Road to Mental Readiness©

Military Mental Training Conference – December 2024

Suzanne M. Bailey, LCol (Ret'd)

R2MR Program Objectives

Overall goal of all Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) training is to improve short-term performance and well-being, while mitigating any negative longer-term mental health or performance problems for military personnel and their families.

- Prevention (increase mental health literacy; decrease stigma and other barriers to care); and
- Performance (enhance well-being, coping & resilience)

Changing Attitudes Toward Mental Health

- **Persuasion**: importance of quality of information, process of reflection, time for discussion
- **Credibility**: operational experience and professionalism of speaker (can relate to audience; co-delivered)
- **Evidence-based**: content from credible sources, research and program evaluation demonstrating effectiveness
- **Culturally appropriate and supported**: fits with values of toughness and fitness, valued by larger group
- **Empowerment**: tools to manage stress effectively, ability to recognize distress and access support or resources

Attitudes and attitude change:

Implications for the OSSIS Speakers Bureau Programme

Megan M. Thompson

Donald R. McCreary

Enhancing Mental Readiness in Military Personnel

Megan M. Thompson & Donald R. McCreary
Defence Research & Development Canada
1133 Sheppard Ave West
Toronto M3M 3B9
CANADA

An Approach to Mitigation of Operational Stress:
Guiding Principles

Mark Zamorski

Program Evolution

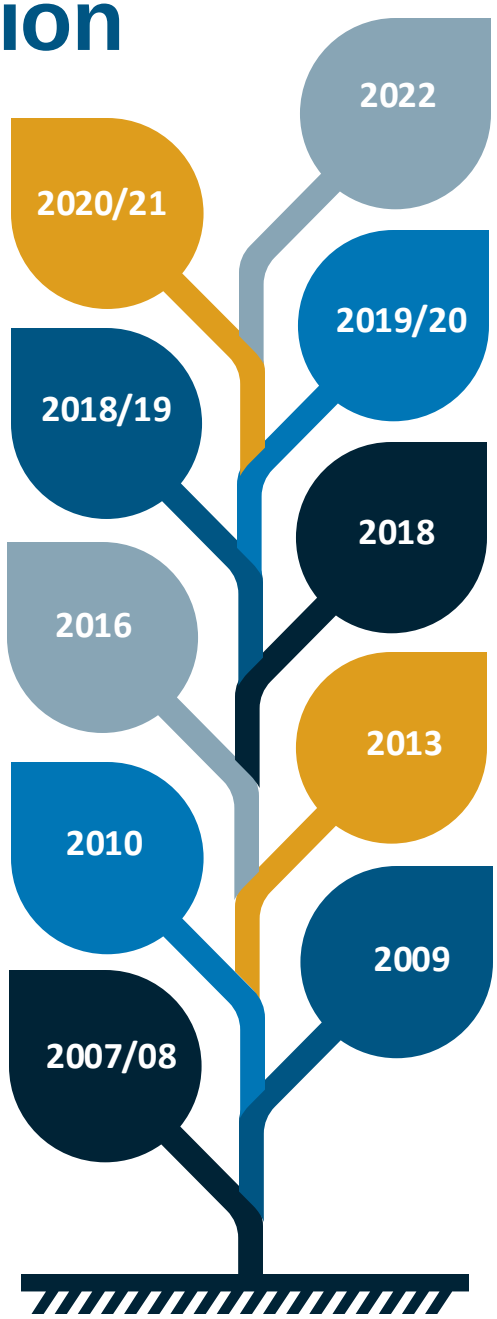
Online R2MR Training
- Deployment training (for those unable to attend in person)
- Blended learning (to allow for more application of skills in person)

Psychologically Safe Environment
- 13 Psychosocial Factors (unit and leadership level)

Expanded Performance Training * (TB)
- Optimized Performance Cycle
- Recovery strategies for wellness
- Performance coaching (instructors & leadership)
- Setback management

Post-Deployment & Family Training * (CJOC)
- Skills and strategies for transition and reintegration
- Complementary family training (pre and post deployment)

Program Established * (CMP)
- Mental health literacy (Mental Health Continuum)
- Stigma and other barriers to care
- Junior leader actions (Ad hoc Incident Review)



Expanded Team & Workplace Training
- Team resilience
- Facilitative environment

Fidelity Focused Instructor Training
- Fidelity of implementation gap analysis
- Creation of Fidelity Focused Instructor Training

Mobile Application
- Launched R2MR Mobile App for on-the-go skills practice & self-monitoring

Expanded Career Training * (AFC, SG MH Strat)
- Occupation specific training (Big Four +)
- Revised recruit training
- Intermediate/advanced leadership training

Pre-Deployment Training * (LFDTS)
- Mental skills training (Big Four)
- Mental Readiness training for military operations

