

EXECUTES OPERATIONS IN AN INTEGRATED,
ACCOUNTABLE, AND AGILE MANNER

How Resiliency Prepares Leaders to Prevail on Battlefields of the Future

Justin Stoddard, United States Air Force Academy

I'll never forget stepping out of the C-17 aircraft that carried our light infantry company to Kandahar, Afghanistan in the summer of 2003. As we shuffled out the back and down the ramp, the first thing I felt was the thick heat and the strong smell of jet exhaust from the engines as they were slowing down. I kept waiting for the heat to dissipate as I walked further from the aircraft, but even in the darkness of our "o-dark-thirty" arrival the heat wasn't going anywhere. Reception handed us warm bottles of water to drink as we got our in-brief and my crash course in battlefield resiliency began. It continued in the following days as we confirmed our weapons-zero on ranges in 120+ degree heat, did physical training (PT) at night, and got chased around by camel spiders. But the real test came when my light infantry platoon was given several armored Humvee troop carriers and gun trucks and told we had three days to develop our new battle drills and standard operating procedures (SOPs) and start patrolling. Back in Fort Drum, New York we had trained on foot and had never fought from vehicles. But here we were and we had to figure out and learn to fight and win in vehicles on a battlefield we had never experienced. And so we did. Upon redeployment in the spring of 2004, every member of my platoon walked off the plane and back to their friends and families with greater wisdom, experience, and a toughness only close combat can provide.

- Author Reflection

The ability to withstand, adapt, recover, and grow when faced with overwhelming challenges is the essence of resilience and represents a critical asset of leaders in the military as they encounter stressors and changing demands (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2014). As the characteristics and nature of the global battlefield changes and the complexities of dynamic adversaries increase, the necessity for leaders to develop resiliency is more critical than ever. Leaders who understand the construct of resiliency theory, the process of building resiliency, and the importance of assessing their own personal successes and failures will be better prepared to develop the resiliency necessary to prepare themselves and their units to fight and win on the battlefields of the future. The shifting

nature of future conflict demands we prepare now to confront, engage, and triumph over adversaries and challenges that currently may not exist. Resiliency-building efforts are essential to future success since the habits and problem-solving skills can be applied to any situation regardless of military specialty including future, currently unknown challenges. This paper will review the origins, development, and framework of resiliency theory, discuss resiliency-building models, and highlight the importance of conducting self-evaluations and after-action reviews (AARs) to improve individual and unit performance. This will demonstrate why understanding resiliency (and how to build resiliency), is so critical to achieving individual success and emerging triumphant on the complex battlefields of the future.

Resiliency Theory Origins and Development

Research on individual resilience began in the early 1970's with the work of Dr. Norman Garmezy and his investigation into children at risk for severe psychopathology (Garmezy, 1974). His later work with Dr. Ann Masten focused on children raised in severely adverse circumstances and why some of them grew up with serious behavioral challenges while others in the same households seemed unaffected or even strengthened by their experiences. They recognized that some children demonstrated a kind

of stress competence and stress-resistance which they later termed "resilience" (Garmezy & Masten, 1986). As resiliency research progressed and definitions for resiliency developed, researchers moved through several "waves" of theory moving from identifying resiliency in terms of individual traits and qualities, to recognizing protective factors designed to help cope with stressors, and then later combining the two into an internal motivational drive toward self-actualization (Allan et al., 2014; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Masten et al., 2008). Continuing research led to describing resiliency as a dynamic process of reacting to and engaging adversity in order to regain a homeostatic state that may be better, worse, or the same as when the adversity began (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Luthar et al., 2000; Richardson, 2002). This new understanding of resiliency theory, and the movement from a static trait-based theory to a process-based theory led researchers to explore factors that might lead individuals to develop resiliency, how resiliency influenced performance, how to measure resiliency, and determine if it was possible to build and develop resiliency in different populations.

