

Applied Positive Psychology

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Week 6

Lecture 19: Understanding and building resilience: Part 2

I welcome you all to module 6 of this course titled Applied Positive Psychology. Module 6 is about resilience and post-traumatic growth. Today we are talking about lecture number 16, part 2, where we will discuss the concept of resilience and how to build it. Let me give you a brief recap of the last lecture, which is part 1 of this lecture. In part one of lecture 16, we discussed the concept of resilience. How do we define resilience? What are the important indicators of resilience? We also discussed three waves of research on resilience in terms of the different patterns that emerge historically, in the literature of resilience. Then at the end, we discussed some of the foundational studies or classic studies that gave us insight into resilience and the factors involved in it. We'll continue from there in the second part of this lecture and talk about some of the resilient qualities in positive psychology, important concepts or factors that are discussed in the context of resilience, and mostly we'll be focusing on how we can build resilience.

So, let's start today's lecture. As we know that the emergence of positive psychology has led to elaborate studies of positive constructs that contribute to our well-being. Resilience is also studied. Let us see what are the things that are discussed in the context of resilience in the field of positive psychology. So in recent years, the field of positive psychology has contributed significantly to identifying resilient qualities. As part of this movement of positive psychology, researchers like Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi have highlighted the strengths, characteristics, and virtues associated with mental health, vitality, and resilience. A lot of these strengths, character strengths, and so on, which we have also discussed earlier, can be categorized under many of these resilient qualities. Especially in the issue of American psychology, that outlines these resilient qualities as indicators of optimal psychological functioning and so on. With the passage of time and progress in research, people have been trying to outline important qualities related to resilience.

Some of the key qualities that are identified as related to resilience include- happiness and subjective well-being, optimism, faith, self-determination, wisdom, excellence, creativity, and so forth. A lot of this construct is directly or indirectly related to the

concept of resilience, and these are some of the core concepts that are discussed in positive psychology. Additionally, a special issue of the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* focused on strengths, virtues, and positive characteristics that contribute to resilience. In that journal, some of the highlighted qualities associated with resilience that they discussed are morality and self-control, gratitude, forgiveness, dreams, hope, humility, and so on. These are some additional concepts that are included in the literature of positive psychology, which can be linked to resilience. These resilient qualities reflect an evolving understanding of resilience.

Now, if you look at the earlier research, its focus on resilience was very specifically on understanding how to overcome adversities. Some additional research in the positive psychology construct simply reflects that this resilience has also been studied in the context of the development and cultivation of positive traits that promote overall well-being and thriving in life. So, resilience, as a conceptual term, has become much broader, where people are not only talking about how to overcome adversities in terms of resilience, but is also discussed in the context of a positive trait that can promote well-being and thriving in one's life. Now let us look into how we can build resilience that is what are the important ingredients that we can take from existing findings in the literature by discussing a model that we'll try to understand. So, like a building muscle, increasing your resilience takes time and intentionality. We have to build it slowly, with the passage of time by developing those characteristics.

.Now we'll try to understand what the important things are that we can focus on in terms of building resilience. A very interesting model called the skill-based model of personal resilience summarizes many of these important factors that we can understand or discuss for building resilience. This model was proposed by Baker, Baker, Burrell (2021). They introduced a skill-based model of personal resilience. This model integrates important skills of resilience and ways to develop them. This is a skill-based model which acknowledges both trait and contextual factors, encouraging facilitators for considering individual differences. This is a skill-based model that include diverse factors like trait characteristics and contextual factors as well. This model of resilience takes a triadic perspective, focusing on three key domains. These three domains are: cognitive factors, which means what thought processes are; behavioral factors, which mean how you take actions; and emotional factors, which involve how you deal with your emotions. Cognitive factors, emotional factors, and behavioral factors are three important factors in terms of understanding and building resilience. Each domain plays a distinct role in the different stages of the resilience cycle.

During initial survival, recovery to normal functioning, and ultimately achieving psychological growth, resilience can play a very important role. All these factors—cognitive, behavioral, and emotional—also play an important role. This model has two

important sections. One is about content. What are the important contents or factors that we should focus on for resilience training or building? And the second important aspect of this model is the process factors, which are critical for successfully applying the processes.

