
What is the Benefit of Mental Toughness to the Work Place? A Case Study Assessment.

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Why Mental Toughness?



- **As a trait is relatively stable**
- **Facilitates:**
 - Self-belief
 - Desire/motivation
 - Dealing with pressure and anxiety
 - Focus (performance-related)
 - Focus (lifestyle-related)
 - Pain/hardship factors (Jones, 2002)

Defining the concept



- **One definition:**
- *“Mental Toughness is... the capacity for an individual to deal effectively with stressors, pressures and challenges and perform to the best of their abilities irrespective of the circumstances in which they find themselves”.*

The 4Cs of mental toughness



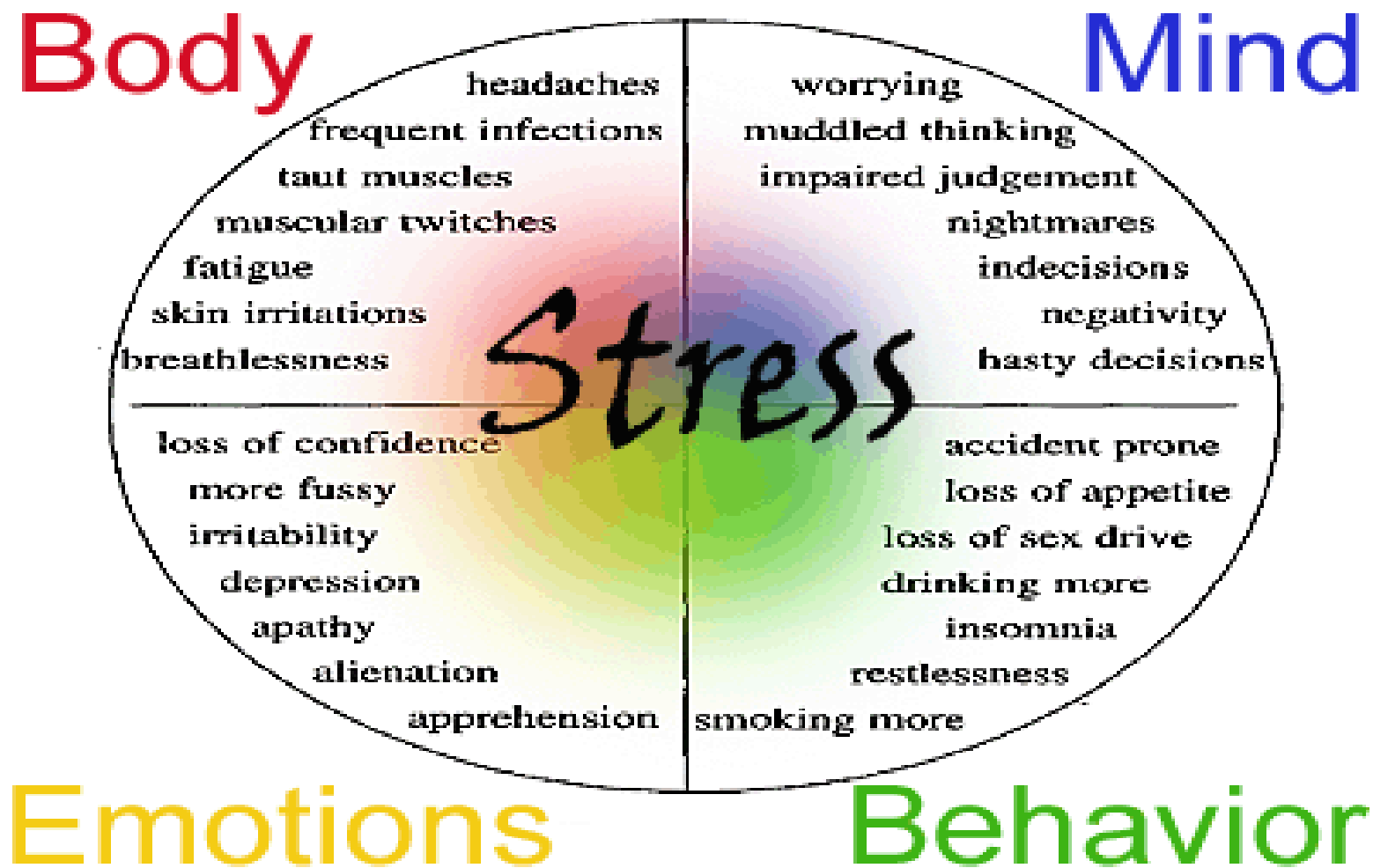
- Control
- Commitment
- Challenge
- Confidence



