

## Resilience in Relation with Personality, Cognitive Styles and Decision Making Styles

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Resilience in managerial life is worth looking in to as managers need to be more resilient so that they can bounce back from the loads of pressures and adversities encountered in business. In this context, there is a need to understand the resilient ability of a manager against his personality traits and thinking pattern. With this assumption, a research is designed to examine the relationship of personality dispositions, cognitive style and decision making style with resilience of management students. A sample of 130 management students was selected randomly between the age group of 20-25 years. The tests used are Resilience Inventory, Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Cognitive Style Inventory and Decision Making Inventory. Results showed that resilience has positive association with thinking-personality type and an inverse relationship with feeling-personality type. Systematic and intuitive-cognitive styles have shown positive correlation with resilience. Further, behavioral-decision style has shown negative association with resilience. The study concludes with the implication of resilience in the business world.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Personality, Decision Making Styles, Cognitive Styles.

There are individuals who seem to “bounce back” from negative events quite effectively, whereas others are caught in a web. They seem to be unable to get out of their negative streaks. Being able to move on despite the influence of stressors does not demonstrate luck on the part of those successful individuals, but demonstrates a concept known as resilience. Psychological resilience refers to effective coping and adaptation although faced with loss, hardship or adversity.

Resiliency is defined as “the ability to spring back from adversity that interprets the trajectory from risk to problem behavior or psychopathology and thereby result in adaptive outcomes even in the presence of challenging and threatening circumstances” (Zimmerman & Arun Kumar, 1994). Indeed, resilience is the successful adaptation of an individual despite facing risk and adversity. It refers to a pattern over time, characterized by good eventual adaptation despite developmental risk and chronic adversities (Masten, 2001). However, literature has shown repeatedly nine individual phenomena that correlate with resiliency i.e. being perceived as more cuddly and affectionate

in infancy and beyond; having no sibling born within 20-24 months of one’s own birth; higher level of intelligence; capacity and skills for developing intimate relationships; achievement orientation in and outside of school; capacity to construct productive meanings for events in their world that enhances their understanding of these events; being able to selectively disengage from home and engage with those outside, and then to re-engage; being internally oriented and have an internal locus of control and absence of serious illness during adolescence (Barnard, 1994).

### Theoretical Aspects of Resilience:

*Developmental Theories:* Developmental experts explained that humans are born with no concept of “self.” A person constructs a self-image of his body first, his capacities and limitations through experimentation and then of his essential nature as he looks into the “mirrors” of his caregivers. A child who generally receives positive reinforcing images of himself as they are reflected in the loving gestures of his primary caregivers soon begins to associate these reflected subliminal messages with his own state of being in the world. In troubled families,

however, the mirroring process goes awry and children are at risk of forming an inner self-representation that feels defective and unwanted (Swinney, 2001). However, developmental theory maintains that occasionally a child will manage to distract himself from distorted images and will be drawn instead to more positively reinforcing image of himself in relation to his environment. Piaget's (1952) one of the stimulus equilibration is the most useful information processing concept. It refers to the overall balancing-act that occurs between existing frames of reference and novel experiences, ideally leading to a sense of coherent equilibrium between the child's subjective inner and objective outer world. This would predict resilient life coping skills from a child possessing an innately adaptive, harmoniously balanced internal frame of reference (Siegler, 1991).

*Cognitive Theories:* This theory has revealed many means by which individuals can develop more resilient ways of processing information. Emotional and spiritual intelligence are gaining equal respect as essential for our individuation. They are fundamental to one's relationships with self, others and universe. Goleman (1996) stated that an individual's brain parts combine their energies in order to synergistically give rise to the new facet i.e. resilience. Individuals' intellectual areas of brain always get activated to face the reality of an event or any object. How a person reacts to change in the world order and disorder comes from his childhood and those traumas he sustained then and afterwards, as well as how he learned to grow beyond them. Individual's experiential associations condition his present and future responses. They condition the rationality with which the person assesses the amount of fear he feels and its relative proportion regarding the risks he is exposed to in his lifestyle choices. It conditions how he responds to difficult situations.

