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Beyond Agility – Resilience

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Agile 2011 Keynote

http://www.agilealliance.org/resources/learning-center/keynote-the-power-of-an-agile-mindset

Do you mostly agree or mostly disagree with the following?

(1) Intelligence is something very basic that you really can't change much. You're born with it or not. Yes, you can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.

(2) No matter how intelligent you are, you can always get better, sometimes you can improve a lot.

You can substitute any ability or talent for "intelligence."

Two mindsets
Fixed vs. Agile

Ability – static, like height

Goal - look good

Challenge - avoid

Failure - defines your identity

Effort - for those with no talent

Reaction to challenge - helplessness

Ability – can grow, like muscle

Goal - to learn

Challenge - embrace

Failure – provides information

Effort - path to mastery

Reaction to challenge – resilience

Small effects matter

- Decades of research show that what we say to each other and to ourselves impacts our mindsets.

- I receive lots of e-mail asking for help.

- Can we train people to hold the agile mindset?

- It seems the answer is "yes."

Research on teaching mindset

- Studies have shown increased motivation, better grades, higher achievement test scores.

- Students taught that brains form new connections during learning and that over time they can become smarter.

- Benefits were especially pronounced for students subject to negative stereotypes—girls in math or minority students.

Huge experiment

The U.S. Army announced in 2009 that it planned to train all members (over a million) in resiliency.

https://www.rto.wrair.army.mil/index.html

Some modules are password protected but much is freely available, including Powerpoints for training.

Why resilience?

- **Research shows that those holding an agile mindset display resilience in response to challenge, the fixed mindset response is helplessness and blaming.**

- **"Resilience is the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity."** (Jensen and Fraser, 2005)

Learned helplessness

- **Early work by Martin Seligman is the foundation of part of the Army's training.**

- **Experiments with animals (including humans) showed that repeated shocks without any way to control them, led to giving up, not even trying to escape.**

- **However, about one-third of the subjects never give up. Why?**

Explanatory style

- **Those who don't give up (optimistic) explain situations as temporary, local, changeable (even though they apparently have no control).**

- **Pessimists explain situations as permanent, uncontrollable, pervasive, typically suffer anxiety and depression.**

- **Story of engineers being fired ☹!**

Pennsylvania Resiliency Program

Teaching children and adults a better explanatory style has been successful in reducing anxiety and depression.

A 10-day program also teaches teachers and parents to help their students and children.

http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/prpsum.htm

Comprehensive Soldier Fitness

- **3 components:**
- **(1) On-line self-test for psychological fitness, taken annually to track progress**
- **(2) Self-improvement courses available following the test**
- **(3) Master resilience training for sergeants (train the trainers).**

First step: the test

Christopher Peterson, University of Michigan, author of the Values in Action signature strengths survey, created the test

Global Assessment Tool (GAT), 20-minute questionnaire that focuses on strengths

Measures: emotional, family, social, and spiritual fitness, research suggests these are the keys to resilience.

Individual scores are confidential but Army tracks all data to learn from this huge experiment.

Self-improvement courses

- **Based on test scores, soldiers select on-line courses to improve.**

- **Modules for each "fitness" and one mandatory course on post-traumatic growth.**

- **Army training modules:**
  https://g1arng.army.pentagon.mil/programs/crms/pages/default.aspx

The REAL reason for the Army experiment

- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, suicide among service members and veterans has soared to record levels during US military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.**

- **In 2011 every 3 months 10,000 combat veterans sought help for PTSD**

- **Total with PTSD – more than 200,000.**

- **In 2010, 22 active military and veterans committed suicide each day.**

Albert Ellis: ABCD Model

A: activating event

B: beliefs about self, others, environment, etc.

C: consequences—feelings and behaviors

D: dispel unrealistic beliefs

C results from B, not directly from A.

Recall story of engineers who were fired.

Exercises

Students examine scenarios.

Separate: event; beliefs about the event; feelings/
behaviors generated by thoughts.