Loehr's Psychological Performance Inventory

- Self-confidence
- Negative energy
- Attention control
- Visual control
- Imagery control
- Motivation
- Positive energy
- Attitude control

Stress Symptoms



Mental Toughness and Stress



- Dealing with stressful situations and despotic bosses
 - The mind → essential to becoming mentally tough
 - Never let negativity be the main focus in your mind
 - Maintain the ability to choose
 - Project a positive attitude
 - Define goals
- Could assist in attaining long-term success and professional advancement in stressful environments (Scarnati, 2000)

Mental Toughness and Stress, *cont.*



- Peripheral arousal can be compared to toughness and in combination with psychological coping, corresponds with positive performance in even complex tasks, with emotional stability, and with immune system enhancement
- Toughness concept facilitates both short- and long-term coping
- Assists with stress reduction (Dienstbier, 1989)

Mental Toughness and Stress, *cont.*



- Exercise reduces stress
- Makes individuals happier, healthier and more productive
- Busy executives - with high stress levels have more to gain than most
- Smart working equals healthy working
- Important to start and stick with an exercise program
- Use mental strategies for developing a mindset for maintaining a regular fitness program (Goldsby, Neck & Koerber, 2001; No author, 2002)

Mental Toughness and Leadership



- Leadership - wins the hearts and minds of people to achieve a common purpose
- Training for leadership
 - Involves the “inner person”
 - Inner mental toughness, to cope with and handle the problems and pressures that are present in today's life
- Leadership could be most important aspect of modern management (Gilbert-Smith, 1991)

Mental Toughness and Leadership,

cont.



- High-performing leaders
 - Effectively deal with the complexities of modern business
 - Respond quickly to change
 - Deal with ambiguity
 - Provide direction
 - Manage around constraints
 - Leverage the commitment and intellectual capital of the people around them.
- Creates a distinct performance environment that enables the organisation to adapt, innovate, and ultimately win and sustain competitive advantage (Jones, 2004)

Mental Toughness and High-Performance Environments



- Define high performance
- Lead high performance
- Enable high performance
- Deliver high performance (No author, 2005)

Mental Toughness and High-Performance Environments, *CONT.*



- Important indicators of an HPE
 - Clarity around the performance that is expected
 - Multi-level performance expectations that emphasise both quantity and quality in delivery
 - Clarity around who is responsible for delivering the different aspects of the multi-level performance
 - Constructive challenge that induces a pressure to perform on which people can thrive
 - High levels of support in pursuit of delivering against the challenge
 - Internal leadership capability that is strong at all levels of the organisation
 - Performance that is both effective and efficient, thus inducing a state of “flow” in the organisation
 - High levels of awareness at all levels of the organisation; and high performance beliefs, attitudes and behaviours among all members of the organisation
- Practical implications - HPEs are easy to write about, but not so easy to create (No author, 2005)

Case Studies

Objective



- To explore the approach of two individuals to demands at work and how they address these

Method



- **Design:** A diary method allowed the entry of numeric and written information on two occasions
 - Interviews were conducted after the participants had completed the diaries
- **Participants:** Two nurses (both women) with different extroversion and neuroticism scores, were selected from a larger sample
 - They completed four diaries per wave, one per week
 - Scales assessing demands, resources, job performance and job strain were completed twice daily, with higher scores indicative of a greater experience of the condition
 - Individual questionnaires assessed mental distress, personality, mood, emotional well-being (PANAS) and coping
 - The participants were informed of the study's anonymity and confidentiality
- **Analyses:** A comparison of the mean scores of the diary data, correlation analyses and the thematic and content analysis of the interviews
 - All of the scales had acceptable levels of reliability

