Positive Resilience:
Thrive or Survive

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About **people**wise

peoplewise is a global leader in talent management. Our mission is to develop the potential of people; transforming individuals, teams and organisations from the inside out to achieve sustainable and strategic business growth. For over 10 years, **people**wise have been researching the role that resilience plays in people's lives.

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Positive Resilience

Our research into positive resilience has included **global studies** across a number of industries to increase understanding of the differences between those who falter at the first hurdle versus those who are agile and adaptive to adversity and go on to learn and grow from these experiences.

We define **Positive Resilience** as a key psychological capability that differentiates people's ability to thrive, not just survive in the workplace. It is positive resilience that enables individuals to harness pressure and use it to their advantage – meaning that they can persevere, adapt and grow from any situation, adversity, threat or challenge.

We consider positive resilience to be a **critical life skill** that is vital for individuals, leaders and organisations to measure, hone and develop. So much so, we launched a **longitudinal piece of research into positive resilience**, which will track a cohort of children for **10 years,** throughout all of their secondary school education and beyond into later life, in order to learn more about the trajectory of Positive Resilience; its key influencing factors, and the interventions that have the most enduring effect in enabling people to thrive.

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Executive summary

With our insatiable thirst to conquer new frontiers and discover as yet, unrealised possibilities, we are demanding more and more of ourselves, at work and at home.

Take a moment to stop and think about the sheer volume of responsibilities, interactions and communications you deal with on a daily basis and compare it to the volume you dealt with five years ago. The technological innovation of the modern age has enabled us to manage an increasing volume of information and assume a level of responsibility that was unimaginable only a decade ago.

However, with new opportunities come new challenges, and thanks to our continued pursuit of success and achievement, we are experiencing an unprecedented rate of change and complexity.

If we are to realise our potential and take full advantage of new and exciting opportunities as they arise, we need to be:

- Increasingly agile

- Able to manage increasingly complex environments

- Able to anticipate, adapt and grow from challenges

Here at peoplewise, we believe that to do so, requires 'Positive Resilience'; without which there can be no courage, no rationality, no insight, no growth, and no exceptional performance.

Typically, we might consider an individual who is able to 'bounce back' from adversity and restore a sense of normality following a period of intense pressure to be 'resilient'. However, we strongly believe that simply 'bouncing back' from adversity is not enough, as this only makes us 'survivors' of our experiences. Rather, we can learn to 'bounce forward' from our experiences and emerge on the other side with greater enthusiasm, optimism and motivation than ever before.

'Positive Resilience' is this dynamic process – a personal effort that allows an individual to go beyond merely rebuilding what is broken, by offering them a platform for personal growth. Positive Resilience makes us more than just 'survivors'; it makes us 'thrivers' of our environment.

"...We can learn to 'bounce forward' and emerge on the other side with greater enthusiasm, optimism and grit determination than ever before"

As more of a 'winning attitude' than a personality trait, Positive Resilience is by no means an inherent quality that an individual either has or does not have. Rather, it involves behaviours, thoughts, actions and feelings that can be learned and developed in anyone.

Positive Resilience – at both the personal and collective level – offers individuals and organisations huge opportunity realise long term competitive advantage by helping them to be more flexible, more adaptive, more open to growth and change. This whitepaper explores the concept of Positive Resilience and how individuals, leaders and organisations can apply some key principles in order to develop an environment that grows thrivers and not just survivors.

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Introduction

Think of an individual you know of who seems able to 'bounce back' from negative events confidently. What is it that they do to overcome adversity? How is this different from everybody else? When others appear to get caught in a rut, seemingly unable to get out of their negative streak, how do they find success? The term 'resilience' is commonly used to describe such ability, but what exactly does it mean to be truly resilient? What makes some people able to bend under pressure and bounce back whilst others buckle?

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it"

Helen Keller

The complexities of defining what appears to be the relatively simple concept of resilience are widely recognised within the behavioural sciences (Windle, 2010; Haskett et al., 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). Indeed, many identify resilience as being an elusive quality that you only realise you possess 'after the event'.

The term 'Resilience' originates from the Latin word 'Resilire' – or to 'leap back'. General definitions have deviated very little since, with notions of quick and effective recovery being commonly used. Masten et al., (1990) defined resilience as "a process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenge".

A review of resilience practitioner and academic research shows great variability in how resilience is identified, measured and defined (Masten, 2007). Interestingly, in an effort to define resilience, some researchers have likened the concept to the elasticity of certain metals (Lazarus, 1993).

Consider for a moment the characteristics of cast iron; it is a hard and brittle metal that breaks easily under tension. Wrought iron on the other hand is as equally hard and as brittle, but is able to bend without breaking under pressure.

"Sustainability is about survival. Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected"

Jamais Cascio

Like cast iron, many people are able to perform their respective duties and roles effectively; however, they often experience an inability to cope when placed under excessive or prolonged stress. Resilient people on the other hand, can be compared to wrought iron in the sense that they are able to adapt to external pressures in order to maintain performance levels.

The two materials share a highly similar material composition, but it is their ability to adapt that makes the crucial difference.

By analogy, resilient people do not need to be any more skilled or qualified than those around them, but simply able to adapt their approach using their past experiences as a guide (Block & Block, 1996).

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Over four decades of observational and longitudinal research tends to describe resilience as an 'innate self-righting mechanism' (Werner & Smith, 1992) that uses the 'steeling effects' of past experiences to help bounce-back from current pressures and challenges.