Look for (1) patterns driving adaptive outcomes and
(2) patterns driving counterproductive outcomes.

Identify deeply held, core "iceberg" beliefs that
drive thoughts, determine feelings/behaviors.

Once iceberg identified

Is it still useful?

Is it still meaningful?

Is it accurate in the given situation?

Is it too rigid?

Does it contribute to or undermine my effectiveness?

Special iceberg

Special attention is given to the core belief: "Asking for help shows weakness."

This core belief undermines the willingness to rely on others or to ask for help from leaders, peers, or other health care resources.

It's very difficult to change.

Slowly changing

One soldier commented privately: "There was a time when I would have called a soldier a @#$%* for seeing a counselor or going to a chaplain. If I didn't say it to his face, I sure would have thought it. I don't see it that way anymore. Multiple deployments have taught me that we're all going to need help and it's the strong ones who are willing to ask for it."

Minimize catastrophic thinking

- **Ruminating about irrational outcomes increases anxiety, paralyzes thinking.**

- **Consider worst-case, best-case, and most likely outcomes—in this order.**

- **Make these detailed.**

- **Story about negative performance review.**

Thinking traps

- One example: the tendency to judge others based on one small piece of evidence.

- "I hate to admit it, but I think that way a lot. I tend to write people off if they screw up. I'm not big on second chances because I think you can judge character by seeing behavior. If that guy had a strong character, he wouldn't be dragging and his uniform wouldn't be in disarray."

Communication Styles

- **active constructive - authentic, enthusiastic support (a la Carol Dweck)**

- **passive constructive - understated support**

- **passive destructive - ignore the event**

- **active destructive - point out negative aspects of the event**

Waiting for results

Preliminary data show small gains.

The program itself is "agile," the website and the modules are continually being updated based on research and feedback.

Families, including children, are now included in training.

Lots of anecdotal evidence

- The Army is less concerned with conducting a valid experiment than deploying troops.

- Initially groups were identified and trained and then split up and deployed.

- Data collection has been sparse and mostly subjective, although there are lots of testimonials.

- The results are positive, but some argue are not enough to justify the enormous expense.
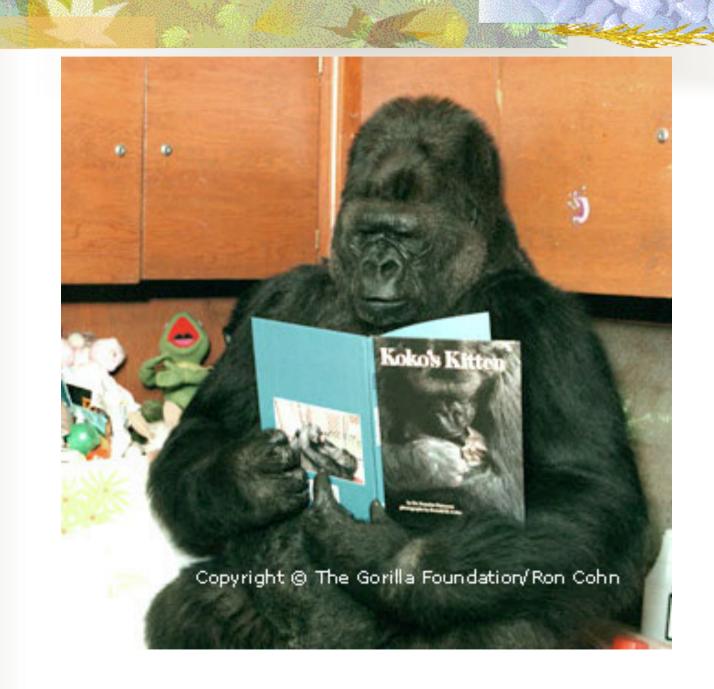
- Results will be years in the making.

The best evidence

Spouses and fellow soldiers report that they have a better vocabulary.

They have a "name" for a feeling or a way of reacting.

This reminds me of the benefits of patterns – a name allows communication about the object.

That gives me hope ☺!