



A STUDY ON MT PATTERNS
IN HEAD TEACHERS AND
DEPUTY HEAD
TEACHERS IN SCOTLAND –
PARTICIPANTS IN RESILIENCE
DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES

Background

The programme was a joint project between the AHDS (Association of Heads and Deputy Heads in Scotland) and SCEL (Scottish College for Educational Leadership). The focus of the programme was to help Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers to deal more effectively with stressors, pressure and challenges. Participants in the programme were self-nominating. This might influence the patterns of scores.

Nevertheless, the pattern emerging is similar to those observed in other large-scale projects where all senior staff are obliged to participate. The data shown is based on the first 206 attendees. The same pattern was observed through the remainder of exercise covering, in total, almost 500 participants.

The programmes operated in two phases:

1. Identify the participant's mental toughness across 6 factors (the study used the MTQ48, the precursor to the MTQPlus)

At the same time to identify through group work at the start of each programme what the participants felt were the main sources of stress and pressure in their roles. Surprisingly, despite that there were more than 25 workshops over 3 years and participants came from all over Scotland and rarely knew each other, the output from this exercise was very consistent.

All participants (there were more than 450) were asked to identify the most important stressors in their role. 4 emerged:

- Dealing with staff
- Dealing with parents
- Bureaucracy – dealing with local authority staff
- Uncertainty – the inability to plan a day and stick to it because of the need to respond to events.

Similar exercises carried out elsewhere in UK showed very similar patterns for both mental toughness and sources of stress and pressure.

2. Reflection and action. Working in small groups in the style of an Action Learning Set, participants shared MTQ profiles and:

- a, discussed how closely the profile described their mental approach to events,
- b, worked with others to help them to explore their profile and,
- c, identify for each a small number of actions they would adopt. These activities came from, either things that the others have found useful or from a menu of exercises and activities provided in the workshop.

Participants agreed to keep in touch regularly to monitor each other and to support each other.

The Data

Scores for the Mental Toughness questionnaire (the MTQ48) are reported on a scale of 1 – 10 which represents points on a normal distribution curve. Scores of 1-3 often indicate mental sensitivity (they can find life challenging). Scores of 8 – 10 usually indicate the mentally tough (who deal more comfortably with life and its challenges). Most people score in the range 4 – 7.

The norm is 5.5. This is what the average person on the planet would score. Analysis and interpretation usually starts by comparing scores against the norm. Studies in organisations (public and private sector) show that the average mental toughness score for a 1st Line manager is around 6.00 – 6.25 and for a middle manager is around 6.50.

The table below is useful and interesting.

Generally, staff in Education are provided with little real development around mindset, resilience and mental toughness although its relevance and importance are well understood.

If we look at the development of equivalent staff (leaders and subject experts) in commercial organisations there is much more attention given to developing personal characteristics that enable them to deal more effectively with the stressors, pressures and opportunities in their roles.

Mental Toughness Scale	What this means ... what does scale assess	MT Sten Score	Observation
OVERALL MT		5.66	<i>This is only slightly higher than the “average person on the street”</i>
CONTROL	<i>Life Control</i> – I believe I control enough to be able to achieve	6.13	<i>This is significantly higher than average indicating that most thought that they were sufficiently in control of themselves and their circumstances to achieve Represents a sense of self-worth.</i>
	<i>Emotional Control</i> – I can manage my emotions and the emotions of others	4.84	<i>This is significantly lower than average suggesting that most allow their emotions to affect their behaviour and perhaps that they will reveal those emotions (too?) readily to others. Can affect the mood of people around them.</i>
COMMITMENT	<i>Goal Setting</i> – I promise to do it – I set goals and like working to goals	6.02	<i>This significantly higher than the average. It suggests that most are motivated to achieve tangible outcomes and are prepared to work hard to deliver them. This was borne out by discussion with participants. Together with the CONTROL element this often represents resilience. Generally, the participants emerged as a resilient group – maintaining the pursuit of goals despite adversity.</i>
	<i>Achieving</i> – I’ll do what it takes to keep my promises and achieve my goals		
CHALLENGE	<i>Risk-Taking</i> – I will push myself – I am driven to succeed	5.37	<i>This was slightly lower than the norm for most people but not significantly so. Suggests that not all are open to new ideas and that they don’t always learn from their experiences. Explanations offered included weariness from having to adopt initiative after initiative (often politically driven) and the budget-driven way they have to operate which was prescriptive and rarely allowed for flexibility..</i>
	<i>Learning from Experience</i> – even setbacks are opportunities for learning		
CONFIDENCE	<i>In Abilities</i> – I believe I have the ability to do it – or can acquire the ability	5.11	<i>Lower than the “norm” and surprisingly lower than expected. Explanations offered included the lack of training for the role; the lack of CPD for their leadership role and the lack of “respect” given by others including parents.</i>
	<i>Interpersonal Confidence</i> – I can influence others – I can stand my ground if needed.	4.84	<i>Significantly lower than the norm. Again many attributed this to challenges in dealing with staff (often unionised staff) and with parents. Several used the term “worn out”.</i>

In Conclusion

The programmes proved to be both popular and successful. 25 one-day workshops were run over 3 years.

Limited to one day per workshop, the goal was to create self-awareness about each participant's mental approach to the challenges each faced in their life and in their work. This is crucial for development.

When individuals recognise why they can sometimes thrive and sometimes struggle, they are more likely to engage in their development. This programme introduces a range of development activities but with limited opportunity to practice them.

What was observed was:

- a. In general participants were more resilient than most people. They dealt effectively with setback, adversity and pressures. Resilience is a valuable quality. It helps people to survive but that is not enough to thrive. Resilience is closely related to the Control and Commitment constructs.
- b. In general, participants were less positive/optimistic than most people. Positivity is closely related to the Challenge and Confidence constructs. The pressures they experience come from an ever-changing environment and from interpersonal pressures form a range of sources. shows that developing Positivity is an important contributor to helping people to thrive.
- c. Both of these are in an important sense "invisible". They exist in the head and are not easily diagnosed and understood. The programme was very well received because it addressed this.