Two contemporary researchers, Dr. Paul Bartone and Dr. Angela Duckworth, have extensively explored resiliency, hardiness, and grit, and found ways to accurately measure these qualities. Bartone has written extensively about concepts surrounding the human ability to overcome adversity, particularly in the

Dr. Justin R. Stoddard is currently an Assistant Professor and prototyping branch chief at the Center for Character and Leadership Development at USAFA. After enlisting in the Army in 1997 as a combat medic, Justin attended the University of Colorado Boulder ROTC and commissioned in 2001 with dual majors in Philosophy and Russian studies. From 2001-2017, Justin served in active duty, reserve, and mobilized reservist positions as a rifle platoon leader in Afghanistan from 2003-2004, HHC commander from 2009-2011, and Senior Intelligence Division Chief from 2012-2017. In 2011, Dr. Stoddard earned his master's degree in leadership studies and intelligence and national security studies from the University of Texas - El Paso, and in 2019 earned his PhD from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs in Education Leadership, Research, and Policy researching the grit and resiliency of cadets attending USAFA.

military (Bartone, 2006; Bartone et al., 2009; Bartone et al., 2013; Bartone et al., 2008). His extensive research has demonstrated the value of resiliency both in leaders and in those they lead. Bartone has dedicated a great deal of research to the study of resiliency and hardiness by creating and assessing surveys, such as the 15-item Dispositional Resilience Scale, which has proven a reliable and valid measurement tool to evaluate the *hardiness* and *resilience* of a variety of individuals, especially soldiers and military leaders (Bartone, 1995, 2007). His research identifies and underscores the importance of resiliency in dealing with the stresses of deployments, rigors of military life, and the risk factors associated with combat. It is notable that the terms hardiness and resilience are often used interchangeably, showing the close and, in most cases, synonymous use of these terms.

Duckworth has researched grit extensively with adults, Ivy League undergraduates, West Point Academy cadets, and participants in the National Spelling Bee (Duckworth et al., 2007). Duckworth determined that grit is a combination of two key subcomponents: consistency of interest referred to as

the National Spelling Bee (Duckworth et al., 2007). Her research at West Point discovered the significant connection between grit, passion, resiliency, and individual performance in an academic and military training environment replete with the challenges and stresses inherent to both. This again underscores the close relationship between resiliency and successful leadership performance.

Definitions of Resiliency

As previously mentioned, definitions of resiliency have changed over time as researchers attempt to quantify, predict, standardize, and understand resiliency. Many of these definitions include the concept of bouncing back from adversity (Dyer & McGuinness, 1996; Ledesma, 2014; VanBreda, 2001), returning to a former shape after being bent or pulled (Resilience, 2018), or rising every time you fall (Duckworth, 2016). While the various definitions capture different aspects of resilience, all of them follow a common thematic cycle wherein an individual possesses and demonstrates the ability to face an adversity, to process and react to that adversity, and to emerge with a new homeostatic state after regaining stability or normalization.

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passion, and perseverance of effort simply referred to as perseverance (Duckworth, 2016), which is synonymous with resiliency (Perkins-Gough, 2013). She created a survey tool called the Grit Survey containing two subscales to measure the elements of passion and resiliency. This survey tool was used to predict student success, including that of West Point cadets attending basic training and students participating in

As explained by one West Point cadet who completed initial cadet basic training, “Within two weeks I was tired, lonely, frustrated, and ready to quit—as were all of my classmates” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 25). However, that cadet,

and many others simply would not quit despite the challenges placed in front of them. As Dr. Duckworth explains, while some quit, others did not, and the key difference seemed to be, “... a ‘never give up’ attitude” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 26). Resiliency represents the determination to keep trying, keep pushing forward, and never give up despite the many obstacles or adversities that may stand in the way.

The definition of resiliency developed by the Defense Centers of Excellence of Psychological and Traumatic Brain Injury and adopted by the United States Air Force, describes resiliency as “The ability to withstand, recover and grow in the face of stressors and changing demands” (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2014, p. 14). This definition uses the verbs “withstand, recover, and grow” indicating resiliency is a dynamic action instead of a static trait or characteristic. This action-based definition of resiliency captures the desire and intent of the military services to develop individuals capable of facing overwhelming challenges, and to survive and thrive despite the nature of future uncertainties. Moving forward with this definition for resiliency lays the groundwork for a discussion of resiliency theory itself.