In order to develop resilience, what are the contents or factors on which we should focus? This model is structured around three core modules, each reflecting different aspects of resilience. We can build resilience by addressing all three important factors or components of resilience. One is focused on emotional resilience, one focuses on resilient thinking or thought processes, and the third one is behavioral response, which is about balance and recovery. Each of these three components has different sub-factors. For example, emotional resilience depends on social connection, positive emotions, and emotion regulation. Resilient thinking depends on or is promoted by flexible thinking and optimism. Balance and recovery as a behavioral component are facilitated by balancing demands in our lives and taking self-care.

Emotional resilience: how can we build it? At the emotional level, how can we become more resilient? One important component is that emotional resilience is enhanced by emotional regulation ability. The more you are able to regulate, control, and direct your emotions, the more you will become emotionally resilient. You are able to bounce back and control your emotions to deal with the situation. Emotional resilience is about the ability to manage physiological and emotional responses to stress. When stress or trauma happens; there are many changes that occur in the body and mind, which we can broadly call as disturbances that disturb our homeostasis. Now while building these emotional disturbances, emotional regulation is very helpful. Resilient people experience the same physiological arousal as other people, but they are able to calm the sympathetic nervous system and activate the parasympathetic nervous system.

So whenever we face any stressful situations or traumatic situations, our physiology gets activated, specifically the sympathetic nervous system- our heart rate increases, our skin temperature increases, and so on. These are the indicators that your whole system is in a disturbed state. People with high resilience or the ability to regulate emotions can quickly control the sympathetic nervous system and activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which calms the system. There are a lot of techniques we can learn to calm our physiological system when we are in an emotionally disturbing situation. Techniques like mindfulness, which we have elaborately discussed earlier, acceptance of emotions, and controlled breathing techniques are some of them. We have discussed some of these things already in the previous modules. Arousal and repression help manage negative emotions and foster effective problem-solving. How do you interpret that arousal? How do you look at the world and interpret situations? All these things will influence your physiological arousal, and the more you are able to regulate all these things using

breathing techniques, mindfulness, acceptance, and thought processes, the more likely you are to adapt quickly and regulate your emotions; your emotion regulation ability will also enhance your resilience because you will then be able to better deal with the situation since you can control your emotions. If it becomes too much, it is very difficult to deal with the situation.

Then come positive emotions. The more we experience positive emotions while facing difficulties, the more likely we are to deal with the situation in a better way. Resilience is also linked to the experience of positive emotions. Positive emotions, which we have discussed elaborately earlier, also have a lot of functions, such as broadening our thoughts, building our resources, and enabling us to function in a much better way when we experience them. So positive emotion, if we are able to induce it or get it from the environment, will enhance our resilience. Studies show resilient individuals tend to feel positive emotions like hope and excitement during challenges, which help them recover quickly and cope more effectively.

So the more you experience positive emotions, the more likely you are to become resilient in the situation. Engaging with positive emotion enhances cognitive function, reduces cardiovascular activity, and leads to greater overall well-being. Overall, they also contribute to emotional resilience. We can increase positive emotion; we have already discussed that elaborately, but we can also develop skills to experience more positive emotion such as savoring positive experiences and expressing gratitude; all of this can boost resilience over time.

Third is social connection and support which can also build your resilience or emotional resilience, especially if you have strong social relationships, which are crucial for emotional resilience; this means more meaningful support system from other people. Whenever we face difficulties, if we get support from other people, emotional support or otherwise, we are more likely to deal with the situation in a much better way and become more resilient. Because then not all the problems are coming directly to you, the people around you are also helping you face the situation. You are not alone in dealing with the situation. You may have very limited resources in terms of dealing with the situation alone, but when there are people around you, their resources are also added to yours, so you are able to fight the situation or face it in a much easier way. So that also builds resilience. Research shows that resilient people are adept at forming supportive connections and using them to manage stress and so on. A positive reciprocal relationship where trust and emotional safety are present can enhance resilience by providing both emotional and practical support. Social relationship, connections and support systems build resilience very strongly, so one can increase this factor by making more meaningful relationships. This can be a very important factor for enhancing emotional resilience.

Focusing on social connections, support systems, positive emotions, and emotion regulation—these three can facilitate resilience.

