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Recent developments in team resilience research in elite sport

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Defining team resilience

Over the past decade, team resilience has been researched across a range of contexts. There is a general recognition that the relational fabric inherent in teams means that resilience at the group level should be conceived differently to the individual level. Indeed, when researching resilience, it is important to be cognizant of the potential changes in the meaning of constructs at different levels (Zautra *et al.*, 2008). Definitions of team resilience are presented in Table 1. Of the 18 team resilience publications that exist, only eight include a definition and just five of these are original, empirical studies (Morgan *et al.*, 2013; Amaral *et al.*, 2015; West *et al.*, 2009; Carmeli *et al.*, 2013; Stephens *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, identification of common features of definitions and conceptualizations of team resilience is limited. However, there is some consensus about the protective nature of team resilience from the potentially harmful effects of stressors. For example, the definitions in Table 1 point to resilient teams' abilities to withstand (Morgan *et al.*, 2013), resist (Amaral *et al.*, 2015), and overcome (Rodríguez-Sánchez and Perea, 2015; Alliger *et al.*, 2015) stressors. The notion that team resilience is a dynamic, temporal process is another feature arising from the definitions.

Table 1. Definitions of team resilience

Authors (year)	Context	Definition
West <i>et al.</i> 2009	Work teams	A positive team level capacity that aids in the repair and rebound of teams when facing potentially stressful situations. Teams which display the ability to either thrive under high liability situations, improvise, and adapt to significant change or stress, or simply recover from a negative experience are less likely to experience the potentially damaging effects of threatening situations" (p. 254).
Morgan <i>et al.</i> 2013	Elite sport teams	A dynamic psychosocial process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effects of the stressors they collectively encounter. It comprises of processes whereby team members use their individual and combined resources to positively adapt when experiencing adversity" (p. 522).
Carmeli <i>et al.</i> 2013	Top management teams	... a team's belief that it can absorb and cope with strain, as well as a team's capacity to cope, recover and adjust positively to difficulties" (p. 149).
Stephens <i>et al.</i> 2013	Top management teams	Resilience refers to the ability of individuals, groups, and organizations to absorb the stress that arises from... challenges and to not only recover

Authors (year)	Context	Definition
		functioning back to a 'normal' level but also learn and grow from the adversity to emerge stronger than before" (p. 15).
Rodríguez-Sánchez and Perea 2015	Emergency services/work teams	A capacity teams have to overcome crises and difficulties" (p. 30).
Alliger <i>et al.</i> 2015	Business teams	... the capacity of a team to withstand and overcome stressors in a manner that enables sustained performance; it helps teams handle and bounce back from challenges that can endanger their cohesiveness and performance" (p. 177).
Amaral <i>et al.</i> 2015	Project teams	The resilience of a team can be defined as the team's ability to deal with problems, overcome obstacles, or resist the pressure of adverse situations, without entering into rupture, and allowing a positive adjustment to successfully perform particular tasks, increase reliability, longevity, and the overall performance" (p. 1182).

Given that team resilience research recognizes the particular importance of relationships, it is perhaps surprising that most definitions do not refer to team resilience as a shared, collective, and psychosocial phenomenon. There are, therefore, opportunities for researchers to advance knowledge by explaining the basis of their definition and conceptualization of team resilience in future studies. For example, in the area of organizational psychology, Meneghel *et al.* justified their conceptualization of team resilience as a collective level construct by drawing on studies across a range of psychology contexts and using multilevel approaches (Chan, 1998). Furthermore, these authors (Meneghel *et al.*, 2016) directed attention to the potential role of affective processes in groups. Employing structural equation modelling, their findings revealed a positive relationship between collective positive emotions, team resilience, and performance in teams. Since team resilience research is at a nascent, albeit burgeoning stage of development, we recommend that researchers adopt an integrated (*i.e.*, cross-disciplinary), systematic approach to advance definitional, conceptual, and theoretical development.