Resiliency Framework

Resiliency theory is a strengths-based theory that instead of focusing on deficits, focuses on individual strengths that lead to healthy development and positive outcomes regardless of the level of risk exposure. This theory involves the elements of adversity, promotive factors that include internal assets and external resources, protective factors, and vulnerability factors which together, influences resiliency in various ways. Resiliency theory posits that individuals experience risks or adversities in life and possess promotive factors of varying types and degrees that may support the individual’s ability to overcome the adversities (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman, 2013).

Promotive factors consist of the internal assets and external resources an individual has the ability to draw from when attempting to overcome adversity. Internal assets include traits inherent to the individuals such as positive identity, competence, hope, self-esteem, self-efficacy, coping skills, mindset, and mindfulness

(Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2006; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). These internal assets focus on the inherent positive strengths that promote successful resilience when disrupted by risk and adversity. While there are many types of internal assets, a short explanation of a few different examples is instructive.

Self-efficacy is “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy believe they can master their environment and effectively solve problems as they arise, a critical element of individual resiliency (Reivich & Shatté, 2003). This is essential for leaders as the ability to overcome obstacles starts with the internal belief that a person can make decisions, take action, and bring about effects resulting in overcoming obstacles and challenges in a way that brings positive growth and success.

Mindset refers to the tendency of individuals to have either a fixed viewpoint, wherein intelligence, personality, and character are considered static traits with value placed on the individual achievement of tasks, or a *growth* viewpoint, wherein intelligence, personality, and character is malleable, and experience is gained through both success and failure in completing tasks, with value placed on individual effort and the learning process (Dweck, 2006; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015).

Mindfulness is described as “a process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and acceptance” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 234) and an “awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment,

and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). This ability to focus attention on each moment with openness and acceptance can empower individuals to experience hardship in a way that enables them to identify, acknowledge, and accept their own abilities to resolve challenges providing a path to obtaining new skills to handle the challenges ahead. Mindfulness programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) strategies have been proposed to build resiliency among military service members (Grossman et al., 2004; Thomas & Taylor, 2015), and research shows that mindfulness training programs can help individuals learn to mitigate the negative effects of stress (Johnson et al., 2014). Together, these and many other types of internal assets serve to gird up the mental toughness and agility leaders require to engage new challenges and adversities regardless of prior experience.

External assets are the resources available to the individual to which they can turn to for assistance when needed and include parental support, youth and community programs, and adult mentors (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Kiswarday, 2012; Zimmerman et al., 2013). They are those elements external to the individual that they can reach out to for support if they decide to. These external assets could include talking with friends, family, and fellow colleagues in the military, but also include working out, reading a book, going for a hike, running, and participation in other types of activities and connections external to the individual. These serve as powerful assets as individuals faced with continuous hardships can turn to activities which bring a respite from the demanding operational tempo of warfighting, and socially connect with others in similar situations. These relationships can potentially strengthen individuals and organizations as

the unit members learn to rely upon each other as they endure similar challenges together. As a key element of the resiliency framework, these aforementioned elements and many other types of promotive factors may significantly influence the development of resiliency. As individuals identify new resources to draw upon and reach out to when experiencing adversity, they can improve the ways they value growth and may increase their belief that they can, in fact, bounce back from setbacks.

Protective and vulnerability factors are elements that may influence the effects of adversity depending on the individual and their background (Braverman, 2001; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Luthar et al., 2000). Protective factors are sometimes closely related to promotive factors, but they extend past the individual level to include supportive family networks, socioeconomic status, school experiences, supportive communities, and cultural resources. These factors serve to counteract or ameliorate the effects of adversity and thus, guard the individual from the adversity itself (Braverman, 2001). Vulnerability factors represent the negative qualities, experiences, or lack of protective factors that make individuals more susceptible to adversity and intensify the risk effects. Both factors may be present as a result of the presence or absence of family support and strong community identity, and access to or the lack of assistive resources (Braverman, 2001; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Thus, based on their unique life experiences, everyone will have unique combinations of protective factors and vulnerability factors, and will likewise handle adversity very differently.