Now, the next factor is about resilient thinking, as the model shows. It can be enhanced by flexible thinking and optimism. Enhancing resilient thinking means that in your thinking process, you become resilient. At the cognitive level, you can become more resilient by focusing on flexible thinking. Flexible thinking is about cognitive flexibility. It is the ability to shift thinking patterns to adapt to new or challenging circumstances. Whenever a problematic situation arises, it means it is no longer a new situation or a normal situation; things have changed around you. So, you also have to cognitively adapt yourself to the new situation.

If you are remaining in the earlier stage of the thinking process, you cannot adapt. You have to be flexible in terms of identifying the new situation and adapting accordingly. Now the situation has changed; new things are coming up, so accordingly, one has to address the situation, and that requires flexibility in one's thinking. It's crucial for resilience because it allows individuals to overcome ingrained negative ways of thinking and better respond to challenges. So, this quality is very important for making one resilient. Things that can facilitate cognitive flexibility, unlike cognitive reappraisal, is cognitive restructuring. For individuals, how can you reinterpret the situation in a new light of evidence? That is called cognitive reappraisal. You are able to interpret the situation in a different way.

Research shows that resilient individuals use cognitive flexibility to manage negative situations, negative interpretations of the situation, and emotional reactions, and they are better able to cope with the situation. This also impacts emotions because thinking and emotions are very directly connected to each other. So, the ability to reappraise challenges reduce physiological stress responses, enabling better problem solving and so on. A resilient individual can adjust their thinking from older patterns to new thinking patterns, from habitual negative patterns to more balanced ones, and so on. How do you think about the situation when something goes wrong; that is an indicator of flexible thinking and that will increase resilience.

Optimism is also very important. We have already talked about optimism in detail. So, an optimistic thinking style is something that is a characteristic of resilient thinking. People who are resilient are more optimistic in a sense. This includes explaining negative aspects as a temporary thing. It is specific to the situation. And generally, they think this can be changed rather than being permanent, pervasive, and personal. All these things have been discussed in the earlier lectures about optimism.

Optimistic thinking style, when you see a negative event happen in one's life, leads you to

think of it as very specific to the situation and a very temporary thing that can be changed. This gives them resilience and energy to work on and come back to one's functioning level before the negative event. So, optimists view challenges as surmountable and perceive setbacks as opportunities for growth. They see that challenges can be opportunities for growth, so that attitude makes them more resilient. Optimism also buffers against stress and depression, which we have already discussed. Optimistic explanations help people manage stress better, reduce the risk of depression, and so on. Optimists are also more likely to seek social support during stressful times, which can also make them more resilient. Optimistic thinking also involves generating balance and a realistic explanation of the event.

Optimism should not be unrealistic. We are talking about optimism here in a realistic way. So resilience thinking combined with explanatory frameworks, optimistic perspectives, and cognitive flexibility can create realistic optimism. This combination of optimism and cognitive flexibility can make people highly resilient. These qualities can be developed to make oneself resilient.

The next and last factor is about balance and recovery, which is a behavioral component. It includes balancing demands and self-care. Factors related to resilient behaviors include balancing demands. How are you able to balance the demands of your life? The more you are able to balance the demands, the more resilient you will become. People have multiple roles in their lives. Resilient individuals demonstrate the ability to balance all these competing demands from life, such as roles at work, home, personal life, and so on. How are you able to balance all these things? If you are able to balance them, you will become more resilient. If you are too burdened by these demands, you will face more stress and problems and will not be able to adapt properly. This balancing act is essential for maintaining well-being and preventing burnout. Research links high levels of resilience to the ability to manage and prioritize different demands. When you have so many demands in your life, you have to find your priorities. Accordingly, you devote your energy, so that it will help you to balance the demands. Some people also use something called job crafting, which basically means redesigning your job, whatever work you are doing, to make it more meaningful so that you enjoy doing it and find more meaning in it. That also helps you to balance demands and leading to greater satisfaction.

An optimistic thinking style can also be connected to the aspect that a key factor in balancing demands is optimistic thinking in terms of finding priorities, and optimism can also be helpful in balancing demands. Optimists are better at prioritizing tasks because when they are optimistic about something, they see what is most important for becoming hopeful in the future and so on. So that prioritization also helps in terms of developing an optimistic thinking style. Optimism also supports goal-adjustment strategies.

