



Harnessing hardiness - psychological resilience in persons and organizations

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Summary - BLUF:

1. The world is changing.... increasingly complex, connected, and fast-moving
2. To be effective in this shifting environment, US forces must be more agile, adaptable, and resilient
3. Recent advances in psychology of human adaptation to stress can help DoD get more from its workforce and organization
4. Personality hardiness (theory, research, practice) provides a science-based approach to maximizing resiliency

Changing environment brings new challenges

- Growing technological complexity
- Changing roles and missions
- Increased uncertainty regarding threat
(“proliferation of threats from unexpected areas” (Navy HCS, 2004))
- New emphasis in on psychological / personality factors in human capital..... Adaptability, flexibility, resilience

Psychosocial stressors in military operations

- 1. ISOLATION :** Physically remote, far removed from family; Poor communication; Different culture; Newly configured units, low cohesion
- 2. AMBIGUITY:** Mission Definition unclear; Unclear Command Structure; Role Confusion (Warrior or Peacekeeper?); indeterminate tour length
- 3. POWERLESSNESS:** Rules-of-Engagement Restrictions; Limited Activity; Cultural/Language Barriers; Red tape; can't get things fixed, repair parts; Relative Deprivation
- 4. BOREDOM/TEDIUM or EXISTENTIAL BOREDOM:** Repetition & Predictability; Lack of Meaningful Work and Activities
- 5. THREAT/DANGER:** Threat of Harm (Terrorists, Mines, Snipers, Disease); Psychological Threat (Exposure to suffering, civilians, refugees)
- 6. HIGH PACE OF OPERATIONS:** Many commitments & fewer available forces means frequent & longer deployments, shorter training cycles, less time for families

New emphasis on human capabilities

- Growing importance of individual, psychological / personality factors..... Adaptability, flexibility, resilience
- Multiple skills & capabilities
- Eg., Army's "pentathlete"...warrior, diplomat, statesman, communicator, creative thinker, business manager
- Eg., Gen Petraeus: "Warrior-Builder-Diplomat" spirit
- Eg., Navy's Human Capital Strategy: future organizations must be resilient, agile, able to grasp and process complex data quickly, creative, always learning (focus on organization level)

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Stressful Life Events, Personality, and Health:
An Inquiry Into Hardiness

Suzanne C. Kobasa
University of Chicago

Personality was studied as a conditioner of the effects of stressful life events on illness onset. Two groups of middle and upper level executives had comparably high degrees of stressful life events in the previous 3 years, as measured by the Holmes and Rahe Schedule of Recent Life Events. One group ($n = 86$) suffered high stress without falling ill, whereas the other ($n = 75$) reported becoming sick after their encounter with stressful life events. Illness was measured by the Wyler, Masuda, and Holmes Seriousness of Illness Survey. Discriminant function analysis, run on half of the subjects in each group and cross-validated on the remaining cases, supported the prediction that high stress/low illness executives show, by comparison with high stress/high illness executives, more hardiness, that is, have a stronger commitment to self, an attitude of vigorousness toward the environment, a sense of meaningfulness, and an internal locus of control.

An exceptional number of studies in the last 20 years (cf. Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; Gunderson & Rahe, 1974) have sug-

gested that stressful life events precipitate somatic and psychological disease. This article considers the importance of personality as a conditioner of the illness-provoking effects of stress.

During the last decade, investigators have shown that the recent life histories of hospitalized persons contain significantly more frequent and serious stressful events than do histories of matched controls from the general population (e.g., Paykel, 1974) and that Navy personnel who begin a cruise with high stress scores suffer more illness episodes during the months at sea than do sailors who start out with low stress scores (Rahe, 1974).