Understanding the process by which we experience adversity and exhibit resiliency is instructive as a precursor to discussing how to build resiliency. The

process begins with each of us in a state of stable homeostasis with our experiences and the promotive, vulnerability, and protective factors at the ready. Adversity disrupts our lives and pushes us out of our stable condition and into a period of time when we wrestle with the adversity, bringing to bear the resiliency factors and working through the challenges the best we can. This is where our resiliency is tested as we attempt to overcome the adversity and reintegrate back into a new state of stable homeostasis. This process results in us attaining a new stable state that may range from an increased level of resiliency or resilient reintegration, to the same level of resiliency, to a decreased level or even dysfunctional level of resiliency if the adversity is more than we can bear (Richardson, 2002). How we emerge from this process depends on our ability to effectively draw upon and utilize the factors and resources available to us. For leaders operating in complex environments, the ability to effectively work through this process and adapt, grow, and learn from adversity is critical to achieving success both personally and professionally. Building this ability then becomes of critical importance and focused attention on building resiliency is invaluable.

Building Resiliency

Using the above resiliency framework, leaders can begin building resiliency by examining the promotive factors and strengths they most commonly draw from to work through adversity. Reflecting on these factors and bringing them to the forefront of their minds makes them more available when adversity presents itself. Additional promotive factors based on individual needs can also be developed to help get through new challenges if the current list is insufficient. Reflecting on specific vulnerability factors and weaknesses, and developing strategies to compensate or overcome these factors can also build resiliency.

Based on prior work, researchers have proposed several resiliency-building models designed to *inoculate* the individual with experiences and strategies they can draw from when working through new challenges. Three of the models designed to aid in evaluating the nature of individual resiliency and to help develop resiliency include the compensatory model, the immunity vs. vulnerability or protective model, and the challenge model (Garmezy et al., 1984). These models have guided researchers as they applied the principles of resiliency theory to curricular strategies and operational practices to develop and enhance individual resiliency (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Ledesma, 2014; Richardson, 2002). All three of these models pursue a systematic approach to evaluating and building resiliency to stress regardless of individual background or experiences and “suggest themselves for the impact of describing stress and personal attributes on quality of adaptation” (Garmezy et al., 1984, p. 102). Resilient adaptation is the goal, and the intent is to discover how promotive, protective, and vulnerability factors influence an individual’s ability to adapt to adversity.

The compensatory and protective models focus on dealing with the negative effects individuals may experience because of adversity. The compensatory model seeks to compensate for the negative effects by putting resources in place to help individuals cope with the aftereffects of the adversities they experience. The protective model seeks to put measures in place to protect individuals from experiencing adversity altogether. While these models can be effective in different environments with different age groups, the challenge model may be the most effective at assisting military leaders with developing resiliency since adversity is inherent to the military environment focused on defending our nations against all enemies foreign and domestic.

The challenge model is different from the compensatory or protective models in that instead of seeking to minimize contact with adversity, counteract its effects, or avoid negative outcomes altogether, individuals are intentionally exposed to moderate amounts of adversity in controlled environments to build a level of immunity to the risk (Garmezy et al., 1984). In this model, individuals can face adversity and wrestle with it under the supervision of others who are ready to help, provide guidance, reinforcement, and aid if necessary, in overcoming the adversity. This type of model serves as an inoculation against adversity that prepares the individual for the next adversity (Ledesma, 2014; Zimmerman, 2013). Researchers note that exposure to levels of adversity too high for the individual to adapt to, are counterproductive, while exposure to levels of risk too low do not pose a sufficient amount of stress, resulting in little to no positive effect (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Fleming & Ledogar,

when restarts are not a possibility and the consequences are real (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Applications of this model are especially common in the context of athletics or completing physically demanding tasks like football practice, military drills, dress rehearsals, or learning to talk through a fight or argument wherein the stress of similar adversities are present with the expectation of performing a task (Zimmerman, 2013). In this practice environment, individuals can engage in a process whereby they struggle with adversity, experience both success and failure, make mistakes, discuss other strategies, evaluate viable solutions, and are then able to restart and face the adversities again. For some coaches, this model is commonly referred to as “doing reps” and is as simple as running individuals repetitively through difficult drills in practice to prepare them for the challenging demands of a real situation. For service members in the

military, conducting drills and exercises under stressful conditions has the same effect of preparing them for the adversities they will face while deployed, where the demands are extreme, and the outcomes can be lethal.