We have already talked about some of these things. It can facilitate resilience in any way. Self-care and recovery are also very important because, to become resilient, you have to take care of yourself. If you don't have energy or the necessary factors for carrying yourself, you will not be resilient because you yourself are not able to deal with the situation. So, behavioral strategies are essential for recovery. Resilient individuals use specific behavioral strategies to recover emotionally and physically from stress.

You have to have proper strategies to come out of situations emotionally and physically. These strategies include taking regular breaks, accessing social support (taking support whenever you are not able to do things alone), engaging in relaxation techniques (learning some basic relaxation techniques so that your system is not overburdened by stress), and participating in enjoyable hobbies and activities outside of work can also build your energy and mindset. Such activities support recovery by reducing stress, improving emotional well-being, and promoting resilience. You have to engage in self-care over the long term. Resilient individuals develop greater awareness and engagement with self-care activities. They recognize the importance of attending to their own needs, which includes not only relaxation and hobbies but also physical exercise and mindfulness. All these things can be included in the self-care aspects. People may also use tools like smart goals. The thing is, whatever you do to take care of yourself like keeping yourself in proper mental and physical health, all these things will actually promote resilience.

Now, very briefly we will talk about the process factor. What are the important variables that we can develop within ourselves? Process factors arise from the situation and the interaction between the person and the situation. So basically, these factors also promote resilience because we do things in a context.

A few important things related to process factors are engagement with learning, motivation level, interpersonal processes, and individual differences. All these things also play an important role when we work in a specific situation. Engagement with learning basically means that this model emphasizes self-monitoring and reflection on personnel, stressors, and responses, which foster engagement with the resilient building process. The more you feel engaged with the task you are doing or in a situation, the more resilient you will be because you feel like engaging with the task.

As individuals actively engage in identifying the sources of their stress and evaluating their emotional responses, they gain a greater sense of control over their reactions, increasing their self-efficacy and resilience. So, the more engaged and one is able to understand and monitor oneself, the more likely they are to be resilient in those contexts. This engagement leads to long-term behavioral changes by reinforcing the application of

new skills and behaviors. So this is one important thing. To what extent are you engaged with the task or learning situation?

Second, motivation is very important. The process factor of motivation is critical for successfully applying the resilience model. If you are not self-motivated to include all these factors, then obviously it will not work. Your motivation should come from within to build resilience. Motivation is shaped by an individual's understanding of their own readiness to change their personal values and ability to navigate challenges throughout the change process.

You can build resilience if you have a higher motivation to do so. If you don't have the motivation to build resilience and understand all these things, it cannot work. So people's understanding, motivation, readiness to change themselves, focusing on personal values, and all these things will be influenced by one's motivation. Key elements for facilitating sustained motivation include recognizing the need to change.

The third one is interpersonal processes. It plays a very important role in the successful application of the resilience model. Your interpersonal support system will always promote whether you are able to include all these resilience factors in a long-term behavioral change. This process emphasizes the importance of relationships, communication, emotional connection, and support for individuals to adopt new behaviors and develop resilience.

All these things will contribute to the extent that you are able to develop those skills i.e., interpersonal processes can facilitate that. These are process-oriented means i.e., these are factors in the context which can further promote your resilience.

Individual differences are always present. Some people are more resilient than others. So those individual differences will play a very important role in the success of a resilient training model. For example, as motivation is an individual difference, some people are highly motivated to change themselves; some are not; that will also influence. It acknowledges that each participant has unique characteristics, and this variation must be considered for the model to be effective. We should understand that everybody is not the same in order to develop and build resilience. Each participant's ability to engage in and benefit from training is influenced by their personality traits, historical experiences, cultural background, and existing coping strategies.

All these things will influence, and based on that, one can build from there. So these individual differences affect how people perceive and respond to stress and that will influence their resilient building efforts. So, recognizing these variations, facilitators are better able to address each person's unique needs, and one can facilitate that. So, these are

some of the factors that are discussed in the skill-based model, where we can develop resilience by focusing on important factors that should be developed within the individual and addressing some of the factors in the context or in the environment.

Overall, these things can develop our resilience, or we can build resilience by focusing on all these aspects. So, this model gives a very practical applied implication on how we can build resilience. So, with this, I stop here. This is the end of Lecture Number 16. Thank you.