In a relatively simple and ordered environment, drawing parallels between past and present challenges may serve as a reliable resilience strategy. However, we now live in a world of increasing complexity, that – to borrow a military acronym – is becoming increasingly VUCA – 'Volatile', 'Uncertain', 'Complex', and 'Ambiguous'. This means that we need to be more resilient that ever before.

We propose that to operate effectively in this complex and challenging environment individuals need to do more than bounce-back. They need to use their past experiences to positively bounce-forward, learn and grow, applying increasingly adaptive responses to current pressures and challenges.

A VUCA World

In a 'VUCA World' everything is interconnected and ever-changing. Traditional problem solving and planning techniques aimed at reducing uncertainty are proving less and less effective in a world where progress is made by actively engaging with challenges in an agile way (see Table 1)

To be equal to the task at hand, our goal must be more than just to 'bounce back' – but to come back stronger; embracing and navigating change by defining a clear sense of direction, attuning to our environment, thinking objectively, seeking insight and support from others whilst demonstrating an unwavering commitment to 'what could be' rather than what has been done before. In short – we need 'Positive Resilience'.

Volatility The challenge of the unexpected or unstable with an unknown duration	
Uncertainty The challenge of insufficient information	
Complexity The challenge of many interconnected parts and variables	
Ambiguity The challenge of "unknown unknowns" in which causal relationships are completely unclear and no precedents exist.	**?**

Table 1: A VUCA World

Our research suggests that achieving increasingly superior functioning as an outcome of negotiating failures, challenges and setbacks is seldom an outcome discussed within more traditional models of resilience. Yet, in the 'information age' our need to learn from our experiences, to build, grow and ultimately flourish in response to new challenges has never been greater. It is with this in mind, that we introduce the **people**wise concept of 'Positive Resilience'.

The psychology of positive resilience

Positively resilient people are those individuals that choose not to become victims; they do not opt for suffering. They are the encouraged front-runner, the resolute competitor, who when challenged or disadvantaged, determinedly rises up with a smile, high spirits and a handful of practical solutions. Most importantly of all, they are the "ordinary people dealing with the challenges and tragedies of every day real life" (Masten, 2001).

"There is no education like adversity"

Benjamin Disraeli

The notion of positive growth or 'flourishing' in spite of adversity (Hildon et al., 2008) remains largely unexplored within the field of psychology. It has only been with the emergence of 'Positive Psychology' that a greater emphasis has been placed on securing constructive outcomes following adversity or challenge.

Positive resilience is a key psychological capability that differentiates people's ability to thrive, not just survive in the workplace. Individuals with a strong sense of Positive Resilience, as defined by **people**wise, are differentiated by their "ability to persevere, adapt, and grow from adversity, threat or challenge". Harnessed in the right way, pressure and challenge can stimulate and drive performance.

"Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional"

Haruki Murakami

Our research, supported by over 20 years of working with organisations, shows that resilient individuals are typically upbeat, optimistic and offer a zestful approach to life; remaining energetic in the face of challenge and showing The **people**wise model of positive resilience has been scientifically researched and validated based on academic theory, psychological research and our 20 years of experience working with individuals, teams and organisations.

curiosity and an open mind towards new experiences.

Individuals with a high level of positive resilience coolly accept the realities that face them, finding meaning within adversity and have an uncanny ability to improvise, making the best of what they can with whatever's at hand. They often use humour (Werner & Smith, 1992), relaxation techniques (Wolin & Wolin, 1993) and optimistic thinking (Kumpfer, 1999) when confronted with difficulty, in order to achieve consistency, focus and sustained performance in spite of mounting pressures.

"Positive Resilience is the ability to persevere, adapt and grow from adversity, threat or challenge"

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Positive resilience occurs when people are optimistic, show a sense of adventure, courage and self-understanding; use humour in their lives; have a capacity for hard work; and possess the ability to cope with and find outlets for emotions (Seligman, 1992). Other qualities include; curiosity (Arend, Gove, & Sroufe, 1979), a belief in personal worth and meaning (Henry, 1999), strong communication skills (Werner & Smith, 1982), and a support network made up of friends, family, and peers (Baldwin et al., 1993).

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The very notion of achieving 'good outcomes' for those that experience significant difficulties (Luthar, 2006) – which forms the basis of the positive resilience model - originates within clinical psychology with the **Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) Model**, which describes how people who experience severe and life-threatening trauma often achieve positive personal growth as a result of their encounters.

"The human capacity for burden is like bamboo – far more flexible than you'd ever believe at first glance"

Jodi Picoult

Scientific research and the testimonies of survivors often confirm that not every traumatic experience leads to a persistent negative outlook on life. On the contrary, focusing on learnable experiences, individuals can positively build their capacity to confront life and all of its challenges and grow throughout it; becoming stronger, relating more closely to others, gaining a greater appreciation for life, and pursuing new possibilities (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Our approach considers positive resilience as a concept that does not reflect specific personality traits or attributes, but rather the personal qualities that underpin an individual's capability to harness pressure and challenge to harness pressure and challenge in order to stimulate and drive optimal performance.

Contemporary research conducted at Stanford University (Walton, 2014) highlights the value in applying precise, targeted approaches to building Positive Resilience using 'Wise Interventions'.

Wise Interventions draw on a long tradition of research (see Dimidjian et al., 2006; Lewin, 1952; McCord, 1978) and produce significant benefits over time by focusing on clear and specific psychological processes that contribute to factors that undermine an individual's ability to flourish in the face of adversity.