Military Efforts to Build Resiliency

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2008). After building experience through guided practice and development, individuals may enhance their abilities to process adversity as they develop an understanding of what to do, how to perform, and how to process the adversity. This inoculation or steeling process familiarizes the individual with the adversities and prepares them for facing those adversities in real life

leaders who improve their own hardiness are better able to influence subordinates in developing their own personal hardiness (Bartone, 2006). Researchers have determined that in comparison to factors including, in part, college entrance scores, personal values, social judgement, and emotional stability; personal hardiness is a strong and consistent predictor of military leadership

performance for both men and women across different contexts (Bartone, 2006; Bartone et al., 2009; Bartone et al., 2013) and an important indicator of mental health (Eid et al., 2008; Ramanaiah et al., 1999). Leadership in the military is critical for mission success and is the element of combat power that unifies all other elements of combat power (U.S. Department of the Army, 2012). In an attempt to identify styles of leadership most effective in the military, studies have found that some leadership styles foster resilience in subordinates (Eid et al., 2008; Gaddy et al., 2017). However, despite this understanding, the ever-changing nature of global conflict continues to present new challenges to military service members. For example, no one was ready for the changes brought about by the events that occurred on the morning of September 11, 2001.

Not long after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror in the Middle East, military leadership increased their attention on the overall psychological resilience of soldiers returning from combat tours. Some soldiers returned from combat with severe physical injuries, others with severe psychological injuries, but all returned permanently changed as a result of the ravages of war. Military leaders took increasing notice and began prioritizing ways to build resilience in soldiers to strengthen them against the adversities of combat. In 2003, Reivich and Shattree (2003) published *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strengths and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*, which detailed different ways to overcome adversity. Military leaders took notice of the research and began working to develop a program to help soldiers and their families.

Understanding the need to engage in the research and development of resilient leaders, the United States Army and the United States Air Force have initiated research and developed programs to better understand

and develop resiliency within their ranks. The Army stressed the need for every soldier to be resilient and to respond positively after facing adversity, and argued that leaders should train their units to be resilient now and in preparation for future adversity (U.S. Department of the Army, 2012, 2014). The Army defined resilience as “The mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral ability to face and cope with adversity, adapt to change, recover, learn, and grow from setbacks” (U.S. Department of the Army, 2014, para 1-5a). This highlights the elements of facing adversity and being able to withstand, recover, learn, and grow from it.

In 2008, the Army established Army Regulation 350-53: The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program in order to build resiliency and address the sharply increasing number of soldiers returning from war with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicidal tendencies (U.S. Department of the Army, 2014). The program was updated in 2014 and was renamed the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness (CSF2) Program, adding the element of family resiliency to the program along with opportunities for families and family members to receive training that would help build family resiliency as they dealt with the difficulties of multiple deployments, soldiers who came home with injuries, soldiers who came home somehow mentally different from when they left, or soldiers who didn't come back at all. As stated in the current regulation, the purpose of the CSF2 program is “to increase the resilience and enhance the performance of Soldiers, Families, and DACs,” referring to Department of the Army Civilians (U.S. Department of the Army, 2014, para 1-5a).

The CSF2 program identifies five dimensions of strength which serve as the primary conceptual pillars of physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and family resiliency to build the overall resiliency of soldiers

(U.S. Department of the Army, 2014). The regulation briefly discusses these five dimensions of strength as the primary factors contributing to individual resiliency. When combined and effectively embodied in a soldier, the Army believes these dimensions comprise the primary elements of individual resilience resulting in an “individual [who] is better able to leverage intellectual and emotional skills and behaviors that promote enhanced performance and optimize their long-term health” (U.S. Department of the Army, 2014, para 1-5a). This resilience enables leaders at all levels to provide better leadership to their units and strengthen both individual units and the Army as a whole.