Team resilience research in general psychology

In general psychology, team resilience investigations have begun to identify collective resilient characteristics of teams that can protect them from the potential negative effects of stressors. Examples include: the quality of emotional expression among team members (Stephens *et al.*, 2013), high quality relationships and structural ties (Carmeli *et al.*, 2013), coordination (Gomes *et al.*, 2014; Meneghel *et al.*, 2016), diverse team composition and talents (Amaral *et al.*, 2015; Gomes *et al.*,

2014), and social support (Alliger *et al.*, 2015; Meneghel *et al.*, 2016). Particularly at the group level, research suggests that the cultivation of relational protective factors buffer teams from potentially harmful consequences (Carmeli *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, in addition to conceiving team resilience as a constellation of collective traits, some researchers have conceptualized team resilience as a process that can be developed over time rather than comprising a set of static group attributes (*e.g.*, Stevens *et al.*, 2015; West *et al.*, 2009; Carmeli *et al.*, 2013). To illustrate, researchers have suggested that leadership processes may influence the development of team resilience (Rodríguez-Sánchez and Perea, 2015; Alliger *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, Alliger *et al.* proposed that leadership processes equip resilient teams with the physical and psychosocial resources to withstand stressors. In findings that resonate with team resilience research in sport psychology (Morgan *et al.*, 2015), other researchers have highlighted the role of transformational and shared team leadership for work teams to stimulate a proactive approach to challenging situations (Rodríguez-Sánchez and Perea, 2015; Van der Beek and Schraagen, 2015).

Stevens *et al.* (2015) adopted a novel design to establish links between neurodynamic measures and observations of team performance. Specifically, they explored the role of cognitive behavioral group processes in a military context when team members were exposed to disruptions. Findings showed that a high level of collective organization prior to a task facilitated performance during stressors. The researchers proposed that developing collective organization of a task facilitates a team's ability to reorganize this knowledge during pressurized situations. In summary, it is evident from developments in general psychology that team resilience research has illuminated the distinctive role of group-level factors to withstand stressors. However, since this research is in its infancy, questions remain about how team resilience should be defined, conceptualized, measured, and developed in specific contexts.

Team resilience research in sport psychology

A feature of early team resilience research across psychology subdisciplines is, perhaps, the piecemeal approach and lack of integrated development. In contrast, recent advances in sport psychology include a more systematic agenda of team resilience research (Morgan *et al.*, 2013, 2015). In accordance with recommendations by Luthar *et al.* (2000), this programme of research aimed to explore team resilience to develop contextually-specific meanings (*i.e.*, team sport). In the first study of team resilience in sport psychology, Morgan *et al.* (2013) conducted focus groups with members of five elite sport teams. Using thematic analysis to analyze the data, team resilience was defined as a dynamic psychosocial process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effect of the stressors they collectively encounter. It comprises of processes whereby team members use their individual and combined resources to positively adapt when experiencing adversity". Four resilient characteristics of elite sport teams were identified: group structure (*i.e.*, working communication channels during stressors), mastery approaches (*i.e.*, a collective commitment to ongoing learning despite adversity), social capital (*i.e.*, high quality, caring relationships), and collective efficacy (*i.e.*, drawing on setbacks to increase shared belief for future success). This study advanced resilience research by providing greater definitional clarity about the nature, meaning, and scope of team resilience (*i.e.*, what team resilience is), and proposing a framework to profile the resilient characteristics of elite sport teams (*i.e.*, what a resilient team

'looks' like). Notwithstanding these advancements, by describing team resilience as a 'dynamic psychosocial process', Morgan *et al.* (2013) recommended that future research should explore the processes underpinning the resilient characteristics to examine how a resilient team functions over time.

Employing narrative inquiry, Morgan *et al.* (2015) subsequently analyzed autobiographies of eight members of the 2003 England rugby union World Cup winning team. Findings revealed five main psychosocial processes underpinning team resilience: transformational leadership (*e.g.*, inspiring team members' commitment to their shared vision despite setbacks), shared team leadership (*e.g.*, a wide distribution of team member responsibilities), team learning (*e.g.*, sharing knowledge of setbacks), social identity (*e.g.*, developing a distinctive team identity), and positive emotions (*e.g.*, promoting humor despite setbacks). This study illustrated how team resilience processes were essential for the development of excellence which resonates with other research in sport psychology that has identified the critical role of transformational leadership, team leadership, and team identity during challenging situations in elite sport (Yukelson and Weinberg, 2016; Hodge and Smith, 2014; Yukelson and Rose, 2014). Importantly, in both studies conducted by Morgan *et al.* (2013, 2015), team resilience was portrayed as a dynamic, temporal process. Teams do not exist in static environments (Mathieu *et al.*, 2008; McEwan and Beauchamp, 2014) and these findings suggest that team resilience development should occur in accordance with the stage of a team's existence and the specific stressors encountered in that context and at that time. In summary, sport psychology research has captured the contextual and temporal nature of team resilience in elite sport and suggests that leveraging a team's collective resources can enhance their ability to withstand stressors and ultimately perform at the highest level.

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