Our examination of these unique factors and an extensive review of the available literature have led us to the formation of five distinct factors that underpin the **people**wise model of Positive Resilience, known collectively as the '**people**wise Five'.

The Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) Model focuses on five key domains:

1. **Personal Strength –** Becoming more creative, mature, open and authentic
2. **Relating to Others –** Building friendships and family relations
3. **Appreciation for Life –** Valuing life more profoundly and making the most out of each and every day
4. **New Possibilities –** Changing and focusing on life goals and ambitions
5. **Spirituality –** Engaging in introspection and deeper thought

(Adapted from Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011)

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The **people**wise five factors of Positive Resilience

The **people**wise five factors of Positive Resilience represent the patterns of thinking and behaviour that allow highly resilient people to thrive, persevere, adapt and grow from adversity, threat or challenge. They represent key psychological mechanisms that can be developed and enhanced over time through careful practice and consideration. They are the key differentiators between 'bouncing back' to survive and 'bouncing forward' to thrive through pressure, setbacks and challenges.

The **people**wise five factors of Positive Resilience consist of: **Purposefulness**, **Perspective**, **Control**, **Connectedness** and **Growth**. All five factors interrelate; together forming a strong 'Base Camp' of psychological 'reserves' that can be drawn upon when experiencing challenge or change to grow increasingly adaptive performance strategies. The stronger and more attuned the base camp, the more resilient and therefore higher performing an individual can become – no matter what challenges they might face.

Positive Resilience is not a fixed attribute or personality trait – it is a personal psychological resource that influences how we face and respond to challenging situations. All five factors of Positive Resilience are open to development. They may go up or down over time and require conscious effort to maintain.

About the Resilience Index

The **people**wise Resilience Index has been designed and developed to assess the five key factors of positive resilience.

The Positive Resilience model that underlies the Resilience Index has been scientifically researched and validated, and applied successfully across a wide range of jobs and professions at all organisational levels – from front line to executive.

To find out more about the Resilience Index visit www.peoplewise.co.uk.

Positive Resilience Base Camp

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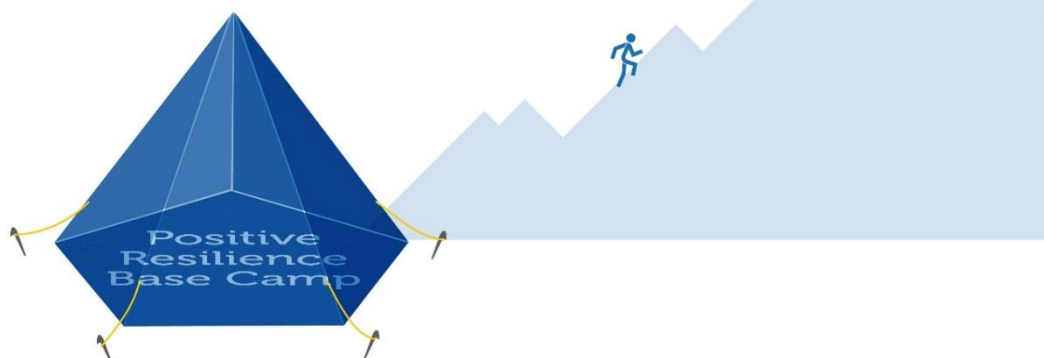
Purposefulness

- Having a strong vision of the future and a commitment to achieve your goals
- Maintaining the determination, tenacity and self-belief to persevere to achieve challenging goals
- Holding the self-belief and passion that allows you to strive for more

Perspective

- Maintaining an outlook that is positive and optimistic
- Being able to identify the causes of your challenges and setbacks accurately
- Investing time and energy on situations and events you have control over

Control

- Staying calm and focused under pressure
- Being able to control your impulses and manage your emotions in the moment
- Recovering quickly from setbacks

Connectedness

- Building and maintaining positive, meaningful relationships with others
- Developing a rich sense of identity and belonging through engaging in multiple roles
- Using social connections to give and receive support

Growth

- Viewing adversity as an exciting challenge and opportunity to learn
- Reflecting on setbacks and mistakes to cultivate learning and growth
- Using past experiences to develop increasingly adaptive strategies

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1 Purposefulness

Purposefulness is what inspires commitment and dedication towards a goal or objective, allowing an individual to push past their current challenges and pressures to achieve a fuller and better future.

Individuals with a high level of Purposefulness:

1. Have a strong vision for the future and a commitment to achieving their goals

2. Maintain the determination and tenacity to persevere and achieve their goals

3. Hold the self-belief and passion that allows them to strive for more

Highly resilient individuals are more likely to be able to sustain effort over long periods of time because of their ability to take initiative, to set their own direction and to create meaning for themselves.

This is supported by Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002), which has shown in over 400 laboratory studies that specific and difficult tasks led to a higher level of performance and an increase in the likelihood of task commitment and completion as opposed to easy, vague and abstract goals such as "to do one's best".

Individuals with a lower degree of Purposefulness are likely to struggle in developing a clear line of sight between where they are currently and where they strive to be. Similarly, they may quickly become deterred by taking action when confronted with obstacles or challenges.

Providing that an individual remains committed to their purpose and has the requisite ability to attain it, and has no conflicting goals there is a clear and consistent relationship between goal setting difficulty and specificity and overall task performance even in the presence of excessive workload or external pressures (Brown, Jones, and Leigh, 2005).

Goal setting, in conjunction with self-efficacy (otherwise known as task-specific confidence; Bandura, 1997), often mediates the effects of other motivational factors that may help or hinder progress through a period of difficulty, including; the availability of feedback, decision making autonomy, and monetary incentives to succeed.