*Psychodynamic Theories:* Psychodynamics' include three inter-related theoretical parts: a) classical ego psychology of Freud, b) objects relations theory of Klein, and c) self psychology of Sullivan and Kohut. Ego psychology conceptualizes the intra-psychic world as one of the tensions between the energy dynamics of the unconscious demands of the "superego," the

conscious volition of the "ego," and the instinctual drives of the "id." This conflict produces anxiety, which brings forth a compromise between the needs of the id and the ego in the form of a defense mechanism such as repression, suppression, denial or projection of the true facts of the situation to a place in the psyche where they no longer have to be consciously dealt with. However, object relations theory views this conflict as being generated more within the context of relationships with others rather than strictly within oneself. Self psychology, on the other hand, focuses more on how the external relationships in one's life help in developing and maintaining a sense of self-esteem and self-cohesion through interaction with one's inner relationship with oneself. It is more of a "two person, self-object" psychology.

In sum, psychodynamic theories have emphasized the importance of ego psychology, object relation and self psychology, the predominant factors they have emphasized is on individuals' personal disposition that helps them in maintaining resilience. Similarly, cognitive theories have explained the concept of experiential associations and rationality in taking calculated risks in difficult situations in professional life, which helps an individual to strengthen their resilience ability.

#### **Role of Personality, Cognition and Decision making in influencing Resilience:**

Individuals behave differently in similar situations and evaluate conditions differently based on their unique expectations, values, previous experiences and temperament (DeNeve & Copper, 1998). Usually, when reflecting about someone's personality, we think about what makes one person different from another or perhaps even unique and this question refers to individual differences. It is not easy to describe or explain how individuals develop particular ways of interacting with the world. This is another issue of individual differences (Huffman, Vernoy, Williams. & Vernoy, 1991). Since earlier times type theories has dominated the investigations of individual differences (Mischel, 1984).

Jung's personality type theory was developed in the early 1900s. His theory was based on the belief that individual behavior affects the way

one thinks, perceives and evaluates the world (Jung, 1923). In the 1920s, Myers and Briggs developed a "type indicator" theory by relying on Jung theories (Rowe & Mason, 1987). According to Myers (1998), Jung focused on accurately describing the eight dominant functions he identified, but he also argues that people use the other functions in a kind of hierarchy of preferences. He used four terms to describe the order of use for an individual type viz., the first and the most used mental process-dominant function; the second in preference-auxiliary function; third- tertiary function and the fourth and the least preferred-inferior function. Briggs and Myers developed Jung's idea of the auxiliary function and included its role in their concept and descriptions of types. The sixteen types of personality indicated by the MBTI were the result of this development. Early research used the function pairs of sensing-thinking (ST), sensing-feeling (SF), intuitive-thinking (NT) and intuitive-feeling (NF) as a useful framework. Personality type is regarded as predictive of organizational preferences for problem-solving and decision-making (Killman & Thomas, 1975).

Further, Cloninger, Svrakic, and Przybeck (1993) defined personality as the way that individuals learn from experience and adapt their feelings, thoughts and actions. Specifically, personality can be defined as a dynamic organization within an individual of the psychobiological systems that modulate adaptation to a changing environment. This includes system regulation by means of cognitions, emotions and moods, personal impulse control and social relations.

A movement came into prominence in the 1950s and early 1960s with the idea that styles could provide a bridge between the study of cognition (e.g., how we perceive, how we learn and how we think) and the study of personality. A small group of experimental psychologists set out to explore and describe individual differences in cognitive functioning. Collectively, these efforts led to a school of thought in cognitive psychology, designed to look at "stylistic constructs," which were said to be psychologically based, individualistic and unchanging (Sternburg, Robert & Li-Fang, 2001).