But the possibility of a causal connection between stress and illness is hardly a new idea. Physicians, philosophers, and persons simply

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Suzanne C. Kobasa, Department of Behavioral Sciences, University of Chicago, 5848 S. University Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

- In 1979 journal report, Kobasa summarized research findings on stress, personality and health in Illinois Bell executives...
- At a time of rapid change and organizational restructuring, she discovered a pattern of characteristics that distinguished workers who stayed healthy from those who became ill under stress – a personality or cognitive style called “hardiness”

Personality Hardiness

Kobasa, JPSP, 1979: Hardiness, stressful life events, & health

“Hardy persons possess 3 general characteristics”

Commitment (vs. alienation)

- the ability to feel deeply involved in activities of life

Control (vs. powerlessness)

- belief you can control or influence events of your experience

Challenge (vs. threat)

- anticipation of change as an exciting challenge to further development

Supporting research on Hardiness

Kobasa & Maddi, 1977, Existential personality theory, in R. Corsini (ed), Current Personality Theories, Itasca, IL: Peacock

General population:

Middle managers (Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn, 1982; Kobasa et. al., 1985)

Health care workers (Keane et al, 1985; Rich & Rich, 1987; Topf, 1989)

Older adults (Magnani, 1990)

Bus drivers (Bartone, 1989)

Athletes (Maddi & Hess, 1992)

Military groups:

U.S. Army casualty assistance workers (Bartone et al, 1989)

Gulf War soldiers (Bartone, 1999; Bartone, 2000)

Peacekeeping soldiers (Bartone, 1996)

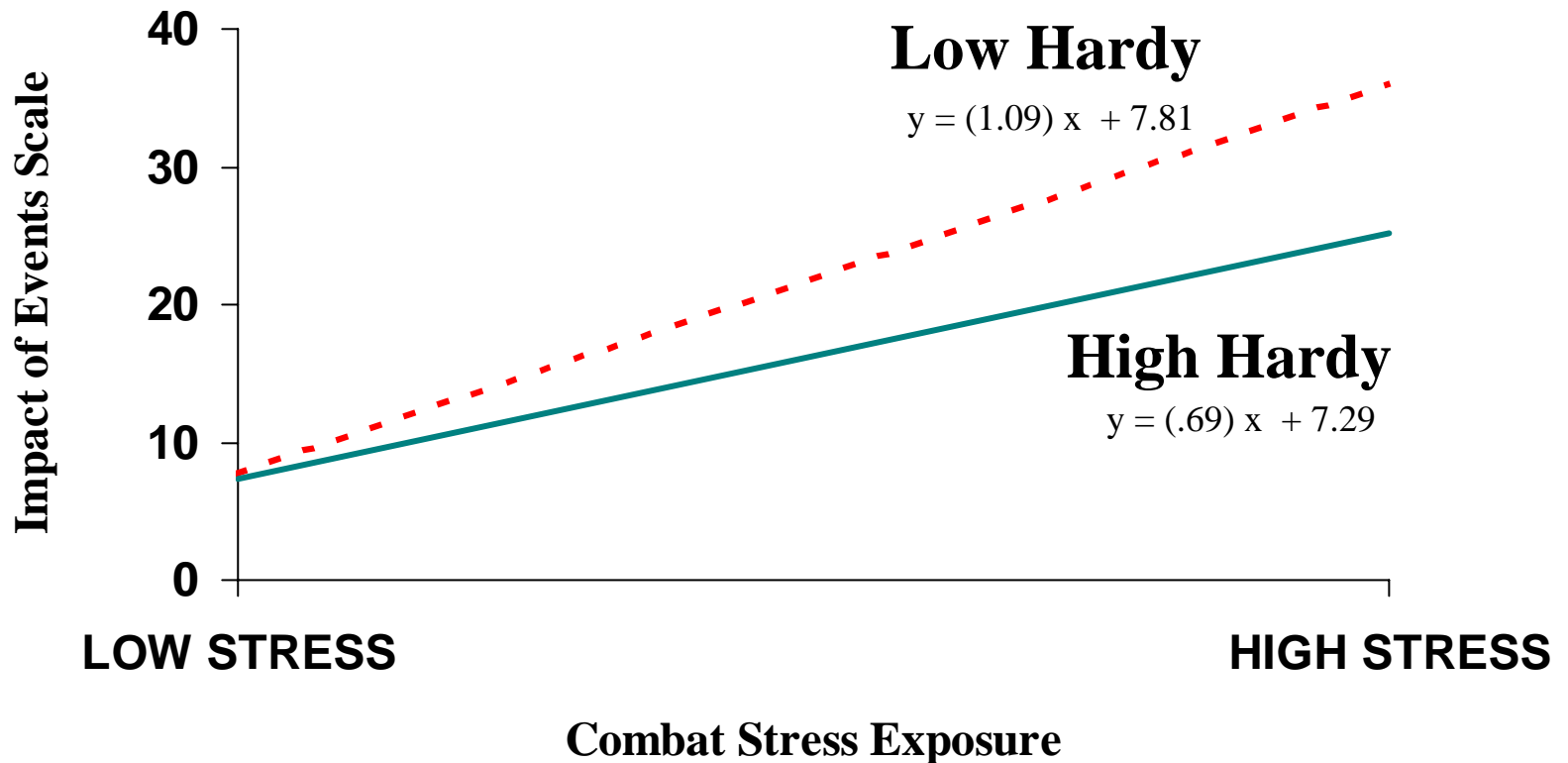
Israeli officer candidates (Westman, 1990)