Harry Potter: A 'Rags to Riches' Story

J.K Rowling is the UK's best-selling living author and one of the wealthiest women in the world, but not before overcoming the hardships of being a jobless, single mother living on welfare.

"An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded, and I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain, without being homeless…By every usual standard, I was the biggest failure I knew," Rowling said during a 2008 Harvard University commencement speech.

On her official website, Rowling wrote that she had always known that she would be a published book author. "As soon as I knew what writers were, I wanted to be one. I've got the perfect temperament for a writer; perfectly happy alone in a room, making things up".

Reliant on state benefits, Rowling dedicated much of her time to pursuing her lifelong dream, writing "Harry Potter" in cafes, such as 'The Elephant House, Edinburgh' with her daughter Jessica asleep in the pram next to her.

In spite of all of the adversity she had to endure and after receiving scores of rejection letters from book publishers, Rowling finally achieved what she had set out to do at the age of six years old when Bloomsbury, gave "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" the green light in 1997.

In the example of JK Rowling, it is clear that despite all of the adversities and hardships that one may endure, determining and remaining true to a clearly defined objective or goal can make all of the difference. Self-belief, passion and above all, grit determination are the true differentiators that separate success and failure, regardless of our perceived talents or lived experiences.

"Talent and intelligence never yet inoculated anyone against the caprice of the fates"

J.K. Rowling

It is important that individuals invest effort in developing a sense of Purposefulness – the ability to see the value in what you do and to know what you are striving for helps to build the endurance required to maintain focus and determination to push through any challenge that is faced. Furthermore, through the process of bouncing forward through setbacks and difficulties, having a strong sense of Purposefulness helps individuals to take on, and achieve, increasingly more challenging goals and opportunities.

PURPOSEFULNESS: A WISE INTERVENTION

Writing about stressful and highly negative experiences can help people confront challenges and setbacks, meaning that they can reduce inhibition and find meaning and purpose from difficult events (Pennebaker et al., 1988).

Writing for as little as 20 minutes per day about stressful experiences within a working week may significantly reduce the overall level of stress experienced and help more clearly define a meaningful purpose to achieve.

Individuals can use this intervention to help create and review their progress on challenging goals – ensuring that they reduce the level of stress experienced and derive fulfilment and a sense of meaning from their commitments.

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2 Perspective

Perspective is what enables us to take on a positive, courageous outlook and stay optimistic in the face of adversity (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Maintaining a 'glass half-full' approach to life's challenges, Perspective allows us to look at the bigger picture; consider where we are in relation to the problem, and how we can go about solving it, rather than resigning ourselves to 'the fates' (Board & Brown, 2010).

Individuals with a high level of Perspective:

1. Maintain an outlook that is both positive and optimistic

2. Are able to identify the causes of challenges and setbacks accurately

3. Invest time and energy into situations to achieve positive outcomes

Put simply, individuals who are able to maintain a high level of Perspective tend to act out their positive beliefs on a day-to-day basis (Luthans, 2007). A positive outlook encourages individuals to feel good about themselves which in turns allows them to focus their efforts effectively and retain control over adverse circumstances or setbacks.

Those with a low level of Perspective tend to hold an external locus of control, believing that they are unable to influence their external environment and are therefore subject to a state of uncertainty and helplessness. Following particularly challenging situations, unexpected events or setbacks, they tend to find it difficult to find something to be positive about, and struggle to block out unwanted distractions in order to switch attention and quickly regain focus.

The reinforcement of positive affirmations through a feedback loop dates back to Heider's Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958), which describes how individuals perceive information in such a way as to arrive at causal explanations for the events that they experience.

Essentially, we make sense of our environments by making a perceptual judgement of how it happened. We gather and combine information to form our judgements and attribute their occurrence in two distinct ways. Either, we create an 'Internal Attribution', where we perceive that we can make a proactive change to our experiences (including setbacks) through personal adjustments and the investment of time and energy, or; an 'External Attribution' where we assign cause outside of a person's control.

JIM CARREY: THE TRUMAN STORY

Actor and comedian Jim Carrey is best known for his energetic, dramatic style of acting and skilled improvisation. As a critically-acclaimed actor, he has starred in countless films including The Truman Show (1998) – a satirical dystopian comedy-drama in which his character, Truman Burbank lives blissfully unaware that he is the star of a constructed reality TV show, with his every action being staged and scripted for the viewing pleasures of billions of people.

In his early years at school, Carrey was very quiet and made very few friends as he struggled to overcome dyslexia. With little education he spurred his own creativity, and left school at the age of 16 to pursue a career in acting. Carrey committed himself to mastering his trade. Despite his dyslexia he developed an impeccable ability to recite lines from memory – observing closely, and paying attention to everything that was going on. In the brief moments where he wasn't investing time and energy into pursuing his dream job; he would drive up to Hollywood, and sit in his car on Mullholland Drive and look out at the city and say "Everyone wants to work with me. I'm a really good actor. I have all kinds of great movie offers. Movie offers are out there for me, I just don't hear them yet." These positive affirmations, combined with his optimistic outlook allowed him to transform himself from a young Canadian comic trying to make his way in Los Angeles to one of the most memorable actors in modern history.

