



MENTAL TOUGHNESS IN
RELATION TO MANAGERIAL
POSITIONS IN THE
OCCUPATIONAL DOMAIN

A Case Study using the MTQ Plus

There has been a growing interest in the concept of mental toughness. Since the pioneering work of Loehr in the 1980s, the 'term mental toughness' is no longer just limited to the sporting arena. Over the last 20 years, the construct is regularly being employed in domains like education, the military and the occupational world.

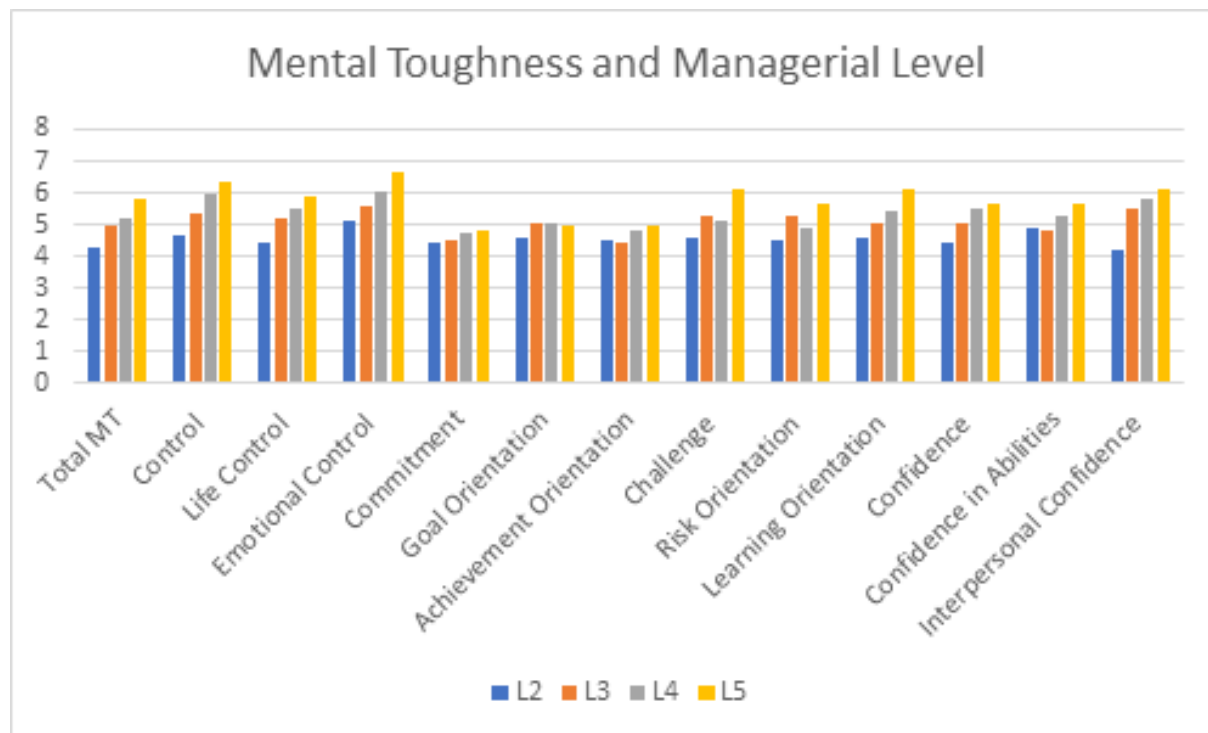
Clough et al. (2002) define the mentally tough individual as having "a high sense of self-belief and an unshakable faith that they control their own destiny, these individuals can remain relatively unaffected by competition and adversity" (p. 38). In their study, the authors suggested that mental toughness is a trait-like dimension of personality which could be aligned with the concept of hardiness put forward by Kobasa (1979). In particular, Clough et al proposed the 4C model of mental toughness: (a) *control (emotional and life)*: a tendency to feel and act as if one is influential; (b) *commitment*: a tendency to involve oneself in rather than experience alienation from an encounter; (c) *challenge*: belief that life is changeable and to view this as an opportunity rather than a threat; and (d) *confidence (interpersonal and in abilities)*: a high sense of self-belief and unshakable faith concerning one's ability to achieve success. To assess this, Clough et al. developed the MTQ48 to measure total mental toughness, as well as its subcomponents. The 4C's model has previously been indicated as "a useful blueprint for examining this important construct" (Golby & Shreard, 2004, p. 935).