Institutionalization of R2MR

DEPLOYMENT TRAINING

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

RECRUIT TRAINING

OCCUPATION TRAINING

R2MR Guiding Principles

Institutionalized
Integrated throughout the career cycle

Explanatory
Importance and relevance

Leader supported
Championed by credible leaders

Experiential
Relevant, tangible skills

Fits military culture
Integrated into military culture

Evidence-based
Grounded in research

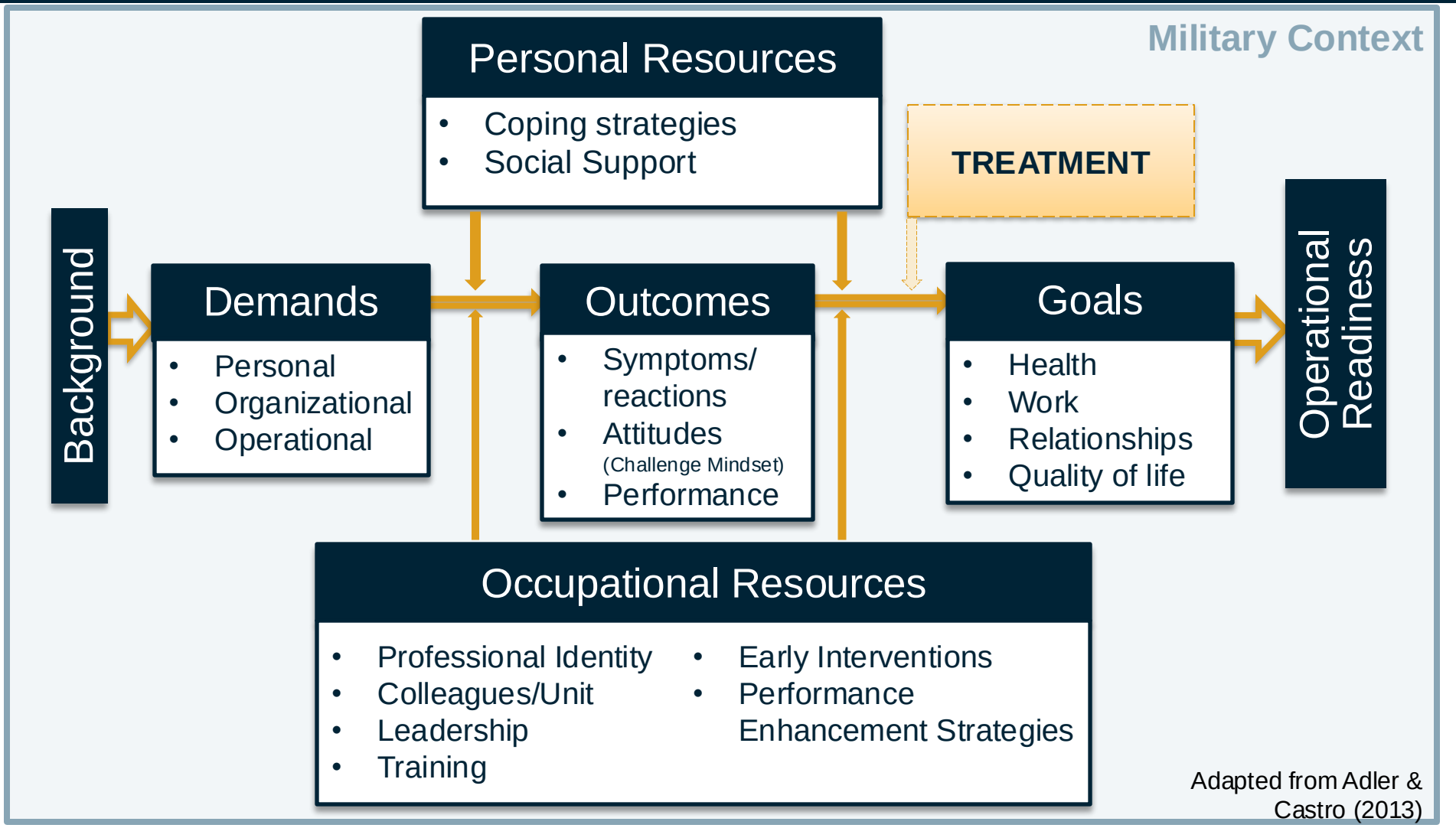
Strengths-based
Builds on existing abilities and skills

Quality-controlled
Standardized content and delivery

Performance & Well-Being

- **Mental health and performance are two sides of the same coin**
- Same skills improve both areas
- Health impacts performance and performance impacts health
- Operational readiness requires both sides of the coin

Occupational Model of Health



Adapted from Adler & Castro (2013)

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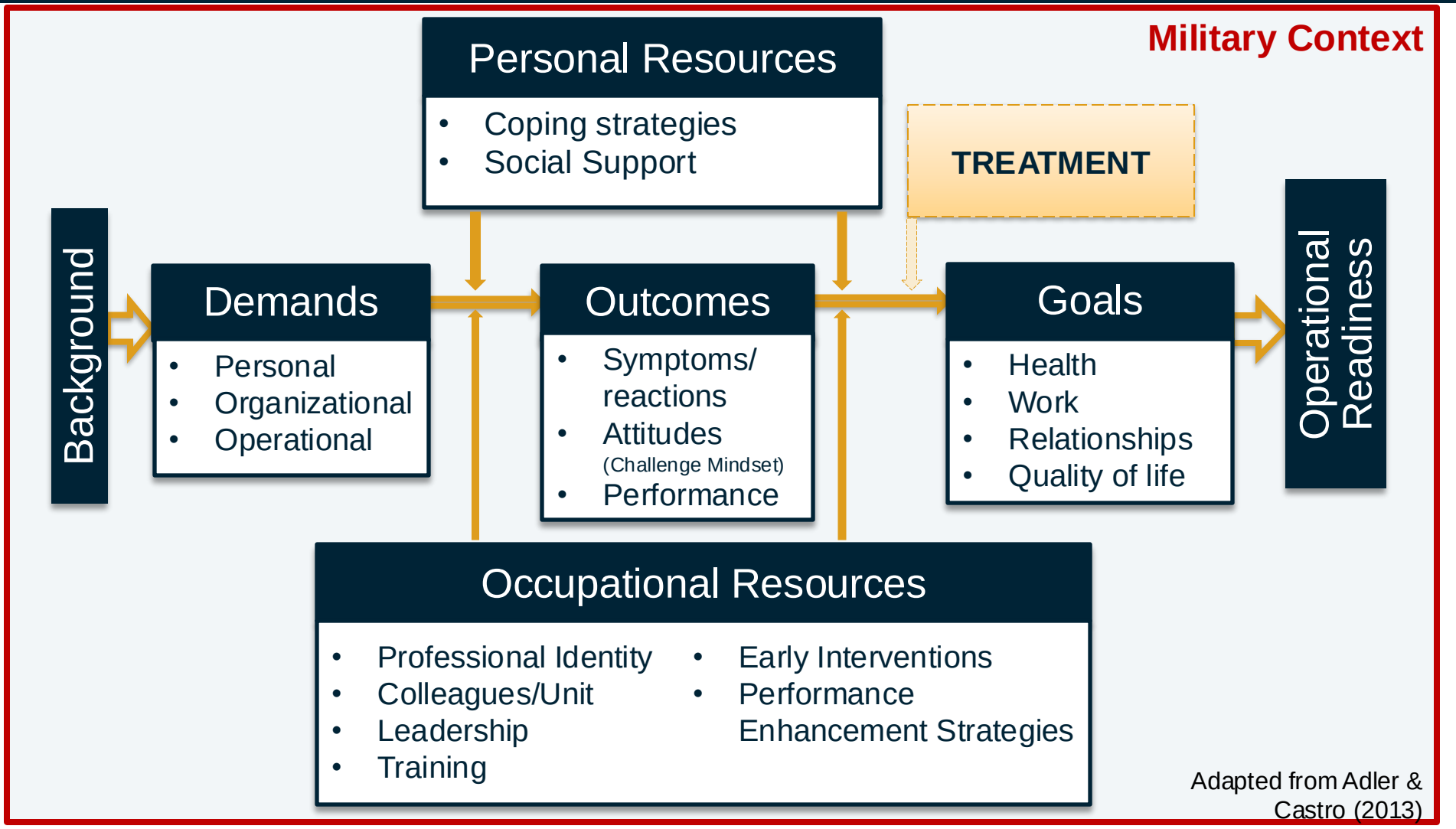