Cognitive style refers to the impact of mental processes on behavior. Sternberg et al. (2001) states that the core definition of 'style' is a reference to habitual patterns or preferred ways of doing something (e.g., thinking, learning and teaching) that are consistent over long periods of time and across many areas of activity, remains virtually the same.

Another essential ingredient of high resilience is the belief that one has control over what is transpiring in one's life. To acquire this attitude of ownership, an individual needs opportunities to learn and apply decision-making and problem solving skills. Rowe et al. (1987) considers decision style primarily as a cognitive process that combines the mental activities of perception, information processing or cognition, making judgment, and coming to the closure of the problem. Other researchers believe that decision making is a more personal experience. Petrides and Guiney (2002) believe that decision making is an influential process in which, one's core values and beliefs are fundamental to the decision making process. These researchers along with others recognize decision making as a cognitive process.

Sills, Cohan, and Stein (2004) investigated the relationship of resilience to personality traits, coping styles and psychiatric symptoms in college students. Results indicated that resilience was negatively associated with neuroticism and positively related to extraversion and conscientiousness dimensions of personality. Further, Margaret, Ted, and John (2001) studied resilience in response to life stress; the effects of coping style and cognitive hardiness. Obtained findings showed that cognitive hardiness, aspects of coping style and negative life events directly impacted on measures of psychological and somatic stress. In another study, Tebes, Irish, Puglisi, and Perkins (2004) examined the relationship of cognitive transformation to indicators of resilience among 35 acutely bereaved young adults and non bereaved comparison group and they found that transformation predicts resilience, and may reduce one's risk trajectory to enhance adaptation. In addition, Scott, Lauren, Lyn, and Alisa (2007) in their study investigated the role of negative cognitive style

in predicting the occurrence of negative life events. Results showed that the individuals with negative cognitive styles generated more negative life events (dependent events and interpersonal events, but not more independent or achievement-related events) than individuals with more positive cognitive styles.

From the aforesaid theories and literature it can be said that personality, cognitive and decision making process plays a vital role in influencing resilience. The professional and hectic life of managers has brought enormous work pressure and personal dilemma while taking decisions. Until and otherwise managers show certain amount of resilience in their profession, it would become genuinely difficult in sustaining in their profession. Thus, the present study is designed to explore the plausible relationship between personality, cognition and decision making with resilience in managerial profession.

### Method

#### Participants:

A total number of 130 postgraduate students (45 females and 82 males) pursuing course in business management from Delhi based management institutes were taken on incidental basis for the present study. Their age ranged from 20 to 25 years.

#### Tests:

*i) Resilience Inventory:* This scale was developed by Monika Guttman. It is used to test an individual's ability to bounce back or to thrive in the face of constant chaos and uncertainty. It has 14 questions rated on the 5-point Likert scale. These questions assess individual resilience skills. It has a reliability of .68 to .74 at 0.01 level of significance.

*ii) Decision Style Inventory:* Rowe and Mason developed this scale in 1987. It was created in order to test an individual's preferences when approaching various decisions in different situations. Inventory consists of ten questions regarding typical situations that individual faces at a managerial level. It measures four styles of decision making, namely, directive style, analytical style, conceptual style and behavioral style. Decision style inventory has a 90% face validity and 70% test- retest reliability.

*iii) Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI):* This scale was developed by Myers and Briggs in 1998. This test has 93 items and measures a person's preferences, by using four basic scales with opposite poles. The four scales are: Extraversion-Intraversion, Sensing-Intuitive, Thinking-Feeling and Judging-Perceiver. MBTI has a reliability of .84 and .86 for internal consistency and .76 for temporal stability.

*iv) Cognitive Style Inventory (CSI):* This scale was developed by Praveen Jha in 2001. CSI is a self report measure of the ways of thinking, judging, remembering, storing information, decision making and believing in interpersonal relationship. Inventory has 25 items and it measures two dimensions of cognitive styles i.e. systematic style and intuitive style. It has a reliability of .70 to .83 at 0.01 level of significance.