To measure and assess the resiliency techniques and skills of its members and conduct training to improve and sustain the overall force, the CSF2 program contains three assessment components consisting of an online assessment and self-development programs, specific training for both trainers and individuals in each unit, and a system of metrics and evaluation used to track and report the results of online assessments and training conducted (Reivich & Shatté, 2003). The Global Assessment Tool (GAT) is the online training and self-assessment tool used to test the individual’s ability in each resiliency dimension and it contains a series of modules individuals can go through to learn more about each dimension and how they can improve their capacity to embody that dimension. As of 2016, the GAT had been taken over 5.2 million times by soldiers, families, and DACs and has proved to be a measuring tool with high reliability (Vie et al., 2016). Research focused on the GAT has produced mixed results with some lauding the program’s overall effectiveness at decreasing negative behaviors (Lester et al., 2011), while others express concerns about the overall effectiveness of the program to actually build individual resilience (Brown, 2015; Timmons, 2013). Despite these results, ongoing efforts continue building

and assessing individual, unit, and family resiliency to identify and develop additional techniques and methods to address the challenges soldiers face as a result of participating in combat operations. With a clear focus on continual improvement the CSF2 program and GAT remain in use, and research continues to evaluate their overall effectiveness and value to service members and their families in building both individual and family resiliency.

In 2011, the United States Air Force began developing its own program to improve individual resilience in a “Total Force Fitness” approach that included eight pillars of fitness and was infused with the concepts of resilience and how to increase individual resilience (Meadows et al., 2016). In 2014, the Air Force established the Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) program designed to “enhance the resilience of individuals, families, and communities” (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2014, p. 1) using four domains consisting of mental, physical, social, and spiritual fitness. This is similar to the Army CSF2 program and allows for future assessments to be completed on an as-needed basis depending on the needs of the unit (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2014, para 4.1). Like the Army CSF2 program, the Air Force CAF program continually seeks to build resiliency by committing resources and dedicating research to understand and address the specific challenges individuals and families face as a result of serving their country. In both services, ongoing efforts demonstrate the commitment of our military to support and develop service members as they strive to adapt, learn, and grow despite the ever-changing nature of adversity inherent to military life. New theories will be developed, and programs tested as the military itself continues to embrace a “never give up, never quit” attitude toward helping its service members progress.

To prepare young leaders to lead Air and Space Force personnel, the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) focuses on developing cadets as leaders of character who embody the core values of *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do*. USAFA itself is a challenging environment for cadets for several reasons. First, it is the intent of USAFA leadership to create and foster an environment that challenges cadets, and thereby build leaders of character. One of the eight key components integral to the essence of USAFA entitled “Developing Character and Leadership” asserts:

The Academy’s unique opportunities allow cadets to practice leadership theory and learn from their experiences. Daily leadership challenges and opportunities abound to learn, apply, and refine leadership principles. The intentional and integrative nature of this officer development catalyzed by the Center for Character and Leadership Development, but implemented throughout, is pervasive at USAFA and not available anywhere else. The Honor Code guides this leadership development to set cadets on a path of living honorably. (The United States Air Force Academy, 2017)

This demonstrates the Academy’s commitment to setting high standards and firm expectations on a routine basis to develop the qualities, behaviors, and traits expected from future Air Force officers. This daily “inoculation” of leadership challenges and high standards reminds one of the repetitively habitual actions of excellence described by Aristotle as a key to developing good moral character and habits of excellence.