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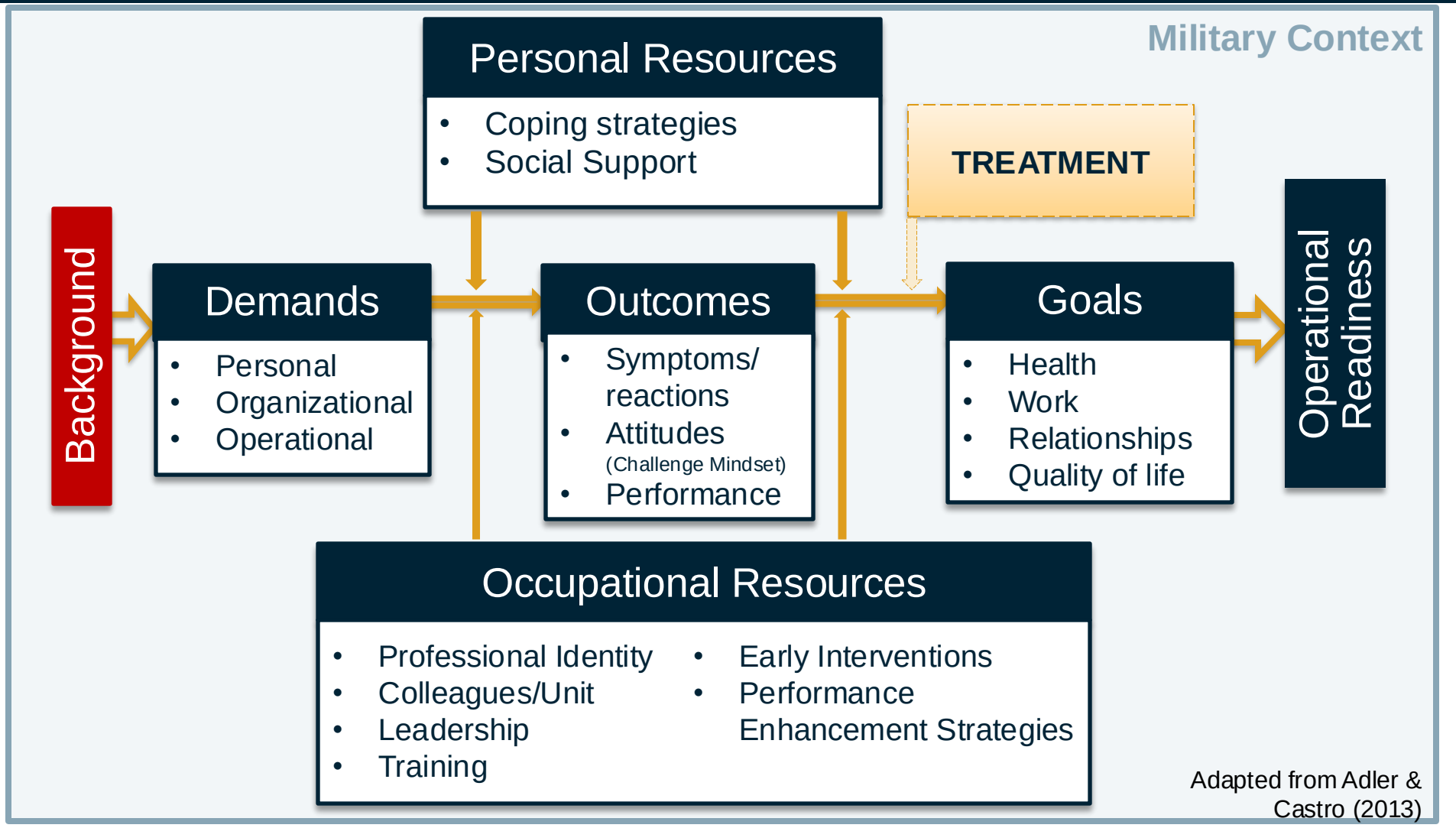

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Occupational Model of Health

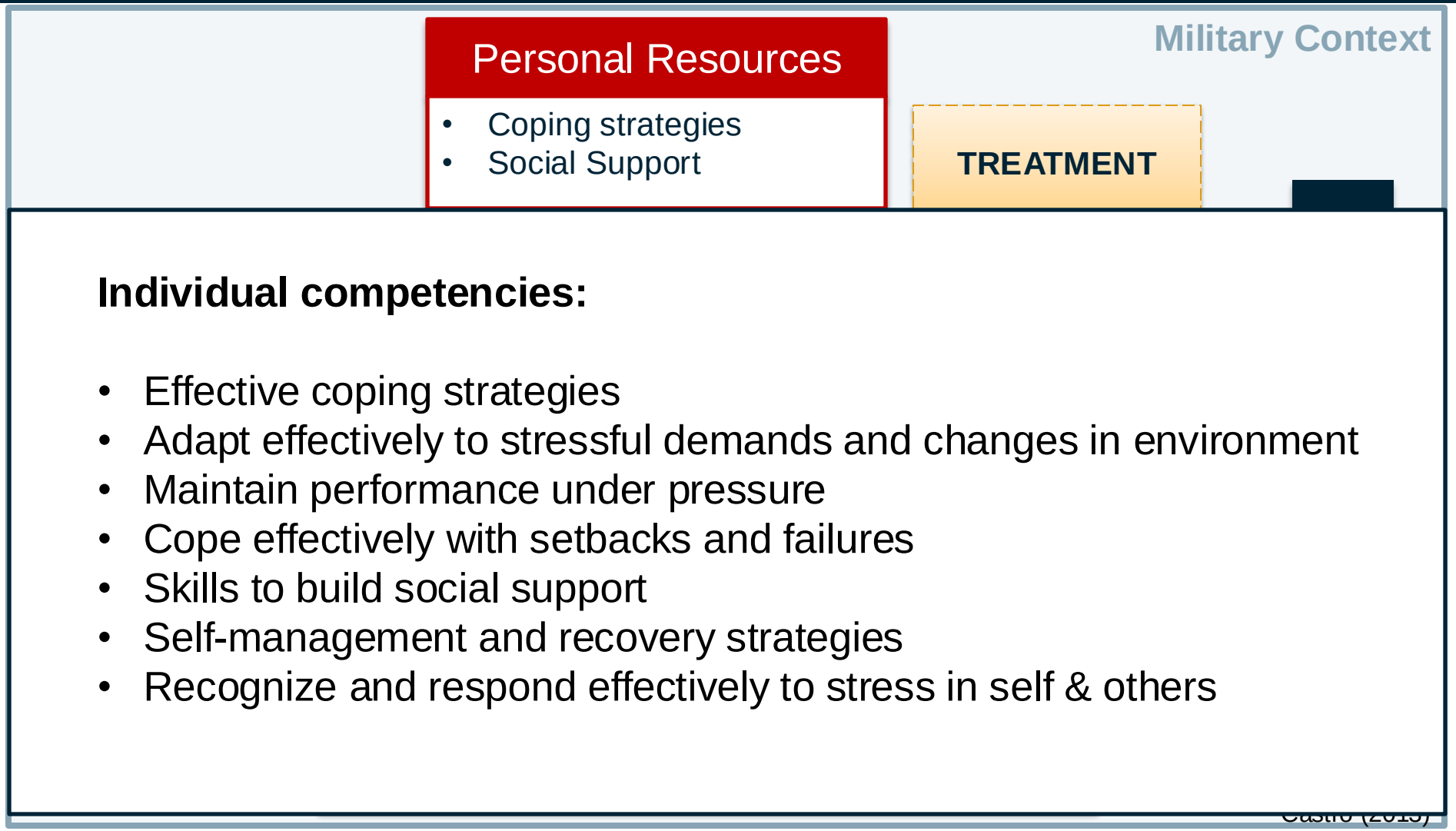
Personal (while in service)
- Physical fitness
- Financial situation
- Family situation

