Personal Resilience and The Adaptive Mind

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NAF 2019 • April 24, 2019
Confidentiality and Self-Regulation

1. Confidentiality

I agree to keep confidential any personal information shared between or among group members. I understand that there is an exception to this confidentiality which applies to the group leader. If the group leader believes that someone is in danger, the leader has a professional obligation to engage the appropriate support professionals in order to keep everyone safe.

2. Privacy (The Stop Rule)

No group member is ever required to answer any question, to participate in any activity, or to tell anything. If I am asked questions or asked to participate in an activity which makes me feel uncomfortable, I understand that I have the right to pass, that is, the right to refuse. I agree to never pressure other group members to participate in any discussion or activity after the member has passed or refused. I understand that the group leader is obliged to protect this right. I also understand that I will benefit more from the group the more I am able to take risks in sharing and participating.

adaptationprofessionals.org
Examples of **Chronic Life Stresses** and **Major Acute Shocks**

- Personal Injury or Illness
- Divorce
- Political Landscape
- Pregnancy
- Terrorism
- Death of a Close Friend
- Domestic Abuse
- Mental Health Issues
- Death of a spouse (or child)

- Child Leaving Home
- Giving Birth
- Homelessness
- Gang Violence
- Migration
- Change in Financial State
- Addiction
- Change in Residence
- New Job/Change Careers
- Climate Change
Phases Commonly Seen through Disasters

- **Pre-Disaster**
  - Warning (years/days/hours)

- **Impact**
  - “Community Cohesion” (honeymoon phase can last a few days to 3-6 months)
  - “Heroic Phase” (occurs during and immediately after impact)
  - “Disillusionment” (can generate mental, social, spiritual, economic, and physical distresses that last months to years)
  - “Recovery” (coming to terms and working through grief, can last years)

- **Post-Disaster**
  - Some People Remain Dysregulated
  - Trigger Events and Anniversary Reactions Can Cause Regression
  - Many Eventually “Bounce Back” to Pre-Crisis Levels (common notion of resilience)

- But Others Use The Trauma As Transformational Catalyst to Increase their Sense of Wellbeing

What is Personal Resilience?

- The ability, in the face of difficulty, to retain flexible cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses \((\text{Neenan and Dryden, 2002})\)

- The ability to mitigate the effects of stress (e.g., factors such as emotional, cognitive, physiological, behavioral responses to work, the work environment or the organizations \((\text{Levi, 2000 EU Guidance on Work Related Stress})\))

- Ability to “bounce back” and “roll with the punches”; ability to deal with perceived adverse situations in a positive and creative way \((\text{CABA, Building Personal Resilience in the Workplace})\):
  - To transform challenge into an opportunity; and
  - To absorb any learning offered by setbacks quickly and at the minimum physical and mental cost.

- Inner strengths of mind and character – both inborn and developed – that enable one to respond well to adversity, including the capacities to \((\text{Schiraldi, 2017})\):
  - Prevent stress-related conditions, such as depression or anxiety, or their recurrence;
  - Recover faster and more completely from stress and stress-related conditions; and
  - Optimize mental fitness and functioning in the various areas of life.
My Person Resilience Journey: Before...

- Domestic Abuse
- Addiction
- Divorce
- Change in Financial State
- Political Landscape
- New Job/Change Careers
- Change in Residence
- Personal Injury or Illness
- Climate Change
- Death of a Close Family Member
- Mental Health Issues

Potential symptoms of stress

- Tiredness and irritability
- Mood swings, emotional outbursts
- Disputes with work colleagues
- Reduced quality of work
- Indecisiveness, poor concentration and poor judgement
- Reduced motivation, self determination, drive
- Loss of sense of humour
- Feeling jumpy or ill-at-ease, insecure or poor self esteem
- Sleeping badly
- Increased sick leave or poor timekeeping
- Avoiding difficult situations
- Working late, taking work home, missing deadlines
- Needing alcohol or medication
My Engrained & Learned Resilience Character Traits

- Optimism
- Emotional intelligence
- Sense of autonomy and independence
- Humor
- Empathy and compassion
- Meaning and purpose
- Sociability and social competence
- Gratitude
- Curiosity and constant desire for continued learning
- Healthy boundaries
- Adaptability
- Willingness
- Routines
- Integrity and moral strength
- Intrinsic spirituality
- Healthy outlets
My Resilience Journey: After and Ongoing…

Calm under pressure
Healthy habits
Complete helplessness and vulnerability
Surviving
Resilience

Balance
Improved self-esteem

Rational thought process
Self-compassion

Happiness
Perfection, invulnerability
# How resilient are you today?

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<th>SOMETIMES</th>
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**MY RESILIENCE TODAY**

X

**TOTAL**

30
Supporting Adaptation Professionals

The Adaptive Mind Project
The challenge

A world …

- Facing rapid and constant change, great uncertainty, surprises and in some instances outright not-knowing
- Experiencing more frequent traumatic disruptions
- Headed for (or already in) transformative change
A growing concern

- Daily exposure to information about how climate change is altering what we love and depend on
  - Landscapes, places
  - People
  - Economies
  - Other species

- Overwhelming grief and anxiety (Kern 2015)

- Growing stress experienced by practitioners (Moser et al. 2018); acknowledged for first responders, activists

- Research in this area is growing (Woodbury 2019; Moser 2019, 2015, 2013; Clayton 2018; Clayton, Manning, Krygsman & Speiser 2017; Doppelt 2017; Thomas 2014; Clayton, Manning & Hodge 2014; Van Susteren 2012)
No one has been trained to deal with this!
“I don’t know of a single scientist that’s not having an emotional reaction to what is being lost. It’s gotten to be so depressing that I’m not sure I’m going to go back to this particular site again because I just know I’m going to see more and more of it dead, and bleached, and covered with brown algae.”

