as well as insights in industry publications were also gathered during fieldwork. These documents informed us about the business change.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020; 2006) approach to understand what strategies were employed by individuals dealing with a volatile environment. The analysis commenced with a close reading of the transcripts to increase familiarity with the data. The next step involved coding the data with a description that summarized the meaning of each extract, codes were then grouped based on similarity,

and similar items were combined to form overarching themes. These emergent themes were examined to draw conceptual links with existing research, creating clusters which formed the key themes for discussion. A log was maintained throughout the phases of data collection and analysis, and a clear account of the research process was recorded to ensure the method of research can be understood (Smith, 2011).

Insert Figure 2 Here

Findings

The key question that guided this study was: how do individuals maintain their resilience in the time where the work environment faced was constantly changing? Similar to previous research which found that individuals may use proactive (Luthans et al., 2006; Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002; Youssef & Luthans, 2005) or reactive resilience practices (Bonanno, 2004) to maintain one's resilience level, data analysis also showed that individuals used both proactive and reactive practices. We found that participants referred to proactive resilience pathways (70% of the total coding) more often than the reactive resilience pathways (30% of the total coding). Within each pathway, however, not all strategies were weighted equally. Specifically, given the strict social restriction during Covid-19, when employing proactive pathways, data showed that individuals predominately used process strategies, followed by risk strategies and then asset strategies. When using reactive pathways to individual resilience, the data showed that reactive resilience was developed predominantly through practices associated with hardiness, followed by repressive coping, methods of self-enhancement and finally positive emotion. The following section explicates the strategies of proactive and reactive practices to maintain individual resilience level.

Proactive Resilience Pathways

Interestingly, while prior research suggested that strategies leveraged may differ depending on seniority and change involvement (Olson & Tetrick, 1998), this study found that strategies leveraged were vastly consistent across gender, seniority level, and individual's involvement within the company change. Data showed that when individuals faced restricted pathways to maintain their psychological resilience, the ability to leverage process strategies (63%) becomes the most important pathway to proactive resilience, followed by risk strategies (21%) and then asset strategies (16%). In addition, while participants highlighted the impact of social distancing restrictions on their ability to leverage risk and asset strategies, a key finding was that a decrease in available time to rest significantly impacted their ability to maintain resilience.

Process Strategies: Enablers. Process strategies refer to ways that can influence individuals' interpretation of events and experiences (Masten & Reed, 2002). Data showed that process strategies were the most utilized strategy during the organizational change in the Covid-19 pandemic. Our analysis showed that participants could reframe the changing work environment through the following practices. Firstly, all the participants mentioned that exercise helped them to keep things in perspective: as well as helping them to *"not only… forget what has been troubling you, but [that they're] more likely to see it as insignificant…and you also just feel generally better about yourself"* (participant 322, specialist). Other practices which were used by all participants were taking breaks. In particular, working from home seemed to empower individuals to take breaks throughout the day and working in a flexible manner was another way in which participants maintained their ability to positively interpret their external environment to maintain their psychological wellbeing. Participants across all levels have highlighted that

> *"[they] really like [their] lunch break and [that they have] been really disciplined and protective around [their] time around that….. I have really enjoyed the freedom to be more flexible in terms of planning my day."* (Participant 122, specialist)

> *"…having the freedom to just pick and choose what you want to do…… the fact that you don't have to think, oh my god are we allowed to do that so that you can go and do things."* (Participant 212, senior management)

This enabled them to feel more empowered and in control of the uncertain, external circumstances which enabled them to find the silver lining in their challenging circumstances.

Secondly, the data also showed that during times of constant change, participants found it helpful to reflect on their habits to gain a better understanding of themselves. In particular, a participant commented on how the restrictions during the pandemic helped them to reflect on their past behavior: "*There are a lot of working habits* before *the pandemic which were just not healthy, and at different points in the pandemic they've not been healthy either*" (participant 322, specialist). Reflection during a period of constant change also helped individuals to gain a better idea of their personal boundaries:

> "*I've got a better idea of like rationally what my boundaries are, and what I need……I've certainly got a better idea of what makes me happy and not.*" (Participant 721, middle management)

and understand the importance of gaining perspective

> *"…it is all about keeping things in perspective, I certainly work hard but no one is going to die if I can't get all my work done."* (Participant 521, senior management)

For participants who engaged in mindfulness practices such as meditation prior to the change and pandemic commented on how helpful they found it throughout this stressful event.

