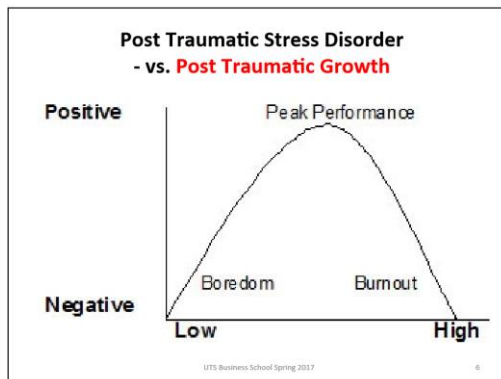


Lecture 6 Stress and Resilience

STRESS definition: a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse circumstances

Effects of stress (physiological)

- ✓ Brain and nerves: headaches, lack of energy, nervousness, memory problems, lack of concentration
- ✓ Heart: faster heartbeat, higher blood pressure
- ✓ Stomach: nausea, stomach ache, weight gain, increased/decreased appetite



- Low stress = boredom
- High stress = burnout
- Optimum level: Somewhere in the middle, enough stress to motivate you

Stress: response to stressors (pressures from the outside)

RESILIENCE: “The capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, failure or even positive events, progress and increased responsibility” – Luthans et al (2007)

Optimism & Resilience Research

Learned Helplessness

Seligman (1972)

- An organism forced to bear aversive stimuli becomes unable or unwilling to avoid subsequent encounters, even if they are “escapable” or avoidable
- Organism learns to accept and endure unpleasant stimuli

Study:

- Conducted on dogs that were placed in a box. The shock would come on and only stop if the dogs jump over a barrier to the other side of which they were currently on.
- Learning group: received treatment they could change
- Helpless group: tethered to the treatment group without possibility to change
- Groups who received no shock or controllable shocks was able to turn off the shocks quickly
- Group 2 (who could not) waited passively for the shocks to be turned off by the experimenter – they learned that nothing they did would affect what was happening so why do anything?

Optimistic Explanatory Style - Seligman (1990)

Explanatory style: is **the way we understand our life events**. It is how we explain to ourselves WHY something happened.

Optimistic explanatory style is saying “NO” to the 3 P’s:

1. It’s not **PERSONAL**: personal responsibility
 2. It’s not **PERMANENT**: events are permanent/temporary
 3. It’s not **PERVASIVE**: everywhere – is this event an example of something that happens everywhere or specifically in this area?
- **Permanence – eternal vs. temporary**
“The boss is nasty” vs. “The boss is in a bad mood” or “You never call me anymore” vs. “You haven’t called lately”
Optimists tend to believe good things and their causes are permanent. Pessimists do the opposite and view success and achievements as temporary (e.g. “I was lucky that time”), and adverse experiences as permanent (e.g. “This problem always happens”)
 - **Pervasiveness – universal vs. specific**
“Bosses are unfair” vs. “My boss is unfair” or “Books are useless” vs. “This book is worthless”
“When a bad thing happens in one area of your life, it doesn’t affect other parts of your life” vs. “When a bad thing happens in one area of your life, it ruins your whole life”
Optimists will apply pervasiveness to positives e.g. “I did that well. I’m good at that kind of stuff”.
 - **Personalisation – internal vs. external**
“I failed the exam because I am stupid” vs. “I failed the exam because it was too hot” or “I didn’t get the sale because I am a loser” vs. “I didn’t get the sale because it’s a tough market”

Optimists

- Health: recovery, immune functioning, longevity
- Psychological well-being: greater coping and resilience
- Success (Seligman & Schulman 1986): better work performance, less burnout, absenteeism, turnover
- Politics (Zullo, Oettingen, Peterson & Seligman 1988): more optimistic speeches by Presidential candidates won 18/22 elections from 1900-1984

ABCDE model: redirecting pessimistic self-talk

A – Adversity (negative event)

B – Belief (your interpretation of the event – 3 P’s)

C – Consequences (your feelings, behaviour, how you respond to the event)

D – Dispute (find evidence that disputes your belief – use the optimist version of the 3 P’s)

E – Energise (tap into positive energy created by the successful disputation + celebrate the achievement to build your optimistic approach)

E.g. I’ve just been made redundant (adversity). This is because I am bad at my job. I can’t do anything right and I’m stupid (belief). I won’t get another job because of this (consequence). Actually, it isn’t my fault. It was the job that was made redundant. I’ve had several successes here and my manager gave me a pleasing referral so I have a good chance to get another job if I put some positive energy into it (disputation). I’ve

disputed my negative thoughts which should enable me to be more confident and positive in job interviews (energise).

Conclusion

Optimistic explanatory style can be learned through:

- ✓ Awareness of self-talk
- ✓ Disputing pessimistic beliefs
- ✓ Replacing them with optimistic alternatives

Penn Resilience Program (with 17 replications)

- Set of 15 empirically supported skills that build cognitive and emotional fitness, strength of character and strong relationships
- The skills: self-awareness, self-regulation, mental agility, strengths of character, connection, optimism
- Group presentations, discussions and practical tasks

TUTORIAL

Cultivating positive emotions, learned optimism and mindfulness are ways we can train our bodies to release bodily stress. We can develop learned optimism through:

- Dispelling unrealistic beliefs about adversity
- Creating a vision of a better future
- Learn skills, knowledge and attitudes that can foster growth and create opportunities
- Change bad habits and start dealing with problems