Case Study 1: Female Staff Nurse, Age 45



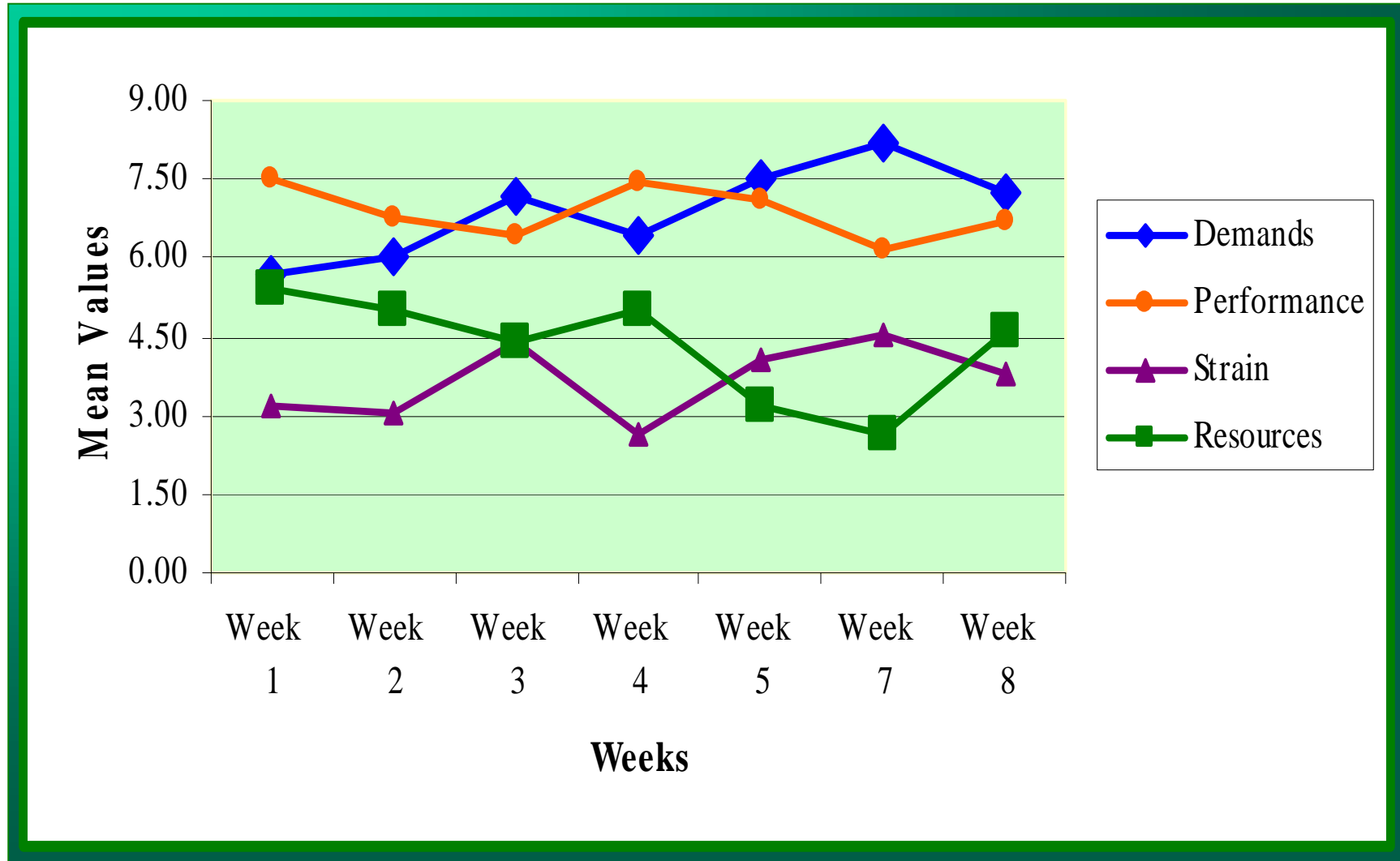
- Extroverted individual
- Used more active oriented coping than emotional coping, with very little avoidance coping
- Positive outlook on life
- Dealt with situations as they occurred and found new ways to address difficult issues
- Enjoyed her job and liked being at work.
- Did not give any instances of low moods