There are two forms of the Mental Toughness Questionnaire – the MTQPlus and the MTQ48. The MTQ48 is the original form developed in 2002 and sometimes called the 6-factor model. The MTQPlus was developed in 2017 by Doug Strycharczyk from the MTQ48. MTQPlus is an 8-factor model which embraces the 6-factor model but adds 2 factors for two of the original factors – Commitment and Challenge. It has also developed the original Emotional Control factor. The new measure has shown to have excellent levels of both reliability and validity.

Mental Toughness Scale	What this means...what does MTQ48 assess...the 8 Factors
CONTROL	Life Control – I really believe I can do it
	Emotional Control – I can manage my emotions and the emotions of others
COMMITMENT	Goal Orientation – I set goals – I like the idea of working toward goals
	Achievement Orientation – I'll do what it takes to keep my promises and achieve my goals
CHALLENGE	Risk Orientation – I welcome new and different experiences – I stretch myself
	Learning Orientation – I learn from what happens - including setbacks
CONFIDENCE	In Abilities – I believe I have the ability to do it - or can acquire the ability
	Interpersonal Confidence – I can influence others - I can stand my ground if needed

In 2018, AQR conducted a study using the MTQ Plus to assess any differences between scores on the MTQ Plus between people employed in a variety of positions within a large team, each one increasing in responsibility. The structure of the organisation had four layers. Level 1 was mainly a clerical role. Level 2 was the first level of leadership. Level 3 is a junior leadership and Level 4 and 5 are senior leaders. The study consisted of 112 participants aged between 20 and 65 years. The MTQ Plus was completed as part of a training event for the department.

Results showed that levels of mental toughness, using the MTQ Plus (Graph 1), significantly varied between employees in different managerial positions. This replicated the finding of Peter Clough and David Merchant when they completed a similar study using the MTQ48.



Overall, senior managers demonstrated the highest levels of mental toughness recorded, scoring significantly higher on all the subscales apart from goal orientation. Middle managers demonstrated the next highest mental toughness profile. Junior managers' mental toughness profile was higher when compared to clerical staff, particularly with regards to control, commitment and confidence.

Table 1: Data showing MTQ Plus Scales

	L2	L3	L4	L5
TOTAL MENTAL TOUGHNESS	4.27	4.93	5.18	5.78
CONTROL	4.68	5.32	5.93	6.33
LIFE CONTROL	4.41	5.20	5.48	5.89
EMOTIONAL CONTROL	5.09	5.59	6.03	6.67
COMMITMENT	4.41	4.51	4.75	4.78
GOAL ORIENTATION	4.59	5.07	5.05	5.00
ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTATION	4.50	4.39	4.78	5.00
CHALLENGE	4.55	5.24	5.13	6.11
RISK ORIENTATION	4.50	5.29	4.88	5.67
LEARNING ORIENTATION	4.55	5.07	5.43	6.11
CONFIDENCE	4.45	5.02	5.53	5.67
CONFIDENCE IN ABILITIES	4.86	4.83	5.25	5.67
INTERPERSONAL CONFIDENCE	4.18	5.51	5.80	6.11

Such results would suggest that the mental toughness profile of individuals in the highest managerial positions would consist of a greater tendency to feel and act as if one is influential (*control*); greater involvement in encounters and tasks (*commitment*); a greater belief that their life is changeable and to view this as an opportunity rather than a threat (*challenge*); and a high sense of self-belief and unshakable faith concerning one's ability to achieve success (*confidence*). The result would also go some way to support the previous findings relating hardiness to work categories from a variety of different occupations, such as business management (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982), health care professionals (Rich & Rich, 1987; Topf, 1989), public sector employees (Rush, Schoel, & Barnard, 1995), trainee teachers (Thomson & Wendt, 1995) and military personnel (Bartone, 1999; Westman, 1990). In addition, the current results also support the data from Golby and Sheard (2004) who demonstrated significant differences in mental toughness and hardiness profiles between players of differing professional levels of rugby league.

The finding that employees in higher managerial positions exhibiting increased scores for total mental toughness as well as most of its subscales, could potentially be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it could suggest that mental toughness can be a significant indicator of potential for the level of achievement and managerial position attained; although we do not have performance data to collaborate such a finding and it is suggested that future research should take this into consideration. Or secondly, it may imply that through their roles in organisations, more senior employees develop higher levels of mental toughness over time.

The study provides a useful insight into the importance of mental toughness in the occupational domain. Organisations should consider how they are developing the mental toughness of their employees, particularly on fast track programmes. Organisation leadership programmes should also include mental toughness training to allow for high levels of performance in the workplace and improved well-being.

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