Organizational
- Clarity or ambiguity of role
- Work demands, overload
- Team functioning
- Quality of leadership

Operational
- Deployments
- Adverse events, including potentially traumatizing events and potentially morally injurious events
- Time away from home
- Accumulation of events/incidents

**** Challenge and discomfort are to be expected***

Occupational Model of Health

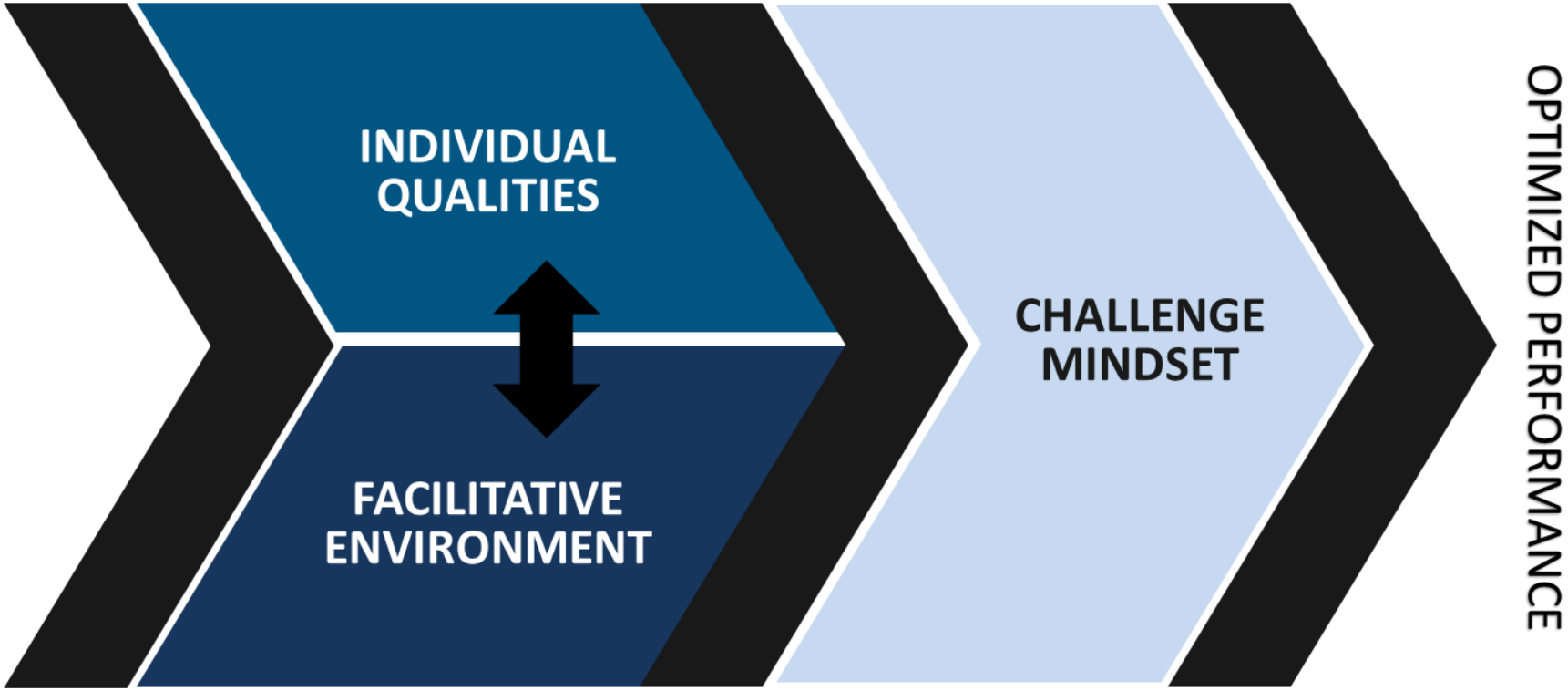


Individual competencies:

- Effective coping strategies
- Adapt effectively to stressful demands and changes in environment
- Maintain performance under pressure
- Cope effectively with setbacks and failures
- Skills to build social support
- Self-management and recovery strategies
- Recognize and respond effectively to stress in self & others

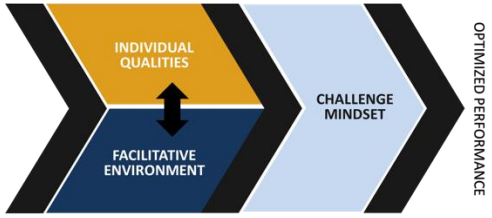
Castro (2015)

Building Resilience & Optimizing Performance

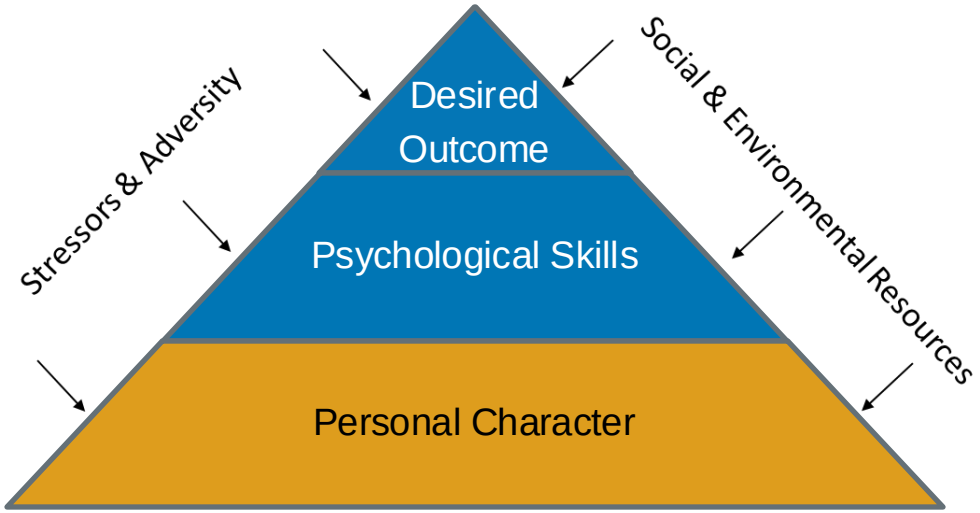


Adapted from Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016

Individual Qualities



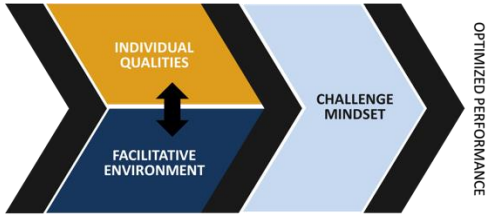
- Refers to the psychological factors that protect an individual from the negative consequences of stress