### Result and Discussion

Pearson product moment coefficients of correlation were computed separately to examine the relationship between the variables. Further, regression analysis has been made to see the effect of personality dimensions, cognitive styles and decision making styles on resilience.

**Table 1. Percentage of management students at different levels of Resilience**

Level of Resilience	High	Above Average	Adequate	Struggling to Cope
No. of students	12%	50%	33%	5%

Results on the measure of resilience (table 1) revealed that 62% of the students are in above average category of resilience among which 12% of them falls in the high category of resilience. It reveals that students are flexible, adaptive & confident and possesses a stronger sense of being in control when faced with uncertainty. Findings indicated that students have good resilience skills; might be having strong social support and they would be more confident and alert to the role of emotions in everyday life. They would be more knowledgeable in making their strategies, solving problems in their day to day activities. Indeed, 38% of students need

**Table 2. Correlation between Resilience and Personality, Cognitive styles and Decision making styles**

Measured Variables	Extraversion	Intraversion	Sensing	iNtuitive	Thinking	Feeling	Judging	Perceiver	Systematic	Intuitive	Directive	Analytical	Conceptual	Behavioral
Resilience	.018	-.023	-.087	.107	.29**	-.28**	.132	-.144	.37**	.25**	.167	.069	.103	-.29**

\*\* p<0.01

assistance in building up their resilience ability. These students need to maintain performance and stamina during periods of high demand and should need to think clearly and logically under pressure.

Table 2 showed the correlation between measured variables among management students. In personality, thinking personality type showed positive relationship whereas feeling personality type showed negative relation with resilience. It reveals that those students who evaluate things logically and intellectually at the same time give lesser importance to emotions and are able to bounce easily from chaos and uncertainties of life. Students who possess logical thinking have the capacity to challenge their strength and weaknesses. They grapple with situations as they arise and shape their environment, if not, they adjust to it. Findings can be supported by the Ellis (1962) and Beck (1976) statement that irrational or dysfunctional beliefs can cause unnecessary emotional distress. Individuals who have irrational beliefs or dysfunctional thinking tend to overreact with strong negative emotions like anger and fear. The way people explain their success and failure influences whether they persevere or give up when faced with adversity. These explanations or attributions can become a habitual way of explaining adversity, challenge and success and so develop into a "thinking style" or preferred way of viewing the world. Our thinking style can help or hinder our ability to respond resiliently to inevitable adverse situations. On the other hand, feeling-personality type has shown an inverse relation with resilience; indicating, that students who are more inclined towards feelings are less resilient. Students, who generally manipulate their problems emotionally and evaluate things by ethics and good or bad, can't easily recover

from adverse situations. Study conducted by Fiona, Judy, Melissa, and Eddie (2004) found the similar result; they explore managers' abilities and preferences with the help of psychometric instruments. Results indicated that thinking and feeling dimension correlate strongly with emotional resilience. Feeling preference were negatively correlated with emotional resilience, which again makes sense as the manager who has a feeling preference to thinking will carry the burdens of their team with them and all of their emotional baggage. Sills et al. (2004) also found that emotion-oriented coping was associated with low resilience.

Further, results showed that in cognitive styles both systematic and intuitive cognitive styles have shown strong positive relationship with resilience. It reveals that students who uses evaluative approach as well as use their past experiences in solving any problem are much more capable of handling any kind of stressors in their day to day life. It also means that resilient students have good problem-solving skills. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), problem solving skills are one of the most significant coping strategies when confronted with stress.

A body of research and investigation has been performed to understand the relationship between cognitions and emotional responses to stimuli. Emotions are always responses to our perceptions of the eliciting stimuli. Myers (1992) has shown that human's happiness is obviously to be found not in material goods, but rather in one's cognitive state of mind. The idea that emotional reactions are triggered by cognitive appraisal rather than environment, enables us to take into account that individuals (or even the same person at different times) can have very different emotional responses in the same situation towards a person or an object (Smith. 1993).