– Camille Parmesan, Ph.D.

100s of letters from scientists, see: istishowyoufeel.com @ITHYF_Letters
"I live in a day-to-day, practical denial of climate change, because it is unbearable. To know what I know - is unbearable."

-- Susi Moser, Ph.D.

See trailer at: https://www.sffilm.org/artist-development/find-a-project/once-you-know
“I used to love falling asleep to the sound of rain. Now, it keeps me up at night with a sense of dread – will the homes in Tijuana hold up? How badly will it flood? How much trash and sediment will we need to clear out of the basins?”

– Kristen Goodrich, Tijuana River NERR
For frontline communities

Health impacts associated with climate-related changes in exposure to extreme events include death, injury, or illness; exacerbation of underlying medical conditions; and adverse effects on mental health [High Confidence].

Climate Change & Health Assessment
A recent email exchange with an extension professional


> “When people call 911 they want someone there who’s going to be brave and heroic and handle the situation” [original quote from article]

> “When people call Sea Grant they want someone there who’s going to be clear-eyed and objective and handle the situation…” [redux]

> “It’s chronic, repeated exposure to everyone’s worst day…” [original quote from article]

> “It’s chronic, repeated exposure to everyone’s raw and unfiltered existential dread…” [redux]
Journaling exercise
What do we mean by an “adaptive mind”?

An evolving understanding/definition:

- A set of propensities, capacities and skills
- ...that allow an individual – embedded in a social network and institution – to respond with agility, creativity, resolve and resilience to stresses such as
  - Constant change, including surprises, rapid shifts, pervasive uncertainty and not-knowing
  - (Vicarious or direct) traumatic experiences (pre-and post-traumatic stress)
  - Challenges associated with transformative change
Core research questions

- What are the qualities, traits, skills and capacities of someone who can cope with and function effectively in the face of great uncertainty and constant, sometimes traumatic and increasingly transformative change?
- What of that is trainable/cultivatable?
- What difference does it make to cultivate “adaptive mind” skills?
Core team

Susi Moser, Ph.D. (PI)  
SMRC & AUNE

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AGCI & Univ. of Mich.

Kristen Goodrich  
TRNERR & UC-Irvine

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Movement Strategy Center

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The Nonprofit Institute

Taj James
Movement Strategy Center

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Wellesley College (president emerita)

Cathy Lounsbury, Ph.D.
Antioch University
New England
Components

- Literature Review
- Practitioner Needs Assessment
- Landscape Assessment
- Transdisciplinary Expert Workshop
- Training Development & Pilots
- Peer Support Institutional Support

Preliminary work underway with seed funding.
Core parts of project, to be undertaken with full funding.
Outputs

- White Paper
- Peer-reviewed Journal Article
- Video
- Transdisciplinary Workshop
- Training materials, practices
- Designing a Training Module
- Pilot trainings
- Peer & institutional support
Outcomes

- **Improved (interdisciplinary) understanding** of what constitutes the “adaptive mind”
- **Greater capacities** among frontline and boundary workers (“climate first responders”)
- **Networked cohorts** of people with adaptive mind capacities, offering mutual support to each other, and bringing more effective help to their communities
- A **greater acceptance** that adaptive mind skills are central to a well-trained resilience/adaptation professional community, recognition of HR needs and implications
Immediate audiences = closest partners

Coasts + Cities + Frontline Communities
= where there is an immediate need
Work to date

- Initial literature review – wide ranging, multiple, disparate disciplines
- Practitioner landscape assessment
  - Survey and some interviews (NERRS, USDN, Sea Grant)
  - Conference sessions (e.g., CAF, Social Coast, NERRS, NAF)
  - Other opportunities (e.g., OCM, USDA, USGCRP)
- Outreach to potential partners, others
- Fundraising (ongoing)
Testimonials

Kristin Baja
Urban Sustainability Directors Network

Susi Moser, Ph.D.
Susanne Moser Research & Consulting
Antioch University New England
Polling Exercise & Dialogue
The ASAP Personal Resilience Affinity Group (PRAG)

**Vision:** Active and skilled adaptation professionals with the capacity to assess, understand, and manage stress and resilience while fostering resilience in others so we can thrive in a changing world.

**Mission:** Gather curious and dedicated individuals interested in exploring research, resources, and tools, sharing experiences, and gaining skills to enhance our personal resilience and professional capacity to pay it forward within the communities where we live and work.

**About PRAG**
- 15+ Active Members
- Member-led
- Interactive research and application
- Speakers

**PRAG Tri-Chairs**

**Emily Wasley**
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**Jake Pollack**
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## Inaugural PRAG Curriculum

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Reaching all adaptation professionals

- What needs?
- Whose needs?
- What resources, practices, approaches are needed?
- How do we account for and do this in a way that respects painful legacies, culture, history, and diversity?
Next Steps

**Personal Resilience Affinity Group**

- Join our monthly meetings
- Access, use and share collected resources

**Adaptive Mind Project**

- Continue to share your experiences with us and others
- Fundraising ideas
- Project implementation
  - Research
  - Trainings
  - Peer groups
  - Wide sharing of resources, practices
Thank you!

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