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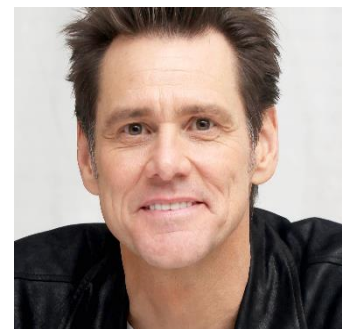
In the example of Jim Carrey, it is clear that a positive self-belief can make all of the difference. By remaining positive, optimistic and willing to continue undeterred when faced with setbacks, an individual can achieve their goals regardless of how unlikely they may seem initially. Perhaps most importantly of all, it is important to realise that great outcomes are the product of a great investment of time and energy and that nothing worth doing comes easily.

"*Maybe other people will try to limit me, but I don't limit myself".*

Jim Carrey

It is important that individuals invest effort in developing a sense of Perspective – the ability to block out unwanted distractions, to stay optimistic about the future and to look objectively at a situation is a vital skill that enables people to effectively prioritise efforts and enthuse themselves and others through even the most challenging of situations.

PERSPECTIVE:
A WISE INTERVENTION

One of the most challenging aspects of creating and reinforcing positive affirmations is in convincing oneself of one's own abilities and talents. To say that "I can do it" is one thing, but to believe it is another thing entirely.

A third-person perspective may be effective in engendering positive thoughts and may prevent reciprocal patterns of negative emotions and experiences (Finkel et al., 2013).

Research indicates that a simple activity every two-to-three months, in which individuals are asked to write about how they think a "third party who wants the best for all", would deal with the stressful situation, helps to frame a situation and achieve quality throughout difficulty.

Individuals can use this intervention to help challenge their automatic thinking responses and identify opportunities to turn what might look like uncontrollable adversity, into an advantage.

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3 Control

Control is what helps us to keep our emotions under control, rather than allowing our emotions to control us. Those able to demonstrate emotional control, otherwise known as Emotional Agility (EA) are able to swiftly adapt to intensifying stress (Armstrong, Galligan & Critchley, 2011).

> **Individuals with a high level of Control;**
>
> 1. **Remain calm and focused under pressure**
>
> 2. **Are able to control impulses and manage emotions in the moment**
>
> 3. **Recover quickly from setbacks**

Highly resilient individuals have the ability to stay calm under pressure because they have the insight and skills to manage their emotions and responses. They are able to cope more effectively with the emotional demands of stressful encounters as they are able to "accurately perceive and appraise their emotions, know how and when to express their feelings, and can effectively regulate their mood states (Salovey et al., 1999; p. 161).

We know that our emotions change according to our own lived experiences. The more intense our experiences the greater our desire is to express our own emotions in response to the situation. In times of intense pressure or stress, our emotions can often limit or obscure truly rational thinking and therefore negatively influence future outcomes.

Individuals with a lower level of emotional Control may experience more intense or severe reactions to stress, which influence their ability to cope and their future decision making. As a result, they may adopt negative or less effective coping strategies (Zajonc, 1966), such as dismissing the opinions of others, avoiding critical issues or feedback and failing to address them in the future.

Impulse Control Theory (Block & Block, 1980) dictates that we all must effectively modulate our own emotional desires, particularly in times of stress or pressure, in order to adapt and function appropriately. An inability to control our own impulses may result in Emotional Hijack (Goleman, 1996), characterised by spontaneous emotional expression, the immediate gratification of one's desires and decision-making based on less objective, irrational means.

NELSON MANDELA: THE BIRTH OF THE RAINBOW NATION

Upon his release after nearly 30 years of incarceration in a South African prison, Nelson Mandela found himself inheriting the presidency of a nation on the verge of a racially-motivated civil war. Under apartheid rule, the rights, associations and movements of the majority black inhabitants and other ethnic groups were curtailed and white majority rule was maintained.

The mind-set and expectation of many was that, upon his release, Mandela would use his newfound power to seek retribution and exact revenge on the white population and take back the country for his black constituents, following years of implacable racial discrimination. Put simply, many people thought that it was 'payback time'. But Mandela saw the world differently and he did not allow himself to succumb to emotion – either those felt by his oppressed constituents, or even perhaps his own having experienced a brutal incarceration as a direct result of opposing racial and ethnic segregation.

Rather than allow himself to be consumed by his mistreatment, or the mistreatment of others at the hands of the oppressors, he invited all South Africans, of all ethnicities to follow him down a new path than respected diversity, as part of the 'Rainbow Nation.

The example of Nelson Mandela highlights the real danger of emotionally-hijacked thinking. Consider what could have happened to the South African nation if Mandela hadn't taken a moment to control his own emotionality or resist the outcries of his black constituents. What future would that have created?

In our own working lives, we too can create less preferable outcomes unknowingly by using less rational, emotionally-charged decision making styles.

"As I walked out of the door to the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison...Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies".

Nelson Mandela

It is important that individuals invest time in developing a sense of Control in order to become more positively resilient. This does not mean that individuals should suppress their emotions – moreover they need to develop the capability to process their emotions and use their insight to channel their emotions in a productive way.

CONTROL:
A WISE INTERVENTION

The most detrimental factor undermining emotional control is the perception of being overwhelmed or unable to cope. Once this point has been reached, learning stops and positive lessons from negative experiences cease.

The simple act of being reminded of the many choices an individual has in completing their responsibilities significantly improves individual happiness and attentiveness (Langer & Rodin, 1976) and their perceived ability to cope.

Individuals can use this intervention to help them develop the skills that will allow them to think clearly and rationally in emotionally charged situations. For example, scheduling a feedback session with a line manager to discuss the freedoms that can be exercised to overcome a stressful scenario is likely to create a newfound sense of control, and can help to break the cycle of reoccurring negative thinking patterns.