Finally, appreciation for one's surroundings and spending time outdoors also helped them to reframe the situation by allowing them to *"switch off a little"*. Participants fed back that

> *"…it makes you feel so much better, and even if you don't want to because it's raining you always come back feeling better."* (Participant 212, senior management)

We noticed that this practice is predominately employed by participants from senior and middle management positions.

Process Strategies: Inhibitors. As for the inhibitors to individuals' capacity to reframe events, participants mentioned the increased working hours meant that they were not able to take time for themselves and to rest. A participant reported that

> *"The first quarter [of 2021] had been so busy for everyone at different points, everyone's been online really late. The weeks where I've felt the worst have been the ones where I have been working really late, staying until 9 or 9:30 [pm] and then felt that I hadn't any time for myself. I found that once I got into that mood, I started to really resent work. I started to resent myself and starting thinking "Why am I even doing this?"* (Participant 322, specialist)

> "*Staring at the computer screen all day every day, and also when you're on camera…I feel like a really need to emphasize my movements and my facial expressions so that people understand what I'm saying. You don't get those natural cues that you would in person. So it's really draining to be honest with you. And when you do it all day*." (Participant 812, middle management)

Working from home also had implications for participants' abilities to maintain work/life boundaries, with some having to work, relax, and sometimes sleep in one room. For example:

> *"…the biggest thing is that mentally you don't get that stop as much as when you used to when you left the office. When you left the office you could also leave work behind in the office, whereas now you bring it with you, and it's with you even on the weekends and when you sleep."* (Participant 122, specialist)

The removal of the commute to and from the office has resulted in a lack of definition around the working day and week which has resulted in work being absorbed into every area of life. As a participant in middle management mentioned: "*my kitchen, and my living room is all one big room. Yeah, so no matter what I'm doing my laptop is the center of the room.*"

Participants also acknowledged an internal inhibitor to their psychological wellbeing which was the increased sense of pressure they placed on themselves. This was particularly prevalent in middle management and specialist levels. Interestingly, managerial interventions to help participants to deal with increased workload could result in a negative impact on work/life balance. For instance, managers assisting with the prioritization of work or suggesting that one finish the day can put more stress on participants. For example,

> *"…a lot of the stress that I feel is me putting it on me. Nobody else is telling me that there's a strict deadline. It's just I have high standards and I want to meet deadlines or be quicker than the average person but to be honest it's not great, but it's something that I've had to deal with."* (Participant 812, middle management)

This increased pressure meant that participants were not able to take rest, be it throughout or after the working day with participants finding that as a result their

> *"…hours are a lot longer, way longer in fact, [so that they] rarely take lunch breaks…… it got to the point where [they] really really struggled to sleep."* (Participant 211, specialist)

Risk Strategies: Enablers. Risk strategies refer to individuals' efforts to minimize the impact of an adverse event, and this was the second most leveraged set of activities used by participants to develop their proactive resilience. Similar to the previous research (Luthans et al., 2006), our analysis showed that socializing was a way of invoking a risk strategy as it enabled individuals to create a sense of shared experience and therefore reduced the negative impact of a stressful event. Participants reported that

> *"…it [was] nice to hear other people's stories…and if you are having a bad time, that shared experience makes it better."* (Participant 211, specialist).

The types of socialization predominantly fell into three categories: socializing with family, colleagues and friends. Prior to the pandemic, participants recalled that

> "*…it was really social engagements [that helped them remain psychologically well]. If [they were] stressed, [they] would meet up with people in the evening after work."* (Participant 655, specialist).

However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the primary source of socialization mentioned in the data was mainly with family and colleagues. Participants described their social interactions with family and colleagues and said that they had

> "*…become closer with [their] family and noticed that [they] were a bit more open with each other… they had spent a lot of time together over the past year as they became [their] social bubble."* (Participant 812, middle management)

Participants of all levels found it beneficial to draw on social support in varying combinations, which demonstrated the adaptability of this strategy in the way participants shifted the primary source of support depending on what was available at the time.