Case Study 1 - Results



- Her work patterns showed:
- Fewer resources increased strain
- More demands decreased performance
- Fewer resources increased strain
- Fewer demands increased performance
- Maintained reasonably high levels of performance and low levels of strain, despite relatively low levels of resources and high levels of demands

Trends in Weekly Stressor-Strain Relationships - Case Study 1



Mentally Tough?



- Daily coping techniques - affected by her extroversion, her positive outlook and coping directly with daily challenges, and as she states, *“I find that when I have had confrontations, real confrontations, all it does, it upset you. It use to, ruins your day, can’t stop thinking about it, and I think it’s not worth it. My happiness is my day not worth that, so I think hey I can work it, this out some other way, and I have, I have severe confrontations with doctors, senior doctors, not just, it’s not worth it in the end, ‘cause it upsets you too much. So I’ve learned now to be a little bit more discreet and find another way.”*

Mentally Tough? *cont.*



- *“But it’s all managerial skills, I mean I’ve usually met most problems now. So I don’t, I know how to get around them. And I just get on with it.”*
- *“And I can explain my rationale, why I want something doing, why I think something needs doing. “*

Case Study 2: Female Ward Sister, Age 47



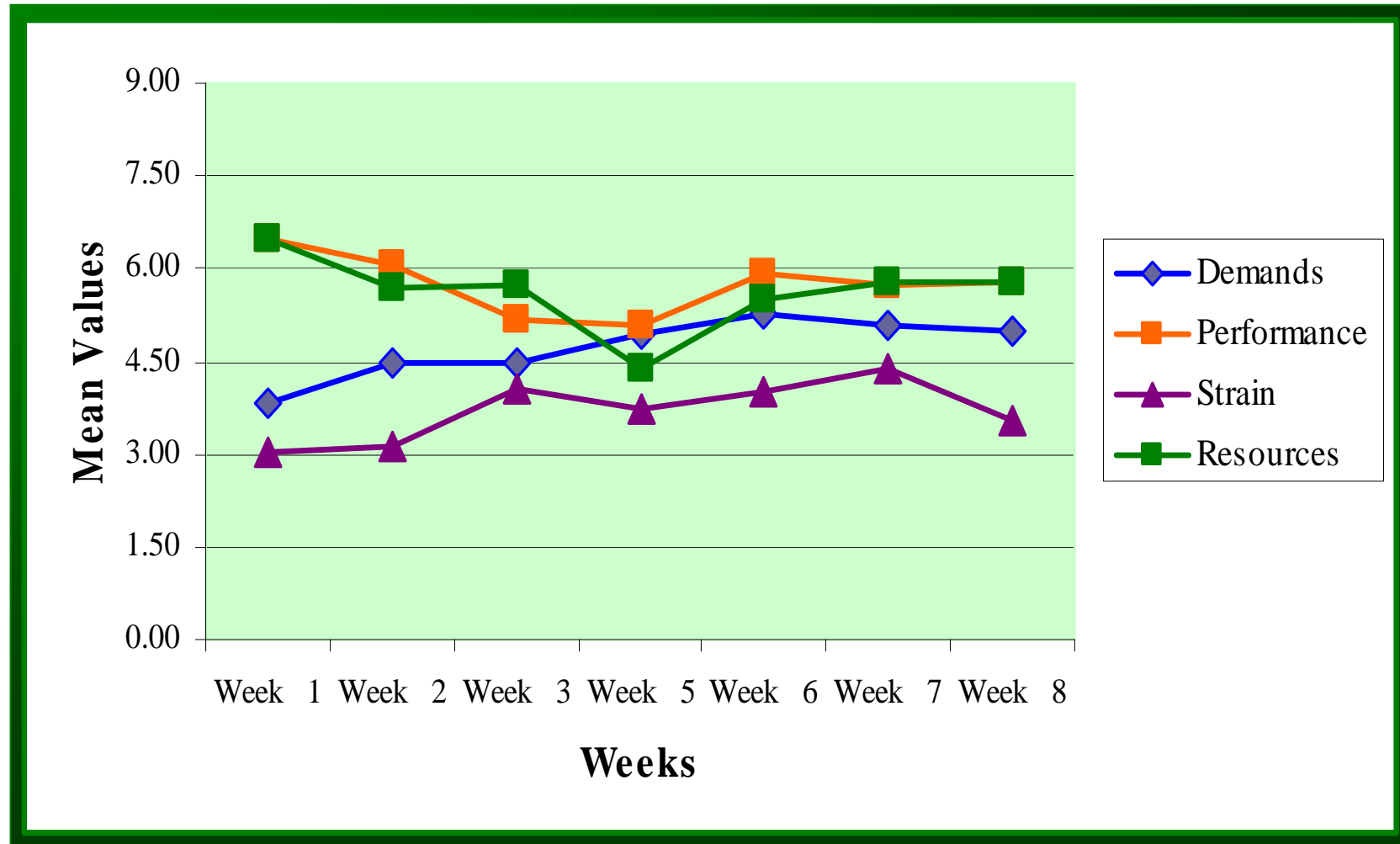
- High neuroticism scores.
- Usually worked for more than eight hours
- Used a combination of action-oriented and emotion-focused coping, with very little avoidance coping
- Higher PA and NA scores - a more positive than negative outlook on life
- General mood affected by being at work