Another challenge inherent to the environment at USAFA is the nature of the cadets themselves. The highly selective admissions process results in a group of individuals considered top performers in the country and from around the world. This creates a student body of high-caliber cadets who have demonstrated academic and athletic accomplishment, provided volunteer service, exhibited strong personal character, and are therefore already highly resilient individuals. While this results in a group of highly capable cadets, it also creates a highly competitive environment where top students compete for top marks to improve their chances at obtaining an Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) or career field of their choice. Cadets are ranked using order of merit lists according to their performance in academics, military officership, and physical fitness and placement, and which have a considerable influence on which AFSC cadets receive thus deciding their initial careers in the Air Force. This highly competitive environment, in addition to the stresses of a military academy and an institution of higher education, combines a variety of stressors and adverse conditions that cadets struggle to manage.

In an attempt to focus the development of cadets, USAFA has developed the nine outcomes of the Officer Development System (ODS) to develop cadets as part of the Air Force’s force development process (The United States Air Force Academy, 2014). The purpose of the ODS is to provide the framework by which the nine institutional outcomes are accomplished in order to “1) develop each cadet’s appreciation that being an officer is a noble way of life, 2) foster a commitment to character-based officership, and 3) develop competencies essential to this identity as a character-based officer/leader” (The United States Air Force Academy, 2014, p. 4). USAFA’s nine institutional outcomes focus on cadet development in:

1. Critical Thinking
2. Application of Engineering Methods
3. Scientific Reasoning and the Principles of Science
4. The Human Condition, Cultures, and Societies
5. Leadership, Teamwork, and Organizational Management
6. Clear Communication
7. Ethics and Respect for Human Dignity
8. National Security of the American Republic
9. Warrior Ethos as Airmen and Citizens

Additionally, each of the outcomes has a list of proficiencies designed to achieve the intent of each outcome, and the proficiencies relate directly to the courses and programs cadets participate in. Outcome number nine, Warrior Ethos as Airmen and Citizens, has eight proficiencies including “Proficiency 5: Exhibit grit: a hardiness of spirit and resistance to accept failure despite physical and mental hardships” (The United States Air Force Academy, 2016, p. 1). This proficiency acknowledges the need for cadets to develop grit and is designed to identify, develop, and evaluate programs and activities established to achieve that goal. In support of this goal, USAFA has developed and implemented courses, programs, and training opportunities to build cadet character and leadership, challenge decision-making ability, and increase mental and physical toughness. This curriculum is designed to span all four years of the cadet experience with each class of cadets experiencing unique and specific programs. It is important to note that USAFA continually endeavors to capitalize on the latest research and information regarding character and leadership development. It therefore comes as no surprise that USAFA continues to review and update its programs to apply the most current research theories and maintain relevant and effective programs to develop the best officers possible.

Self-Reflection and After-Action Reviews

In his discussion of Aristotle’s Ethics, author Will Durant discusses the concept of habituation by quoting the ancient philosopher’s claim that excellence is a habit:

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation: we do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have these because we have acted rightly; “these virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions”; *we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit*: “the good of man is a working of the soul in the way of excellence in a complete life . . . for as it is not one swallow or one fine day that makes a spring, so it is not one day or a short time that makes a man blessed and happy.” (Durant, 1961, pp. 61, emphasis added)

In this sense, habituation or the active and repetitive practice of a particular skill or value over time is believed to enable the individual to embody that skill or value. More recently, retired Navy Seal Eric Greitens explains that “We become what we do if we do it often enough” (Greitens, 2015, p. 29) reinforcing the commonly held notion that “practice makes perfect”. And yet it is not just repetition itself that brings excellence. The reality of post-disruption growth is made possible through intentional, mindful, and focused practice, coupled with careful reflection and intent to take action. Indeed, with enough practice, anyone and everyone can develop resiliency by reflecting upon the disruptive adversities that knock them out of homeostasis and then engage in opportunities that support reintegrative growth. Thus, the key to success using any of the resiliency-building models is engaging in the developmental process of

intentional repetition, reflection, and re-evaluation until cultivating excellence and resilience truly becomes a habit. This process of repetitive effort followed by introspective re-evaluation can create a steeling effect on the individual who can become better able to process any adversity regardless of previous experience. But aside from understanding the conceptual framework and resiliency-building models, what can we do today to build our resiliency?