4 Connectedness

Connectedness describes the extent to which an individual can call upon a strong social network for support during times of need. Individuals with a high degree of Connectedness recognise the value in establishing such relationship; seeking guidance and support from those around them and using those connections to build strong relationships – this in turn helps to direct their motivation towards working collaboratively.

Individuals with a high level of Connectedness;

1. **Build and maintain positive meaningful relationships with others**
2. **Develop a rich sense of identity and belonging through engaging in multiple social roles**
3. **Use social connections to give and receive support**

Individuals who are high in Connectedness actively invest time in maintaining their networks and have positive relationships with others. They recognise the importance of regularly seeking feedback, advice and support from others, and reciprocate to provide the same.

Individuals who are low in Connectedness may experience feelings of isolation in times of difficulty which only stands to intensify the experience of stress. They may adopt a more insular style of working which is also likely to limit their ability to learn from others the most effective coping strategies.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura; 1977) indicates that building and maintaining positive relationships with others is one of the most effective ways in which to manage adversity and challenge. The proximity of peers and confidants allows for an individual to learn resilience strategies 'vicariously' – or through another person.

When we experience difficulty, the easiest person to fool into thinking that something cannot be done is you. Social learning enables individuals to learn to change their outcomes in order to flourish. Our reliance on other people proves most effective within a 'window of opportunity' (Birkmann et al., 2008) in which we are able to learn adaptive resilience strategies most effectively immediately following a negative event.

MICHAEL JORDAN:

The legendary basketball player, Michael Jordan was once unceremoniously dropped from his high school basketball team because his coach thought that he wasn't tall enough to play. At the time, 15-year old Jordan stood at 5"10 and could not yet dunk a basketball. His close friend, 6"7 sophomore student Leroy Smith, took the last of the 15 roster spots in front of Jordan.

Disappointed, he returned home, locked himself in his room and wept. Fortunately, his mother came to his side and offered him what would turn out to be one of the most valuable pieces of advice possible; "the best thing to do is to prove to the coach that he has made a mistake". And with that simple gesture, Jordan focused all of his attention on just that; training harder than ever before and going on to regain his spot on the team.

However, he did not stop there. In the summer leading into his junior year, he made the varsity squad and instantly became Laney High School's best basketball player, averaging more than 20 points a game. Jordan's work ethic still didn't drop off and he enjoyed continued success throughout his senior year before becoming 'ACC Freshman of the Year' in college before eventually being drafted into the National Basketball Association (NBA) as a professional.

The example of Michael Jordan highlights just how effective social support can be to even the most talented of individuals. By offering precise and supportive encouragement, not only can an individual learn to overcome an immediate challenge but they can also embrace and enhance it and use it as an opportunity to learn and grow. Once more, social intervention of this kind, directly following a negative event can help provide positive reinforcement, mitigate feelings of negativity and help restore a sense of renewed focus, determination and drive.

"My mother is my root, my foundation. She planted the seed that I base my life on, and that is the belief that the ability to achieve starts in your mind".

Michael Jordan

It is important that individuals develop a sense of Connectedness. We are all at risk of feeling like we are too busy to invest sufficient time in our social support networks. However, in order to build positive resilience, it is important that individuals engage in a variety of roles that allow them to play to different strengths – providing a rich source of nourishment, feedback and positive reinforcement to draw upon in times of difficulty and challenge.

CONNECTEDNESS:
A WISE INTERVENTION

Feedback and positive reinforcement in times of struggle helps individuals cope and achieve focus through the provision of emotional, psychological, and physical support. Indeed, having a strong social support network is a strong predictor of wellbeing and adjustment to personal challenge (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Myer et al., 2009).

The simple act of sending small letters expressing concern and care for others can significantly reduce the impact of negative emotions during highly pressured experiences they may experience (Carter et al., 2013).

Individuals can use this intervention to help maintain their level of Connectedness. Consider how small gestures of support can be communicated in the workplace – particularly during times of difficulty, change or adversity.

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5 Growth

Growth refers to an individual's commitment to learning from experiences and adopting a 'growth mind-set'. A growth mind-set is achieved when an individual believes in the value of self-challenge; that difficulty and failure is nothing more than an opportunity to grow and learn. Individuals with a growth mind-set tend to interpret challenges as opportunities to learn, not as evidence of fixed inability, and respond by trying harder, not by giving up.

Individuals with a strong growth mind-set;

1. **View adversity as an exciting challenge and an opportunity to learn**
2. **Reflect on setbacks and mistakes to cultivate learning and growth**
3. **Use past experiences to develop increasingly adaptive strategies**

An individual with a high degree of Growth believes that their various skills and abilities are by no means fixed and should be enhanced and developed wherever possible – finding this a valuable and enjoyable experience.

The concept of 'growth mind-set' was first introduced by renowned Stanford University Professor, Carol Dweck. A growth mind-set views intelligence as "a quality that can be changed and developed" (Dweck, 2008).

Individuals who adopt a growth mind-set follow one cardinal rule; to learn, learn, learn! Passion and dedication are vital towards achieving personal development through a growth mind-set. When faced with difficulty or challenge an individual with a growth-mind-set will embrace mistakes and confront deficiencies. The distinguishing feature of a "genius is their passion and dedication to their craft; particularly the way in which they identify, confront and take pains to remedy their weaknesses" (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2008).