Case Study 2 - Results



- Her work patterns showed that higher levels of strain lowered her performance, while more resources increased strain ($r = .55, p < .05$). This counterintuitive finding may be linked to the seniority of this individual who had resources but had also many tasks to perform
- These tasks would involve running a ward, arranging patients for surgery, coordinating with senior doctors/other wards, while maintaining a certain standard for her patients and staff

Trends in Weekly Stressor-Strain Relationships - Case Study 2



Mentally Tough?



- The participant was affected negatively by inter-personal relationships, and as she stated, *“Another person upset me which involved me going off sick for six weeks, with stress, and I had some counselling at that time, and that, despite, despite that fact that that helped me, the counselling did help, to talk through some of the issues. There was still a lot of residual hurt, and that was because the long term effect of all of that were relationship problems.”*

Mentally Tough? *cont.*



- *“There was a time when I used to worry a great deal about work, in fact, I ate, drank, slept and breathe work, I couldn’t switch off. I had sleepless nights, but I find I don’t so much now.”*
- *“I don’t, I think when you’re in a position of responsibility as I am, you can’t just totally switch it off. I find, I don’t know maybe some people can, but I don’t see how, you can just down tools about five o’clock and not think anymore about what’s going to happen the day after, or the week after.”*

Overview



- Both participants had the same type of job
- But, two different personalities
- Both used different coping mechanisms
- Their personalities, relationships, and outlooks on life contributed to their coping behaviours and disparate levels of job strain when dealing with comparable daily tasks
- Their coping behaviour contributed to how they dealt with the stressors in their lives

Discussion



- Stress is ever present in the work environment
- In 2010/2011, there were 400,000 cases of stress out of 1,152,000 cases of work-related illness in the UK (HSE, 2011).
- It is useful therefore to explore ways to address stress related conditions, and improving on mental toughness is one option to consider

Developing Mental Toughness



1. Start with the right attitude and state of mind (know what your core confidence is all about)
2. Program your mind for success ahead of time with positive affirmations and expectations
3. Make Your Behaviours more routine
4. Poise and Composure: learn how to let go of mistakes quickly if things do not go the way you want
5. Take control of Negative Self-Talk: Reframe “stinking thinking” into positive task oriented suggestions
6. Look at failure as a stepping stone for future achievement
7. Be a difference maker, step up and have a peak performance when it matters the most (Yukelson, no date)

Where next?

- Hardiness
- Mental Toughness
- Resilience
- Mindfulness
- ?



Thank you for your attention!

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