**Table 3. Regression of Resilience with Personality Types, Cognitive Styles and Decision Making Styles.**

R	R Square	Df	F	Sig.
.501	.251	14 & 115	2.74	.002

Predictors		Beta
Decision Making Styles	Directive	-.153
	Analytical	-.288
	Conceptual	-.250
	Behavioral	-.423
Cognitive Styles	Systematic	.407
	Intuitive	-.118
Personality Types	Extraversion	-.867
	Introversion	-.788
	Sensing	.205
	Intuitive	.358
	Thinking	.535
	Feeling	.329
	Judging	.185
	Perceiver	.212

Results of the study also indicate that among four styles of decision making, only one i.e. behavioral-decision making style has shown inverse relationship with resilience. It may be interpreted, that students who have characteristics of low tolerance for ambiguity and low cognitive complexity cannot cope effectively with stressful situations. Moreover, these students focus on short term problem solving solutions and face difficulty in making tough decisions of life. All these characteristics during times of stress and adversity make them difficult to step back and think about the situation more flexibly and accurately, thus promoting less resilient behavior.

The regression analysis of resilience has been shown in Table 4. Results showed that multiple R between the predictor variables and dependent variable is .501. The obtained F-ratio for the significance of multiple R is 2.74 (df = 14 & 115;  $p < 0.01$ ). The finding clearly indicates that the predictor variables such as personality, cognitive and decision making style jointly predict substantial variance in resilience. The

square of multiple R ( $R^2$ ) being .25 suggests that all the three predictors jointly account for 25 percent of the total variance in resilience. All the measured variables show significant contribution on resilience. Overall, decision making styles have shown negative influence on resilience, whereas, systematic and intuitive cognitive style have shown a positive and negative influence on resilience, respectively. It may be interpreted that cognitive styles can lead students to cling to accurate beliefs about the world and appropriate problem-solving strategies that result in valuable resilience resources. Despite our best efforts we cannot prevent adversity and daily stress, but we can learn to be more resilient by changing how we think about challenges and adversities. Research has shown that how we think about adversity and opportunity affects our success in school and work, our health and longevity and our risk for depression. Scott et al. (2007) found that negative cognitive style may account for the stress generation effect often found in depressed individuals, particularly for women. Adequately positive cognitive patterns in treatment or prevention programs may not only effectively reduce depression, but may also reduce the likelihood of experiencing negative life events that often serve as precipitants for depression. Further, in personality types, sensing, intuitive, thinking, feeling, judging and perceiver-personality contributed positively with resilience.

Thus, the findings of the study suggest that personality, cognitive styles and decision making plays a decisive role in influencing resilience. It has been found that management students who possess logical thinking had better resilience abilities. Ironically, the students who were inclined more on emotions and feelings had displayed lesser resilience. Management students had shown step by step approach in solving problems and then make an overall plan, this would enable them to display better resilience. In addition, few management students had displayed unpredictable approach in handling analytical problems; this would certainly act as a pulling factor in resilience. Finally, the management students who follow behavioral-decision making style had proven to have low resilience skills.

### Implications

The success of a business depends upon the quality of the decisions its manager's make at each stage of business. It requires high level of logical and intellectual ability and emotional maturity besides high level of resilience. The intellectual ability and emotional maturity can be enhanced through various training programmes. Similarly, resilience can also be learned and further developed through proper behavioral training programmes. Especially, business strategies are made to have profit, customer satisfaction and better managerial decision making. The effective decision making involves various types of risks at every stage of decision making and it requires high level of resilience. However, it is essential for management students to carefully evaluate advantages and disadvantages of every alternative and look out for an overall solution. Adapting to situations and making decisions accordingly requires enormous amount of understanding over the situation and ability to perform against all types of risks and difficulties. Thus, it is necessary for every management student to learn more about handling difficult situations and overcoming them successfully would further add value to management education.

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