2ⁿᵈ International workshop on Modelling of Physical, Economic and Social Systems for Resilience Assessment

The building blocks of resilience
Some contributions to support the development of training curricula.

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Abstract

We believe in a better world and in the responsibility of every person in making it possible.

In this paper we present the fundamentals of our practice in programs of emotional competence development, focusing on "the human side of resilience" and on the three skill groups that form resilience: personal, relational, and executive skills.

We based our work on the triple convergence promoted by advances in technological sciences, neurosciences, and training and learning development sciences.

These resources allow us to train the "behavioral algorithms" that will improve participants' resilience.

Some practices used are artistic activities, games, mentalization, storytelling, and theatrical activities.

Keywords: Resilience, Resilience Development, Positive Stress management, Behavioral Algorithms.

1. Introduction

"Humanity is complex, unpredictable, and brings together people capable of the most destructive actions. It is also capable of projecting its future and building a desirable reality."

Resilience is a comprehensive and dynamic concept, briefly defined as the ability of people or systems to succeed in the face of change and uncertainty and to continue to develop even at critical times. It means living in a crisis and even taking advantage of it. It is the ability to transit in adversity and overcome situations of intense change or high need for adaptation.

Psychological resilience is an important factor in different contexts; its development benefits not only the individual himself but also all other instances where some level of human interaction occurs.
It is not an unusual ability. Most people have it on some level. And it is the result of multiple personal, group and community factors.

Genetic structure, biological and psychological factors, social aspects, values, personal and group histories, experiences, prior learning, and environmental resources are some of the elements that influence it.[1]

Here we will address the "human side of resilience". Or more specifically, "how to empower people and groups with the skills they need to have a high level of resilience."

2. The Triple Convergence. Resources and Strategies

The triple convergence; resulting from advances in the technological sciences, neurosciences, and in the sciences of training and learning gives us a spectacular advance in the possibilities of developing people and groups in the most different capacities, like the resilience itself.

We should be concerned about the building of resilience for all mankind. Here it is not a problem of ours or of them, but of all.

We must engage in this development in all contexts and in all the stages of life; since childhood - this is one of the best times for this; but also in adulthood – when many skills, acquired naturally during life, are useful in this learning.[2]

Many scholars claim that this is a spontaneous and natural improving, promoted by people's own experiences. There are even those who say that the difficulties of life are good teachers. We, at the Latin American Center for Development, believe that it can be accelerated and optimized in a calm, serene and controlled environment. For 23 years, we have developed emotional and behavioral training projects, empowering leaders, groups, and individuals in the main aspects involved in the evolution of personal, group and social resilience through the training of "behavioral algorithms".

Informally speaking, an algorithm is a collection of simple instructions to accomplish some tasks. Commonplace in everyday life, algorithms are sometimes called procedures or recipes.[3]

Behavioral algorithms are mental schemes that direct our strategies of thoughts and actions. They are structured through our previous learning and experiences.
They can be more automated or more conscious, but we all have them, even if we do not know it.

Whenever we face a new situation we tend to use strategies that have proven appropriate in the past. But often these processes are no longer adequate, or our "old strategies" are insufficient in the face of new or critical situations.

When people can improve these strategies in quality and quantity, they have a positive behavioral differential in new situations, especially in contexts that require a great deal of adaptation.

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[1] Sapolsky, 2007
[2] Sandberg, 2017
[3] Sipser, 2006; Gawande, 2011

The training also aims to teach people how to identify possible future critical or risk situations and to build their own training program in order to qualify themselves for skills that may be needed.

3 Practices

Several are the practices used for these goals. Let's look at some:

3.1. Artistic Expressions

Artistic expressions are excellent means to form the essential basis for the construction and structuring of resilience.
In front of a white screen to be painted, a piece of clay to be shaped or a stone to be sculpted, the person develops autonomy, creativity and, among others, a procedural view. Once the work is finished, the self-esteem and empowerment are improved, revealing to the individual his capacity for achievement. When it is done in a group, the activities will also contribute to the development of specific collaborative skills. All of them are fundamentals of resilient behavior.

3.2. Games

Many of the situations that we live on a daily basis can be compared to games. In this context, the games help us to understand any processes of human relationships where roles, objectives, and rules are defined. We are talking about love, professional, learning games and so many others. Games can be healthy and constructive, but they can also be destructive and perverse. Rules, roles, and objectives may be well defined or not.

This perspective opens up a great field of action, allowing us to use game design elements in various contexts of development and learning. These experiences are very motivating and produce an unparalleled engagement in both intensity and duration, allowing the individual to experience a fragment of space and time, that is characteristic of real life, in a fictional and controlled context, even when addressing critical issues. When collaborative, it also promotes the optimization of group resources to overcome critical situations.[4]

3.3. Theater practice activities

Theatrical practices enable people to deal with complex and highly critical situations within a safe and controlled educational environment. They provide a good insight into the identified behaviors that can be developed or avoided according to their suitability in specific contexts. It's a great way to test and practice behaviors "before" every possible situation.

They can be performed in private groups in which all the participants take part in the scene, or with an audience, when who is watching the practice is also allowed to interact.[5]

3.4. Mentalization

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[4] Huizinga, 1955; Deterding-2011; Dominguez, 2013; Andrade, 2016
[5] Spolin, 2013

Mentalization - if well trained - is an excellent resource for self-control, internal assessment, definition and maintenance of focus, strategic planning, personal resource recovery and construction of possible solutions and new realities. Also, it allows the visualization of the most appropriate solutions in each context.