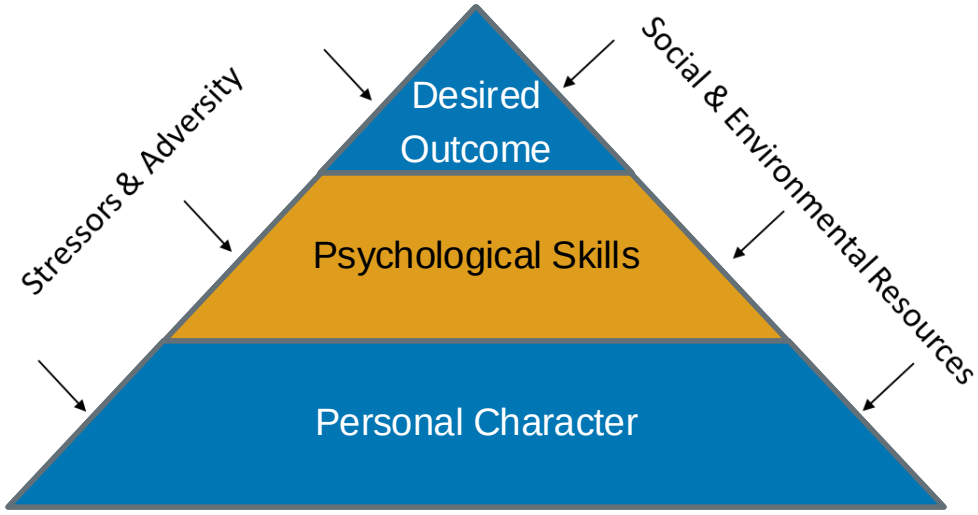
Personal Characteristics

- **Optimistic**, hopeful: positive expectations about future
- **Self-confident**: belief in oneself
- **Extraverted**: outgoing and seeking attention from others
- **Competitive**: compares oneself to others
- **Intrinsically motivated**: enjoys doing tasks, activities
- **Ego oriented**: wants to demonstrate competence over others
- **Task oriented**: wants to demonstrate competence through personal improvement
- **Conscientious**: thorough and concerned about doing things correctly
- **Attributional style**: able to maintain self-esteem by putting success down to own abilities and efforts, and failure down to external or transient factors

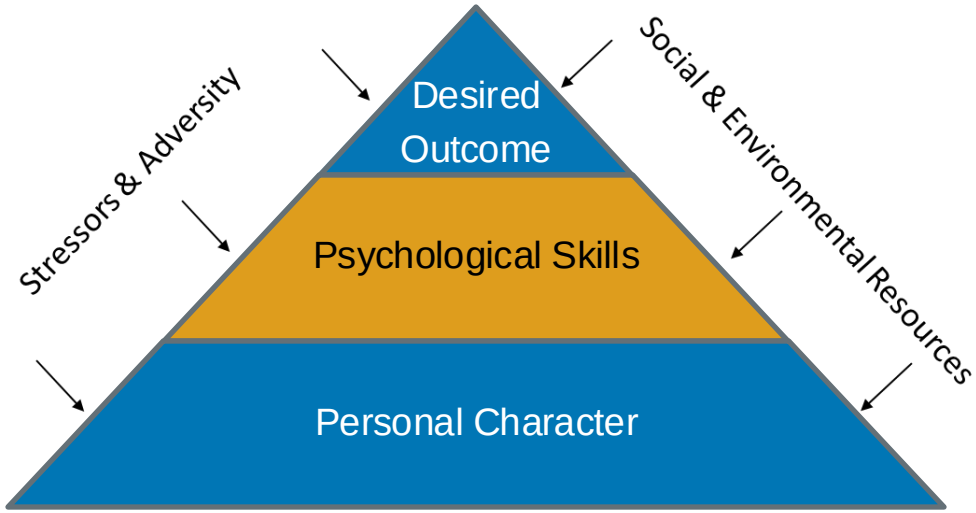
Psychological Skills



- Resilience is the result of a combination of both personality and psychological skills
- Individuals can enhance resilience through learning and applying specific psychological skills and processes



Psychological/Mental Skills



- An awareness of oneself, others and the environment **(mindfulness, emotional intelligence)**
- Direct thoughts and mental images **(self-talk, visualization)**
- Direct attention appropriately **(attention control)**
- Regulate activation levels **(recovery, tactical breathing, emotion management)**
- Set effective goals **(goal setting)**
- Plan for expected and unexpected events **(setback management)**

Optimizing Performance & Protecting Mental Health

Prepare: What are your stressors and demands? How do you prepare for them?

Perform: What can you do to manage and mitigate the demands on you?

Recover: How to you recover in the short and long term?

Core Concepts

- Performance/well-being cycle
- Physiology of stress
- Characteristics of stressful situations
- Individual zones of performance
- Big Four+ resilience skills
- Control & influence
- Coping strategies
- Self-awareness
- Social support
- Mindset
- Setback management
- Recovery
- Actions & Resources

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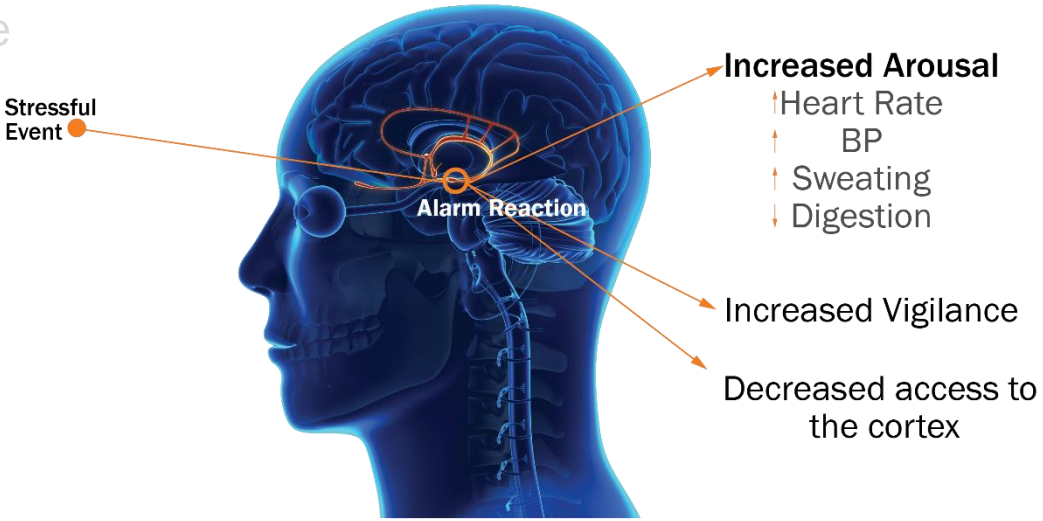