People who adopt a fixed mind-set tend to believe that their capabilities are simply fixed in place; you are either able or not; talented or otherwise. Individuals who think on those terms tend to be more concerned with appearing talented rather than learning where to improve. Consequently, they commit less time to self-development and self-improvement and struggle to overcome setbacks, often ignoring problems or failing to tackle challenges head on (Dweck, 2008).

MALALA YOUSAFZAI: A RIGHT TO LEARN

Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head by the Taliban in October, 2012, aged just 15. Her crime: she wanted to learn. She wanted to go to school. She believed that every girl had the right to be educated, regardless of their religion.

Malala made a full recovery after being airlifted to hospital in Peshawar and receiving emergency surgery in the United Kingdom. The assassination attempt received worldwide media coverage and produced an outpouring of sympathy and anger.

Although she may not know it, or define it as such, Malala demonstrates a strong growth mind-set; she possesses a love of learning so fierce, and so characteristic of a growth mind-set, that she risked her life every day to attend school. To the backdrop of gunfire, Malala fought for her right to learn, rejecting any notion that people were naturally cleverer than she was when they outperformed her on a test. She understands that the world owes you nothing, you have to work hard to become good at something, and you have to practice. If you want the world to change, you have to be that change.

The example of Malala Yousafzai shows it is abundantly clear that the crucial difference between success and failure lies in one's own perception of their ability. A fixed belief in one's abilities leads to the conclusion that learning is of little to no effect, when in reality it can change lives.

"Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world".

Malala Yousafzai

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It is important that individuals invest effort into developing a sense of Growth – this is at the heart of the concept of positive resilience. The desire to improve yourself, the ability to reflect and identify lessons learned, as well as the ability to use the experience of failure or setbacks to create an even stronger motivation to improve is a key differentiator of success.

GROWTH:
A WISE INTERVENTION

In a simple classroom experiment, students were informed that intelligence is malleable and can grow like a muscle with hard work and help from others. In another group, students were taught about the relationship between brain regions and brain function. The students who had been told that their intelligence could be 'grown' showed a marked improvement in mathematical ability (Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck, 2007). In contrast, the second group showed a significant decrease in performance in subsequent tests.

Individuals can use this intervention to help prime their mind set so that they can be successful in new or difficult experiences. Look for the enjoyment in a challenge, viewing it as an opportunity to see what you are capable of.

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Pressure versus performance

For all of us, experiencing a certain degree of challenge and pressure is a natural part of our day-to-day lives. In fact, experiencing some form of pressure actually aids high performance, providing we are able to cope with the demands of those situations, as it helps us focus more acutely whilst preventing stagnation, boredom and the onset of fatigue.

Opportunities to learn and develop also occur in these situations as they allow an individual to gain positive experiences from achieving complex and stretching challenges and gain a sense of thriving. This is known as operating in the **Optimal Performance Zone**. Operating in this zone allows us to achieve high performance, whilst further building and sustaining our positive resilience resources.

However, if we push ourselves too far, for too long, and the pressure that we experience exceeds our ability to cope then we can become overburdened and performance will begin to decrease. This is known as operating the **Overload Performance Zone**. Operating in this zone puts people at risk of put ourselves at risk of fatigue, stress, exhaustion, disengagement, ill-health and diminished performance.

Likewise, not being sufficiently challenged can lead to boredom, lethargy, and disengagement. This is known as operating in the **Underperformance Zone**. Operating in this zone puts people at risk of switching off from their work and prevents them from achieving their full potential.

It is therefore important to know how much work is too much, too little or just right. Ideally, our workloads and work duties should be challenging enough to stimulate us, but also be manageable. Figure 1 highlights the careful relationship between increasing pressure and performance.

Individuals operating in the Optimal Performance Zone:

1. **Feel stimulated and stretched by their work**

2. **Have stretching, achievable deadlines and work demands**

3. **Push themselves outside of their comfort zone, whilst feeling confident in their ability to cope**

4. **Function at optimal productivity and effectiveness**

WELL-BEING: Gaining a positive resilience advantage

We all have strategies, skills and tactics that can help us cope effectively (or less effectively) with stress and pressure. These are learned responses that have become habitual over time. When under stress or excessive pressure, our emotional brain can hijack our rational, high-functioning brain and deplete each of our positive resilience resources. Highly resilient individuals develop a range of coping strategies and healthy daily habits that improve overall well-being which allows them to overcome this emotional hijack and make full use of their cognitive resources to master their stress and remain calm and focused in the moment. Developing these healthy habits and a range of positive coping strategies helps to give individuals a sustainable positive resilience advantage.

The **Pressure-Performance Curve** highlights the relationship between Good Stress otherwise known as 'eustress' and Distress across four key performance areas; Comfort, Stretch, Strain, and Crisis.

