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## Preparation to build resilience

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## Preparation to build resilience

Resilience as a positive and desirable virtue has become internalised and normalised in the public's understanding and, increasingly, practitioners and coaches have searched for ways of promoting resilience in athletes. Over the last decade there has been a burgeoning of resilience programmes developed in a multitude of contexts, such as the military (e.g., Meredith et al., 2011) and the workplace (e.g., King et al., 2016), and for a number of different purposes, such as to develop sustained performance in sport (e.g., Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016) or to manage childhood adversity (e.g., Fritz et al., 2018). However, before jumping on the proverbial bandwagon and embarking on the development of a resilience programme, coaches and practitioners should ask themselves two pertinent questions: (1) Should we aspire to facilitate resilience? and (2) What is the motivation for building resilience?

### Should We Aspire to Facilitate Resilience?

The first question may, at first sight, appear redundant; the development of resilience is intuitively both positive and protective, and may therefore be an attractive proposition for practitioners who aspire to improve some aspect of athletes' lives. However, there are several issues that should be addressed before embarking on an intervention. The first issue relates to the requirement of adversity to facilitate and build resilience (D.J. Brown et al., 2020), and the second relates to the relationship that resilience has with (adversarial or posttraumatic) growth (D.J. Brown et al., 2020). In respect of the former, Howells and Wadey (2020) identified that national governing bodies, performance directors, sport science practitioners, and coaches might be enticed by the transformational qualities of the positive outcomes following experiences of adversity in sport. This is supported by research by Sarkar and Hilton (2020) who identified that elite coaches often create a challenging but supportive environment to facilitate athletes' personal and athletic progression. However, Howells and Wadey (2020) cautioned against an intrinsic belief that introducing, reinforcing, and/or perpetuating current harsh practices (cf. Cavallerio et al., 2016) into training and competition will facilitate enhanced sporting performance and thus promote certain key performance indicators (e.g., heightened podium potentials, improved positioning in medal tables).

Indeed, Kegelaers et al. (2019) warned that increasing pressure on athletes "without sufficient support in place may lead to an unrelenting environment, characterised by unhealthy outcomes such as conflicts, unhealthy competition, blaming, and little attention for mental well-being" (n.p.). In respect of the second issue regarding the relationship with growth, in addressing the similarities and differences between thriving, resilience, and growth, D.J. Brown et al. (2020) identified that resilience may prevent growth occurring at an individual (as opposed to a team) level. Growth occurs when an individual's assumptive world (that is, their beliefs, values, and identity) is shattered by an adversity (cf. Janoff-Bulman, 1992) that is accompanied by significant ongoing distress. Following a period of cognitive processing (e.g., reflective pondering) and disclosure, facilitated by enhanced social support, a higher level of functioning, including superior performance, may ensue (cf. Howells et al., 2017); this higher level of functioning is conceptualised as growth. Resilience, as a consequence of its protective qualities, may impede this process as it has the potential to impact the

individual's perception of an adversity as not being sufficiently negative to involve a shattering of assumptions. Rather, the robust individual is protected from the impact of the adversity and therefore growth, with its increased level of functioning and potentially superior performance (Howells et al., 2017), does not occur. Accordingly, before embarking on an intervention to facilitate resilience, one should question whether it is ethical to introduce adversities in the form of challenges and whether resilience is preferable to growth in a particular context.

### What Is the Motivation for Building Resilience?

This second question relates to addressing a number of key issues in respect of the rationale and motivation for the aspiration to build resilience. Before embarking on a systematic (or otherwise) approach to developing resilience, a number of key issues should be addressed. Firstly, Fletcher and Sarkar (2016) emphasise that resilience training is not a panacea for all mental health or performance problems and that any programme should be part of a larger holistic programme of psychosocial support to develop well-adjusted performers. Secondly, coaches and practitioners need to be cognisant of why they are proposing such an intervention. For example, we may reflect on whether the goal of an intervention is to enhance or deliver optimal performance or whether it is to create a shield that protects the athlete from the negative impact that adversities can have on their emotional and psychological wellbeing. Reflection on this question is an important stage in the development of an effective and timely intervention. To elaborate, Fletcher and Sarkar (2016) discuss an evidence-based approach to developing psychological resilience specifically to facilitate sustained success, and therefore the timing of an intervention is critical.

Thirdly, the decision to implement a resilience intervention or programme should be made whilst being cognisant of the dynamic psychosocial and political nuances in an organisation, for example, the extent to which an organisation is open to sport psychology support. As Bell et al. (2020) report "Overall perceptions of sport psychology [are] varied, with multiple factors impacting upon them including the use and understanding of sport psychology, as well as coaches' perceptions" (n.p.). Finally, for sport psychology practitioners, it is important that one's professional philosophies are acknowledged as this will impact of whether a resilience intervention is considered appropriate and if so, what content it will include. For example, Gonzalez et al. (2016) reported upon a number of case studies involving intervention strategies where they reported their philosophical approach as being eclectic (i.e., drawing on multiple schools of thought) and involved them using a psychological skills training (PST) model to develop resilience in athletes. Alternatively, consultants identifying with a cognitive-behavioural philosophical approach would assume that an individual's beliefs and thoughts influence their behaviour. A consultant working within this paradigm may utilise rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) which proposes that an "individual's beliefs (rational versus irrational beliefs) are associated with emotions and action tendencies that are divergent in their functionality (functional versus dysfunctional) towards goal achievement" (Wood et al., 2017, p. 265). To illustrate, irrational beliefs can lead to dysfunctional cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses that can be detrimental to an individual achieving their goals. In contrast,

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rational beliefs can facilitate positive functional cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses that can help an individual to reach their goals.

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