Risk Strategies: Inhibitors. Unsurprisingly, the inhibitor to deploying risk strategies was increased isolation due to the restrictions in place. This was evident from the data in instances where participants who used to meet up with friends had become closer to family and colleagues. In addition, there were some variances when discussing the impact of risk strategies being restricted, which appeared to more keenly affect specialists and to a certain extent middle management. Participants cited an increased sense of isolation and alienation from friends as the main way in which this strategy was restricted. For example,

> "*Teams is very good for getting something done for like a specific amount of time and having no frills but often people don't take the time to catch up and get to know the other person.*" (Participant 322, specialist)

When senior managers faced the same socializing restriction, they appeared to be more proactive in developing new networks of social support. This proactivity resulted in both a widening and strengthening of their social support as they now feel they

> *"… know [their] team members, personally now more than ever before. In those early days we didn't speak that much about our personal lives, but that has evolved, we've got really good at doing that now."* (Participant 412, senior management)

Asset Strategies: Enablers and Inhibitors. Asset strategies refer to ways which increase individuals' capacity through acquiring new knowledge and skill, and this strategy (Youssef & Luthans, 2005) was mentioned the least by the participants (16% of the coding). Participants' practices in leveraging asset strategies fell into two categories. Firstly, participants reported an increased sense of self-awareness through their self-reflection during the volatile time. They felt that the pandemic benefitted them, as participant described:

> *"… [it was] good to have a period of reflection. There are a lot of working habits before the pandemic which were just not healthy, and at different points in the pandemic they've not been healthy either."* (Participant 322, specialist).

Periods of reflection enabled participants to be more aware of the habits which were not benefitting them which enabled them to change their behavior and increase their proactive resilience. In addition, although organizational change meant job losses for some, it also meant variation and opportunity around their existing role. For example, participants felt that:

> *"…there have been some really quite exciting RFPs and opportunities…the challenges have been different, different things to get your head around so from that perspective, it does keep things fresh."* (Participant 321, senior management)

The inhibitors which prevented individuals from building their asset reserves, unsurprisingly, were related to the increased workload. Participants were very conscious of this and mentioned their tiredness as an inhibitor to exploring the opportunities provided by the change to engage in self-reflection or development. For instance,

> *"When the kids would go to bed at eight, I'd come downstairs and just look at my emails for a couple of hours, because I've had sort of six, seven hours of emails during most people's working day. And frankly, not many people are accepting, phone calls at five, six in the morning, so my ability to kind of do those kinds of things was compressed really into a morning. Yeah, it was, it was tough."* (Participant 121, senior management)

> *"I feel just really really tired and you know there is a lot going on and you don't get the separation anymore, like I said I'm checking emails in all hours that I'm awake to be honest."* (Participant 612, middle management)

Reactive Resilience Pathways

Analysis of interview data found that reactive strategies were achieved through activities associated with hardiness (44%), followed by repressive coping (28%), methods of self-enhancement (18%) and finally positive emotion (10%). When considering the differences in strategies leveraged across gender, level of seniority and change involvement, data showed that employed strategies were similar across seniority and individual's involvement within the company change. When it came to the inhibitors of reactive resilience, data showed that the most mentioned inhibitors for reactive resilience pathways were associated with a sense of lack of control and stability (80% of the coding) and the

inability to see the purpose of the change (20% of the coding). These two inhibitors were associated with hardiness and repressive coping respectively.

Hardiness Strategies: Enablers. Hardiness refers to individuals' innate ability to reframe adversity. Interestingly, participants across gender, seniority, and involvement with the change program demonstrated elements of hardiness as a key way of maintaining reactive resilience despite the constant changing work landscape. All participants mentioned their optimism around the potential for development and new opportunities. For example, they were

> "*excited* about *[the] sorts of opportunities that [the business change] might bring. If [they] play [their] cards right in terms of identifying things [they] might want to work on…… there might be an opportunity to forge a new role and try something new."* (Participant 322, specialist)
>
> *"For me personally I feel I'm in a quite a good position to have hopefully a quite an exciting role [that would emerge after the business change]."* (Participant 544, middle management)

Participants also showed excitement at the prospect of an increased scope of responsibilities, for example:

> *"the change will bring with it the biggest scope and scale of work, and new projects [they] never would have been able to work on before, and the opportunity to work with a new brand is incredibly exciting."* (Participant 721, middle management)

Others looked forward to the opportunity to create new connections and learn from others, for example:

> *"meeting new people, having conversations and having a different perspective coming in. I know there isn't quite the same team at [the acquiring company] but there is something similar, and they might have a completely different skill set that I don't have and that would be really interesting."* (Participant 211, specialist)

In addition to viewing changes as new opportunities which were adopted by all participants, the data further showed that senior management used hardiness strategies by accepting change, leveraging their social resources and creating a sense of control. To quickly recover from the impact of the potential business change, they responded that:

> *"… be having conversations with people to say "remember me" and "think of me when you've got a new job"… just keeping in the line of sight as much as you can."* (Participant 121, senior management)

> *"…the other strategies [include thinking about your network]. How is your network? Are you maximizing your net worth by you talking to head-hunters? I'm certainly doing all of that."* (Participant 212, senior management)

Hardiness Strategies: Inhibitors. While it is possible to view the new opportunities brought about by change, a lack of understanding around the purpose of the change could impact individuals' abilities to accept and embrace the opportunities:

> *"…honestly don't understand what the business case for the change is. No one has explained that in a way I would understand."* (Participant 521, senior manager)

Participants have also highlighted an incongruence felt between their values and those they perceive are that of the new business which has led to an inability to embrace the potential opportunities resulting from the change. For example, a participant described the impact of this incongruence:

> *"…the human-interest stuff is just swept under the carpet, so it's quite difficult to kind of get excited by [the potential business change]. I also find it quite difficult to get excited by the management team when they seem to just treat people in the way that they do."* (Participant 121, senior management)

> "*Whether rightly or wrongly, we always seemed like the nicer company, the more friendly employer of the two.…I'm sad to see that go*." (Participant 544, middle management)

The mix-match between personal values and the change significantly impacts on participants ability to see the opportunity from change and inhibits them from moving forward from this challenging situation.

***Repressive Coping: Enablers and Inhibitors*.** Repressive coping involves individuals finding ways to avoid unpleasant negativities when facing changes. This primarily takes the form of participants focusing on their work, saying that

> *"…it has just been so bloody busy, that I have not had much of a chance to think too much about all of the ramifications. So there's a certain amount of the old ostrich syndrome, you know, head in the sand, try not to think about it, finger in the ears."* (Participant 121, senior management)

Interestingly, among the participants, there were also those who were opting to leave the company to avoid the uncertainty and negative emotions associated with change. For example,

> *"…have more of a reason to move because of the combination as it has created a lot of uncertainty……[it has meant that they] feel a lot safer and are less worried about being put in some random role where [they] don't know who the team is or where [they] might not even be based in London."* (Participant 122, specialist)

By leaving the company, these participants seek stability externally and are therefore actively avoiding the negative emotions associated with the potential business change and have therefore regained a perceived level of control.

As for the inhibitor of repressive coping, a perceived lack of stability was highlighted as an inhibitor to individuals' abilities to bounce back quickly from the impact of the potential business change. This was found to be due to a lingering sense of uncertainty around the future of their role, team and management structure, career progression and a perceived lack of communication around the change process. For example, a participant described the uncertain situation brought about by the business change, saying that *"…[there are] a lot of people who don't really know what new team, new job is going to look like. That creates a lot of uncertainty and anxiety*."

When asked about what inhibits their ability to maintain psychologically well in the face of the potential business change, many mentioned stability, for example:

> *"I'm someone that really values stability. And maybe because we've had such a period of instability with Covid. It feels like another thing that is putting me on an uneven footing."* (Participant 721, middle management)

A specialist further noted the impact of instability on career progression during change:

> *"there is always a bit of fear around where you'll be as a team, you know what position will I be in, how's this going to impact my career progression, and so on. I think that's the personal side of it, and I think at this point in time I don't know how that is going to play out."* (Participant 211, specialist)

This was mirrored by a senior manager who said that

> *"…at the moment is pretty difficult to get excited about [the potential business change], when all you see are people leaving and a lack of comms."* (Participant 121, senior management)