It can also promote a feeling of freedom and peace, even in the most complex contexts. Imagining the end of the situation can increase adaptability and facilitate overcoming the situation.[6]

The practice of this "voluntary emotional adequacy" improves our ability to coping stress and finding balance, motivation and new solutions, even in critical situations.

3.5. Storytelling

Storytelling is the act of sharing stories.
Undoubtedly it is one of the teaching techniques most used by all peoples and at different times. In its various formats, it has divulged customs, thinking and life styles, strategies of conduct and values for many centuries.
This practice, of telling real or fiction stories, offers us excellent strategies for the building of learning and development programs.
Committed to ethical values and to develop skills in the population, the storytelling becomes an instrument of great value in building up resilience in individuals and groups.

These are very effective resources, with an excellent cost-benefit ratio and that do not require large structures and investments for their realization. Isolated or combined, they provide us with many possibilities for action.

4. Skills

The personal and the group resilience are better developed and trained if we break it down into its basic elements, which can be grouped into Personal, Relational and Executive skills.

4.1.Personal skills

We understand personal skills as those directly related to the person.
Among them, we mention sovereignty, self-knowledge, self-management, positive stress management [7], personal shielding, creativity, the ability to read the environment and to perceive risk situations, capacity to identify and create opportunities, problem solving skills in critical situations, the capacity to perform and, fundamentally, the capacity for adaptation and overcoming.

4.2 Relational skills

Relational skills, like healthy leadership, the ability to establish reliable links, effective networks, and creative interdependence, determine the dynamics and effectiveness of interpersonal relationships, helping the functioning of groups and communities.

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[6] Frankl, 1984
[7] Andrade, 2010

They also provide consistency, alignment, synergism, shared empowerment and reorganization to those groups, in the face of critical situations or intense need for adaptation.

4.3.Executive skills

Executive skills are formal or informal processes, which give us, under different circumstances, the best functioning when we deal with different types of processes that occur in our lives.

They are the competencies necessary for the conduct of processes and the execution of projects. We need them to manage our own health, our career, our financial lives and, above all, to conduct ourselves effectively, individually or collectively, during crises or intense periods of adaptation.

5. Items

The good news is that resilience is a systemic ability composed by an interacting group of items that can easily be trained one by one.

We quote here some of the items most frequently addressed.

5.1. The building blocks of resilience

They include competencies in the three groups mentioned, but also the various community resources that must be developed before being needed.

5.2. Personal and group sources of resilience

Each individual or group should develop their own strategies, driven by behavioral algorithms, in different situations. Training coordinators should facilitate the process and point out positive or negative points, stimulating the engagement and cooperation of all.

5.3. Institutions as sources of resilience

Strong, warm and humane institutions are important drivers of resilience. The commitment, especially from the authorities, in improving these institutions should be stimulated.

5.4. True values and beliefs

Values and beliefs are important pillars for structuring resilient behavior. They guide us. We live in search of meaning, and when we find it, we are more effective in dealing with critical situations. During periods of crisis, identifying a purpose in life, and feeling positive about it, can promote resilience.[8]

5.5. Bringing out the best in people

The human being is not a homogenous being.

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[8] Frankl, 1946

The contradictions of society are only reflections of internal personal contradictions. We possess terrible and also very positive aspects. Redeeming the best of people is a top priority in any project that seeks the development of a resilient behavior.

5.6. Mental and emotional balance

Mental and emotional balance is one of the most important aspects of life. When we lose them in a crisis situation, we stop being part of the solution and become part of the problem.

5.7. Self-control

Self-control is a cognitive process necessary to regulate one's behavior in order to achieve specific goals.
It is the ability to exercise control over our state in different circumstances, even the most critical ones. In other words is to have control over our feelings, emotions, thoughts, actions, and behaviors to recover from adversity or to overcome situations of intense change or high need for adaptation.[9]

5.8. Creativity and improvisation

Creativity is a partner of resilience.
Creating is the art of being, the art of building the world in which we live.
Creativity can be spontaneous or a conscious choice, but it will always be a tool for problem-solving and an indispensable strategic factor.
Improvisation is here seen as the ability to build quick solutions in unforeseen situations with limited resources.
The development of these skills can define the success or failure in critical situations.

5.9. Initiative

The ability to start something. An act or strategy designed to solve a problem or improve a situation. The readiness to engage in difficult activities.

5.10. Proactive Critical Adaptation

It is the ability to withstand undesirable situations of reality and not submit to them, but to seek a critical adaptation and develop effective strategies to overcome them.

5.11. Personal and community perspectives

Alignment of personal and group perspectives.
People feel valued by the group and value it, and defend it as themselves.

5.12. Responsibility

The duty to deal with something and the ability to act independently to make decisions without authorization, but with an obligation to respond to their actions.

5.13. The sense of community

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[9] Timpano, 2013

It is not only a matter of recognizing that "my right ends when the right of the other begins" but of accepting that when the rights of anyone in the world are being disrespected, mine will also be disrespected.

5.14. Building winning teams

It is the construction of a group identity committed to the intended result.

5.15. Shared social responsibility

Responsibility is divided and everyone feels responsible for the common good.

5.16. Synergistic and objective collaboration

It is the ability of people to act together with a common goal.

5.17. The strength of character

They are the values practiced by individuals and communities.
Ethics and other values are not characteristics of good people, but of smart people. It is much easier to live in an ethical context!

6 Final considerations

We are all responsible for enhancing everyone's resilience.
Governments, institutions, associations and individuals, all of us have this important mission.
We all dream of a better world and this means greater capacity for innovation, adaptation, coping and overcoming crises.
Training is the differential that provides the consolidation of development and essential skills for us to better conduct ourselves in different contexts.

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