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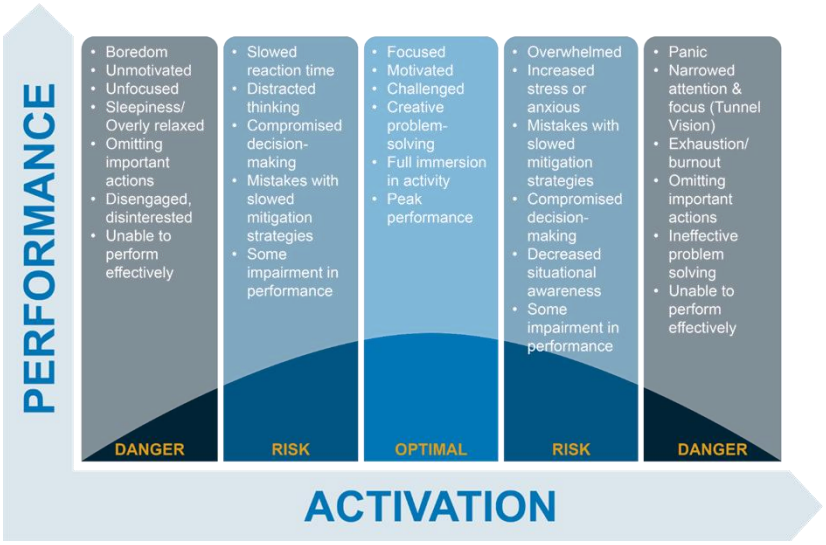

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THE BIG FOUR

Core Concepts

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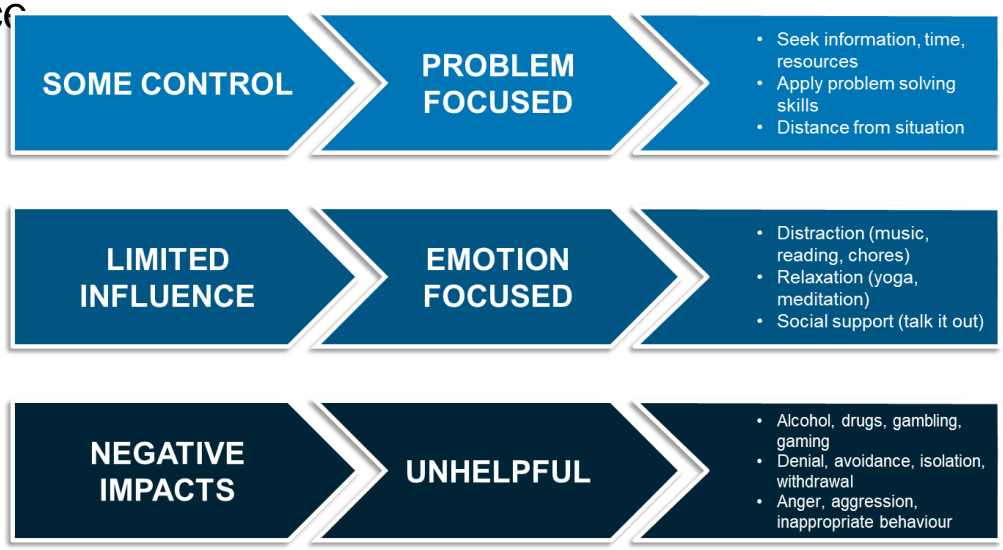

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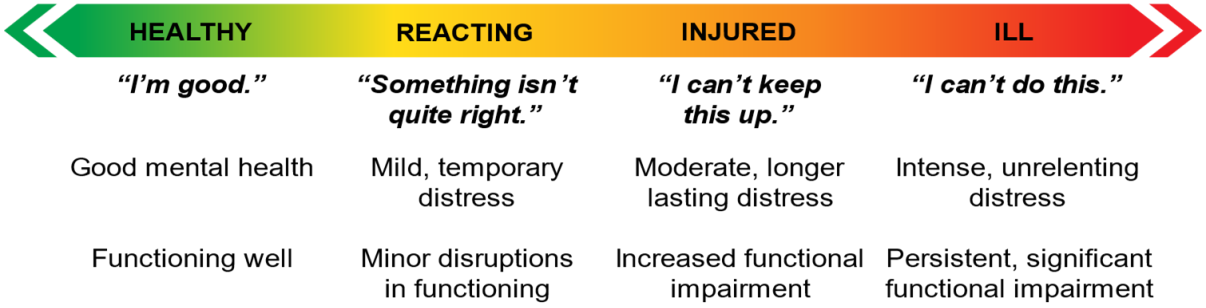

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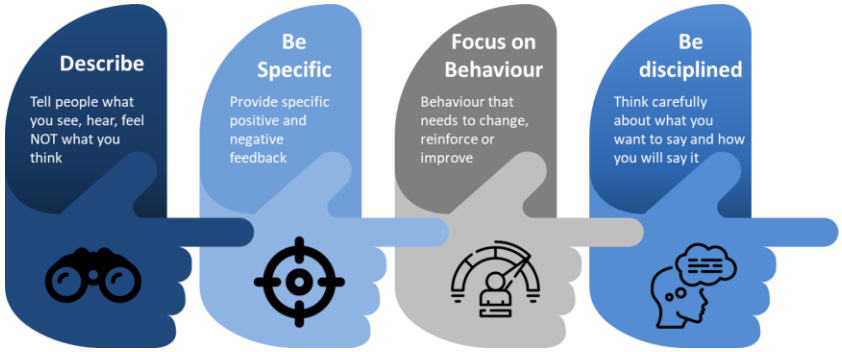

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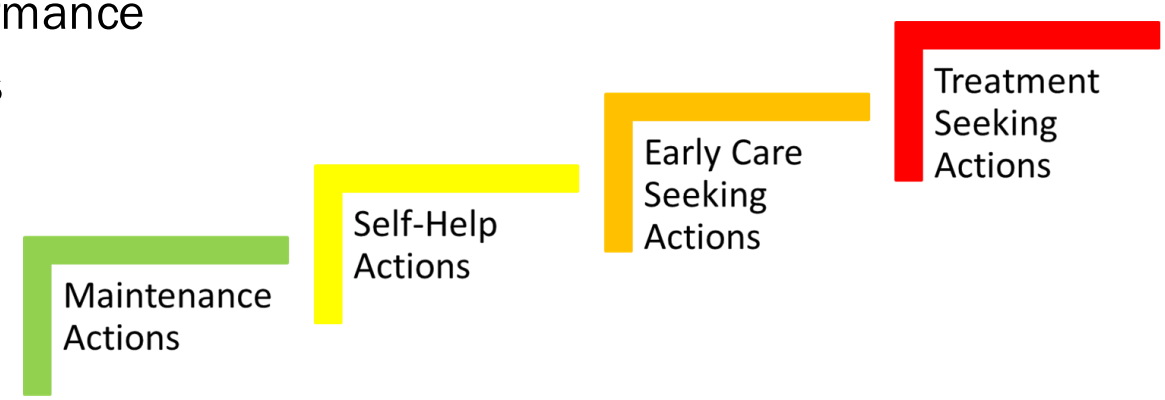