Positive Emotion and Self Enhancement. Positive emotion was mentioned across all levels of seniority and participants as a way of maintaining a positive mindset. For example, participants were aware of the importance and impact of maintaining an optimistic mindset in the face of change:

> *"… if you go in with a negative mindset, then you might portray things, read things and understand things differently than if you go in with a slightly more positive mindset. Then you can think about it and take the opportunities that do come up."* (Participant 211, specialist)

Self-enhancement refers to a positive bias towards oneself. We found that this strategy was mainly adopted by those within senior management. This manifested itself in a confidence in their own abilities which they believed would stand them in good stead in the changing landscape following the potential business change.

> *"… been around long enough not to really be too worried. Whatever the situation I think I'm excited for what I could get involved in leading up to it and afterwards. Worst comes to the worst, I can go and do something else. I feel like I've got a lot of business skills that I've learned over the years that I wouldn't have to necessarily stick to the industry."* (Participant 544, middle management)

Discussion

This study set out to understand how individuals build resilience when their habitual pathways to resilience were restricted. It aimed to do this by identifying the enablers and inhibitors of proactive and reactive resilience during changing work environment – at the time when a significant business change was announced during a global pandemic within an S&P company. This study detailed the practices individuals leveraged to maintain their resilience. For proactive resilience pathways, our participants tended to use process strategies. This included leveraging a combination of different practices, ranging from diet and exercise,

rest, flexibility at work, fostering wellness through maintaining a perspective, engaging with wellness activities, and cultivating an appreciation of the outdoors. For reactive resilience pathways, our participants used hardiness through identifying the new opportunities that came with change, cultivating a belief in their ability to influence the outcome, and accepting change; and repressive coping strategies through compartmentalizing the situation and seeking stability. Our findings also highlighted the individuals' capacity to use and recombine their pre-existing resources when they were unable to use their usual practices to maintain individual resilience.

Interestingly, our data showed the possibility for individuals to exercise proactive and reactive pathways to enhance individual resilience despite their gender, level of seniority, level of involvement in the company change program. Prior research suggested that the way in which an employee responds to change can vary depending on their level of seniority within an organization. Olson and Tetrick (1998) argued that those who are of a lower level have little perceived control when circumstances change and are therefore more likely to leverage repressive coping techniques as a response, whereas those who are more senior tend to be more proactive and engaged with the change and thereby demonstrate elements of psychological hardiness. Kılınç (2014) also suggested that longer tenure in an organization leads to an individual demonstrating higher levels of psychological hardiness. It was therefore interesting to note that the data in this study found that participants of all levels demonstrated displays of hardiness, and that this was the predominant strategy leveraged across all levels of seniority. When considering an individuals' proximity to change, the primary strategy leveraged also remained unchanged. What was found was that individuals demonstrated a sense of optimism around the potential for new challenges and the resulting learning opportunities, as well as a general acceptance and openness to change, which aligns

more closely with Masten's (2001) conclusion in her study into resilience that "*what began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary*".

Our findings also have managerial implications. While individuals can exercise proactive and reactive pathways, findings highlighted that an individual's ability to rest has a significant impact on their ability to build resilience. Not only do we have to consider the impact of an individuals' inability to rest on their physical capabilities to maintain their resilience, i.e., taking exercise, going outdoors etc., but a further and perhaps a more pressing issue is the impact of personal pressure on individuals exert on themselves and how that is leading to an inability for them to maintain or build their proactive resilience. Data showed that the increased sense of personal pressure led to an increase in presenteeism, which in turn saw participants working longer hours and not leaving their desks during the day, therefore not taking breaks. An increase in working hours meant that participants were not able to take breaks throughout the day, and a lack of work/life balance left participants unable to disconnect from work during the evening and weekends. This is consistent with the literature regarding the phenomenon of burn out which highlights the positive impact of rest on wellbeing (Dababneh, Swanson & Shell, 2001; Finkbeiner, Russell & Helton, 2016; Tucker, Smith, Macdonald, & Folkard, 1999), and that exhaustion is the central driver for burnout (Cropanzano, Rupp and Byrne, 2003; Wigert, 2020).