The blue shaded area highlights the impact of successful Positive Resilience strategies which further improve performance within an optimal range whilst increasing the level of stress an individual can endure before suffering adverse performance issues as a result.
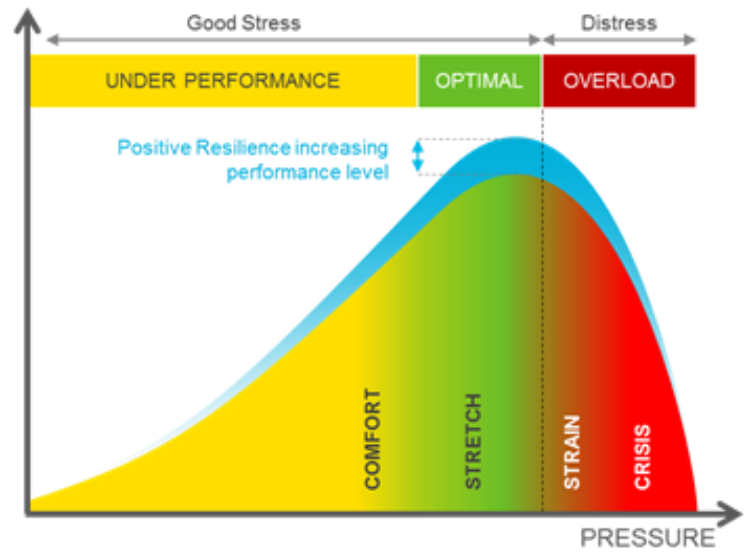

Figure 1: The Pressure-Performance Curve

Collective positive resilience in the workplace

The business case for action is abundantly clear: we live in an increasingly unpredictable and stressful modern world. Identifying how to successfully develop and leverage Positive Resilience from the entry level employee to the 'C-Suite' is becoming more popular, and arguably more necessary than ever before.

With the need to achieve 'more with less' becoming a mainstay feature within the local economy, economic conditions are becoming more inhospitable for businesses, which can lead to an increase in the number of working hours cut and deductions in the amount of paid overtime, without the proportionate reduction in workloads (CIPD, 2014).

Here at **people**wise, we recognise this need and identify that more can be done to help support organisation-wide positive resilience. **people**wise CEO and Founder, Dr Belinda Board coined the term 'Collective Positive Resilience' to describe a resilience strategy that influences all areas of the business from the top-down and the bottom-up.

Collective Positive Resilience is defined as "...the co-operative determination and bonds that bind groups together, and facilitates recovery, adaptation and growth from adversity, threat or challenge".

Collective Positive Resilience is formed of a multi-level base camp that is simply the combined base camp of the personal positive resilience held by individuals and teams within the overarching group or organisation (Figure 2).

"Collective Positive Resilience is the co-operative determination and the bonds that bind groups together, and facilitates recovery, adaptation and growth from adversity, threat or challenge".

Dr Belinda Board, **people**wise

The concept of Collective Positive Resilience is underpinned by Gestalt and system theories – where the combined basecamp of positive resilience resources is influenced by how the five factors of Personal Positive Resilience manifest themselves at different levels. Understanding these interactions, and developing the right environments where people can thrive, not just survive is key. The aim is to have a strong enduring basecamp at every level.
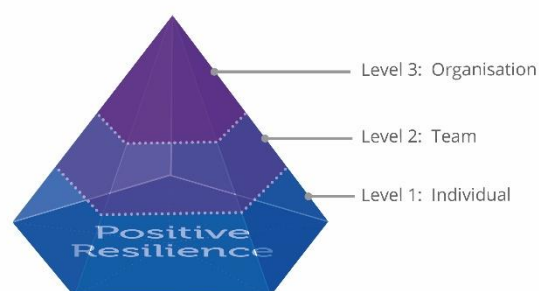

Figure 2: Collective Positive Resilience

By encouraging and leveraging Collective Positive Resilience employees can feel more confident in their capacity to perform effectively; leaders can encourage and inspire their teams through hardship, and; organisations can achieve much-needed stability in a fluctuating economic environment.

With the landscape littered with unpredictable events and a future that looks set to continue this trend, bouncing back is not enough. We need to develop a collective resilience that takes us beyond the status quo and offers a launching pad for growth. We need to build a strong and secure base that generates an environment in which people can thrive rather than just survive.

Positive resilience offers individuals and organisations huge opportunity to realise long term competitive advantage. It is a means of tapping into the individual and collective strength of organisations by helping them to be more flexible, more adaptive, more open to growth and change.

Creating environments where people can thrive and not just survive must be high on organisational and leaders' agendas. By nurturing a strong base from which individuals can launch, sustain and grow themselves – environments that foster personal and collective positive resilience – great things can be achieved.

BUILDING COLLECTIVE POSITIVE RESILIENCE

Traditionally, Human Resource practice focuses on building resilience at two key levels; the individual level and the organisational level. Organisational resilience is defined in very much the same way as individual resilience, with a slightly different focus.

At the organisational level, resilience has often been considered the ability to 'weather the storm' and adapt in the face of change. Principally, efforts to improve organisational resilience have focused on change management and the processes and culture in which individuals have to work on a daily basis. Ultimately, circumstance, or rather predicting future circumstances, becomes the end-goal within the traditional model of organisational resilience.

However, by focusing development efforts at the micro and macro level, a large gap in communication and implementation begins to open up. At **people**wise, we recognise that not only should Collective Positive Resilience be achieved proactively rather than reactively, but it can only be implemented effectively through a structured, visible model that is understood by all, at every level of the business.

Resilience
Index

R

measuring capabilities
predicting potential

The **people**wise **Resilience Index** is a powerful psychometric and diagnostic tool that has been designed and developed to assess all five of the key factors of Positive Resilience; Purposefulness, Perspective, Control, Connectedness and Growth.

The Resilience Index can be used in the following ways:

- Self-audit
- Team audit
- Organisational audit
- 360 feedback tool

To find out more about the Resilience Index visit www.peoplewise.co.uk

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Its primary focus is to promote strategic growth and change at all levels of an organisation, by combining psychological insights and evidence-based best practice with a comprehensive appreciation of an organisation's business goals. It does this by designing and delivering innovative, sustainable cost-effective solutions that deliver.

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