Self-reflection involves taking the time and space to look inwardly at the thoughts, feelings, decisions, and behaviors that have led to various actions. Keeping the resiliency framework in mind, a good place to start is to reflect upon one's own vulnerabilities and promotive factors. Reflecting upon vulnerabilities brings to mind all of the past experiences, relationships, interactions, and events that have influenced the preferences, biases, and behavioral patterns that guide all of us. The uncomfortable and sometimes painful nature of our vulnerabilities often cause us to ignore them all together. But taking the time to recognize, identify, and even giving a name to our vulnerabilities, can help us move forward. An analogy is often made noting we must clearly identify our destination before we can map the path to get there. But until we truly know our location, despite the discomfort of admitting our own shortcomings and failures, we can never be confident in the direction of our first step.

Just as important as reflecting upon our vulnerabilities is reflecting upon our promotive factors, both the internal and external assets. Internal assets such as developing a positive identity, competence, having hope, self-esteem, a sense of self-efficacy, coping skills, a growth mindset, and mindfulness deserve careful and deliberate consideration to identify which assets we have and are skilled in using, and which ones

we don't have and need to develop. Many training programs exist to build and strengthen various internal assets and reflecting upon which assets we are ready to use and which assets we need to develop gives us a first step to adding arrows to our quiver when adversity disrupts our lives.

Another critical topic of reflection involves reviewing our own patterns of behavior when faced with adversity and how we move through the resiliency process. It is important to remember that since everyone experiences disruptive adversity, everyone goes through this cycle whether we realize it or not. The question is not do we go through this cycle, but how do we go through this process and how do we emerge? There are many questions we can ask ourselves while reviewing our own resiliency. What happens when we get disrupted? How do we act? What are our behaviors both inwardly with ourselves and outwardly to others? What elements do we bring to bear while attempting to regain a sense of stability? Do we tend to reintegrate at a dysfunctional level, a resilient level, or somewhere else along the spectrum? These types of questions invite us to reflect upon our own process of working through the resiliency framework when disrupted by adversity with the intent to build a more mindful awareness of our thoughts, how they may affect our behaviors, and their effect on the thoughts and behaviors of others whom we lead and serve with.

Improving our ability to understand our own resiliency and the processes we undergo while overcoming obstacles enables us to see and understand the resiliency of individuals around us and the organizations we belong to. This increased perception aids in the process of conducting effective after-action reviews where deliberate and thoughtful discussions can lead to improving how we execute our various tasks

and missions. After-action reviews have been a key element of military operations for centuries and have enabled individuals, units, and organizations to review the purpose of the task or mission, what was supposed to happen, what actually happened, and then discuss what actions to sustain, what actions to improve, and then develop plans to make those adjustments a reality. Just as with individuals, units and organizations cannot effectively evaluate their progress and move forward without a clear understanding of where they are. This may often get overlooked because no one wants to be labeled the “whistleblower” who identifies problems, and yet doing exactly this can enable organizations to clearly understand where they are as a precursor to developing plans to improve and move forward. Leaders with a clear understanding of how they process the challenges they are faced with model the example to other individuals within the organization. This can help the organization to become more resilient to disruptive challenges faced by the group as a whole.

Whether we are developing leaders of character, or operating as leaders of character ourselves, developing resiliency and clearly understanding the processes and skills we can develop to overcome future adversities helps to prepare us for the challenges that lie ahead. This critical ability to adapt, learn, and grow from obstacles and challenges can help leaders prepare to effectively resolve dynamic and complex challenges that may not currently exist, involving organizations and adversaries yet to emerge. Reflecting upon our own promotive factors, vulnerabilities, resiliency, and by conducting deliberate and thoughtful after-action reviews, we can serve as precursors to help develop the skills and abilities needed to overcome unimaginable challenges. We need resilient leaders ready to face the future battlefield armed with confidence not only in their technical skills, but in their ability to engage and triumph over adversity regardless of what it may be.

We need leaders who will never give up, never quit, and who will lead their units to continue pushing forward to find a way to accomplish the mission.

♦ ♦ ♦

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