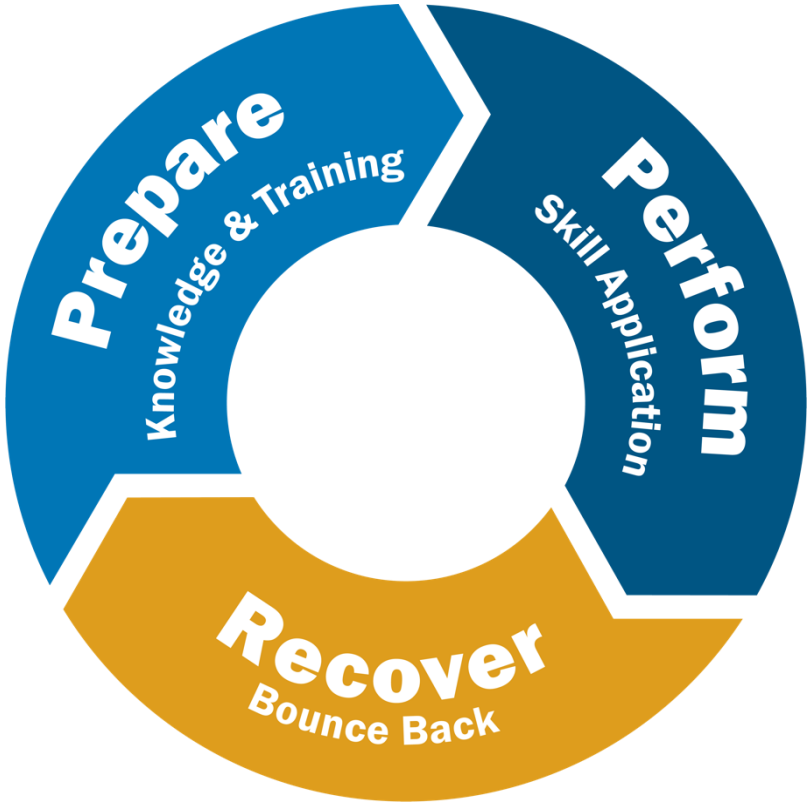
Individual Actions: Prepare

- Identify individual zones of performance
- Know how to manage the stress response
  - Training
  - The Big Four+
- Identify possible sources of stress in performance environment
- Develop contingency plans for managing stress

Individual Actions: Perform

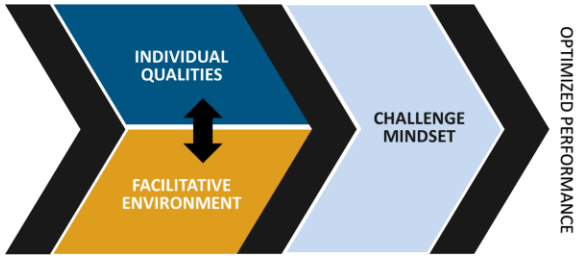
- Know when to employ different types of coping strategies
- Employ effective coping/mental skills
- Monitor self for stress reactions
- Engage in recovery/micro-recovery actions as performance permits

Individual Actions: Recover



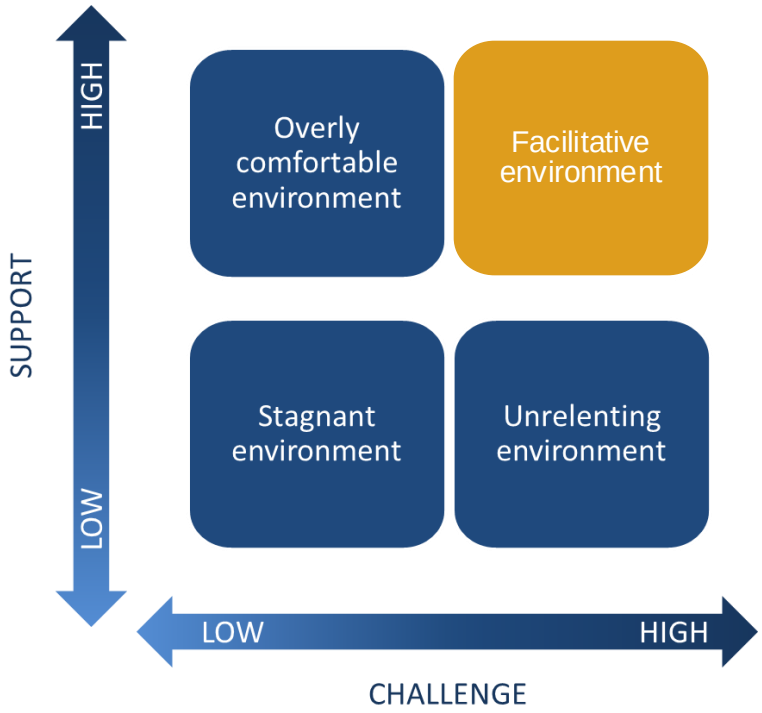
- Engage in recovery activities
- Learn from setbacks and successes
- Monitor health and well-being
- Seek care early if required

Facilitative Environment



- Exposure to difficult training (adversity)
- Overcoming these challenges leads to increased confidence and competence
- It is key to balance appropriate level of challenge with appropriate level of support
- Provision of support enables individuals to develop their personal qualities, promotes learning and builds trust

Features of a Facilitative Environment



- Supportive challenge towards a shared goal/mission
- Input into and ownership of goals
- Culture of shared values and norms
- Strong team identity and cohesion
- Solid understanding of each person's roles and responsibilities
- Confidence in individual/team abilities
- Seeking challenges to grow and learn from mistakes
- Constructive feedback and celebration of successes
- Good relationships between performers and leaders
- Supportive team relationships
- Psychologically safe environment (13 Psychosocial Factors)

Challenge Mindset

- Refers to how individuals evaluate, interpret and manage stress, along with the ability to regulate thoughts and emotions
- Crucial for development of resilience
- Training provides an opportunity to see adverse situations as a challenges rather than threats
- Changed perceptions improve adaptability and ability to manage stress
- Changing perceptions requires key mental skills and strategies to be learned, applied and practiced in a facilitative environment

Occupational Model of Health

Team Competencies and Environmental Resources:

- Team communication, problem solving and social support
- Team performance optimization
- Training to manage demands of service, adapt to transitions
- Professional identity, alignment with military values and culture
- Unit culture: buddies and leadership
- Confidence in technical and tactical training to carry out role
- Performance enhancement through mental skills training (goal setting, attention control, energy management)
- Early interventions

Occupational Resources

- Professional Identity
- Colleagues/Unit
- Leadership
- Training
- Early Interventions
- Performance Enhancement Strategies