Organizational interventions that can be considered include ensuring appropriate levels of resourcing to prevent over-work and encouraging employees to take long (annual leave, weekends) as well as short (during the working day) breaks, the key consideration here is how organizations are assisting employees who are exhibiting overly conscientious tendencies. An example could be to introduce mindfulness practices across the organization to increase self-awareness. According to mindfulness research, this can assist conscientious individuals in improving self-regulation (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007; Shapiro, Carlson,

Astin, & Freedman, 2006). Future research could investigate how this could be done when organizations embrace virtual and hybrid working arrangements.

In addition, given the incongruence between individual and company values were inhibitors for hardiness, findings highlighted the impact that direct managers and senior managers can have in shaping individuals' meaning-making processes, and how their narratives could encourage subordinates to demonstrate optimism around the challenge. Organizations should consider how they factor this into their change management programs from a reactive resilience perspective, and their learning and development strategies from a proactive resilience perspective. Organizations could for example weave a narrative of opportunity in messaging before and during a change to facilitate employees in realizing their anticipation of new challenges, and development after the change has occurred to reinforce ideas of psychological hardiness. On a more continual basis, organizations could foster a culture that encourages and incentivizes healthy habits around diet and exercise, spending time outdoors and implementing more flexible working practices. Further research could analyze how managerial interventions may affect individuals' sensemaking of the change, and the actual meaning of the change experienced by individuals.

Conclusion

As an exploratory qualitative study, this study identified individuals' practices to maintain their level of resilience during a turbulent working environment. Findings indicated that individuals could flex their ways to maintain resilience level yet overwork and being unable to rest served as the main reason to prevent individuals bouncing back to adversity.

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Figure 1: Developing proactive resilience

Development of proactive resilience	Risk Strategy (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006)	Process Strategy (Masten & Reed, 2002)		Asset Strategy (Youssef & Luthans, 2005)
Building your resilience	Building Connections	Fostering Wellness	Embracing Healthy Thoughts	Finding Purpose
	▪ Prioritizing relationships ▪ Joining a group	▪ Take care of your body ▪ Practice mindfulness ▪ Avoid negative outlets	▪ Keep things in perspective ▪ Accept change ▪ Maintain a hopeful outlook ▪ Learn from your past	▪ Help others ▪ Be proactive ▪ Move towards your goals ▪ Look for opportunities for self-discovery

Figure 2: Data Structure

Emergent Theme: Proactive Resilience Pathway		Emergent Theme: Reactive Resilience Pathway	
Sub-theme	**Summary of codes**	**Sub-theme**	**Summary of codes**
Process Strategy	Enablers for process strategy ▪ Diet and exercising ▪ Able to rest (e.g., taking breaks, taking time off for the self) ▪ Flexibility at work ▪ Foster wellness (e.g., maintaining a perspective, engaging wellness activity) ▪ Environment, nature and outdoors (e.g., appreciation for local community and environment, spending time outdoors) Inhibitor for process strategy ▪ Increase work demand and inability to take rest (e.g., increase in working hours, lack of work/life boundaries, no time to take rest) ▪ Increase personal pressure and decrease in self-confidence	Hardiness	Enabler for hardiness ▪ New opportunities (e.g., developing new skills, increased responsibility, knowing new colleagues) ▪ Belief in ability to influence outcomes ▪ Accepting change Inhibitor for hardiness ▪ Incongruence between individual and company change (e.g., unable to align one's purpose to the business change, unclear around the reasons for change)
Risk Strategy	Enablers for risk strategy ▪ Socializing with family, work colleagues, and friends Inhibitor for risk strategy Increased isolation and alienation	Repressive Coping	Enabler for repressive coping ▪ Compartmentalizing the situation ▪ Seeking stability (e.g., leave the company) Inhibitor to repressive coping ▪ Lack of control and stability (e.g., uncertainty around their existing role, management, team structure, uncertainty around career progression)
Asset Strategy	Enabler for asset strategy ▪ Self-awareness through reflection ▪ Work role variation and challenge Inhibitor for asset strategy ▪ Unable to perform their job	Positive Emotion	Enabler for positive emotion ▪ Maintaining a positive mindset
		Self Enhancement	Enabler for self-enhancement ▪ Confidence in own abilities