Norwegian Navy cadets (Bartone, Johnsen, Eid, Brun & Laberg, 2002)

Israeli war POWs (Waysman, Schwarzwald & Solomon, 2001)

FIGURE 1

Gulf War Combat Stress Exposure (CSE) predicting IES scores for Low and High Hardy groups, active duty sample*



* Displays Hardy x CSE interaction ($p < .0001$) in regression model, N=824 active duty, unstandardized betas used to map regression lines

How hardiness works

Hardiness is a generalized style or form of functioning that encompasses:

1. Cognitive – how events are interpreted & understood

1. Behavioral – actions taken in response to events

1. Emotional – affective tone or feeling

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graph LR; A["1. Cognitive – how events are interpreted & understood  
1. Behavioral – actions taken in response to events  
1. Emotional – affective tone or feeling"] --> B["Transformational coping"]
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Transformational coping

How can leaders increase “hardiness” in their organizations?

1. Lead by example.... Model a hardy approach to life and work, demonstrating commitment, control, challenge (stress is good!)
2. Facilitate “hardy” cognitions - sense-making of experience
 - in how tasks, missions are planned, discussed, executed
 - in how mistakes, failures, casualties are talked of, interpreted
 - in debriefings, AARs: focus on events & positive constructions
3. Seek out (create) meaningful / challenging group tasks, & then capitalize through reflection and recognition
4. Communicate respect, commitment to unit members, *mitwelt*

Increasing Hardiness in Organizations

High Hardy

Low Hardy

Supportive work interactions build **Commitment**

Environments permitting mastery build **Control**

Change is seen as richness: builds **Challenge**

Leaders support employees' attempts to express their ideas, capabilities; contributions are recognized with awards, praise	Leaders not supportive, too engaged in themselves, no time, hostile or disapproving neglectful of expressions of needs & potentialities
Leaders provide tasks of moderate difficulty, & needed resources – employees experience success, sense of mastery	Leaders impose too many, too difficult tasks; chastise for failure; arbitrary exercise of power; inadequate resourcing
Leaders show by example and discussion that changes are interesting & useful for learning; minimize bureaucratic obstacles	Leaders show by example that change is disruptive, threatening; seek security and predictability above all; favor restrictive policies & bureaucracy

More research findings:

Hardiness predicts:

- More robust immune system responses to infection (Dolbier et al 2000)
- Better peripheral vision in football players (Rogers et al, 2003)
- Better decision-making in police shoot / no-shoot scenarios (Barton et al, 2004)
- Performance in rugby players (Golby et al, 2003)
- Positive use of emotion / anxiety in athletes (Hanton et al, 2002)
- Retention in West Point cadets (Bartone & Kelly, 2005) and civilian college students (Lifton et. Al., 2006)
- Success in Army Special Forces selection course (Bartone et al, 2007)

Conclusion

- 1. Resilience – agility – adaptability are critical for effective human performance in the new environment**
- 2. Hardiness theory and research provide a scientific basis for understanding human resiliency under stress**
- 3. Hardiness – resiliency can be increased in individuals and organizations**