Adapted from Adler & Castro (2013)

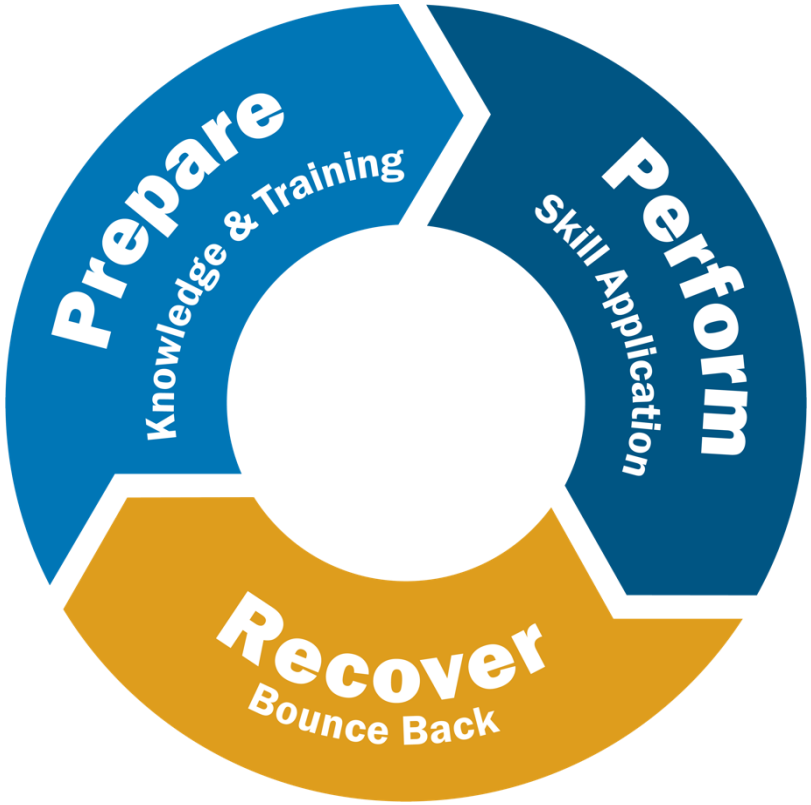
Team Minimizing Behaviour: Preparing for Stress

- Understand expectations
- Monitor team performance and readiness
- Anticipate challenges and plan contingencies
- Plan and prepare for adverse events
- Prepare to handle stressors

Team Managing Behaviour: Performing Under Stress

- Gain and maintain situational awareness
- Monitor others and provide assistance
- Engage in effective team coping
- Seek guidance and support

Team Mending Behaviour: Recovering from Stress



- Participate in team debriefs
- Learn and grow from experience
- Monitor the health of others
- Provide emotional support
- Acknowledge effort
- Express appreciation
- Recover from challenges

Occupational Model of Health

Leader Competencies:

- Communication
- Sense of purpose, meaning
- Facilitative environment: balance of challenge and support
- Psychologically healthy workplace: 13 Psychosocial factors
- Stress exposure and realistic occupational training
- Leader actions to minimize, manage and mend stress at individual and team levels
- Coach and mentor performance skills
- Respond to adverse events: Ad Hoc Incident Review (AIR), AAR, PIES

Occupational Resources

- Professional Identity
- Colleagues/Unit
- Leadership
- Training
- Early Interventions
- Performance Enhancement Strategies

Adapted from Adler & Castro (2013)

Leader Actions:
Build a Facilitative Environment

- Get to know your personnel
- Strengthen your team's sense of community and shared purpose
- Establish rules around communication, share information and provide clear expectations
- Encourage individual growth and development
- Allow for input into decision making
- Monitor workload and prioritize accordingly
- Check in regularly and monitor well-being
- Celebrate successes and provide constructive feedback
- Identify and resolve problems early

Core Leadership Concepts

- Managing leadership stress
- Leader actions
- Mental Skills Training
- Facilitative environment
- 13 Psychosocial Factors
- Shared zones of performance
- Performance coaching
- Responding to adverse events

- Managing staff/personalities (P,U,N,T)
- Multiple demand on time/attention (P)
- Decision making in less-than-ideal situations (P,U,N,T)
- Conveying bad news (operational versus personal desire) (P,U,N,T)
- Ever-changing priorities (P,U)
- Dealing with the senior leadership (P,U,N,T)
- Dealing with conflict (U)
- Well-being of staff (P,U,N,T)
- Constant organizational change (P,U,N,T)
- Leading people with more experience, different experience (T)
- Feeling unqualified at outset (N,T)

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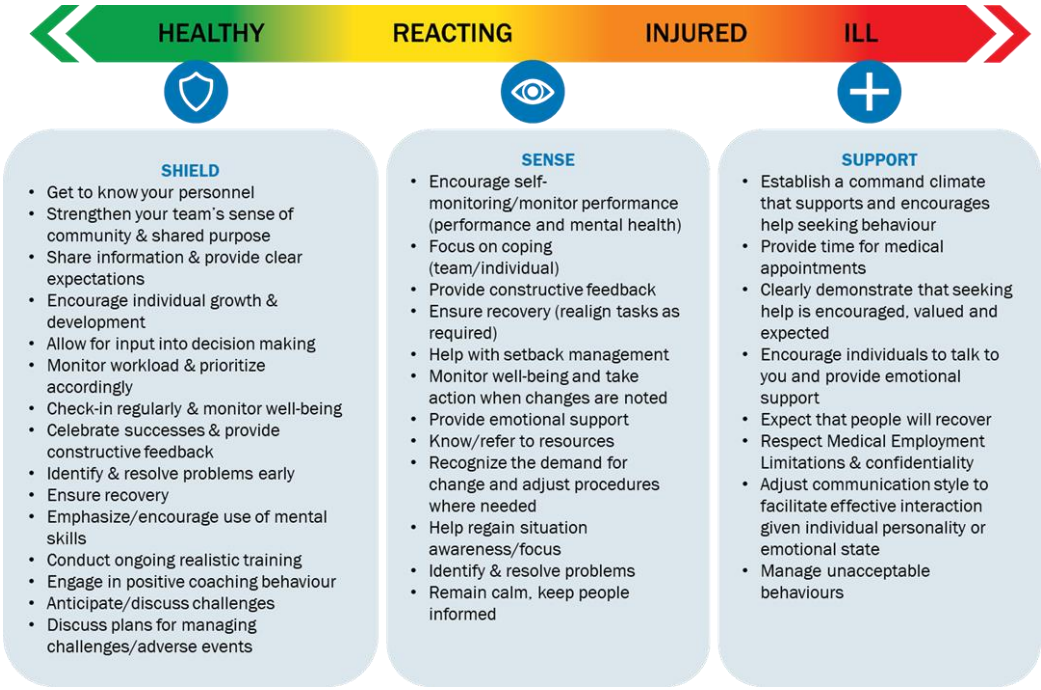

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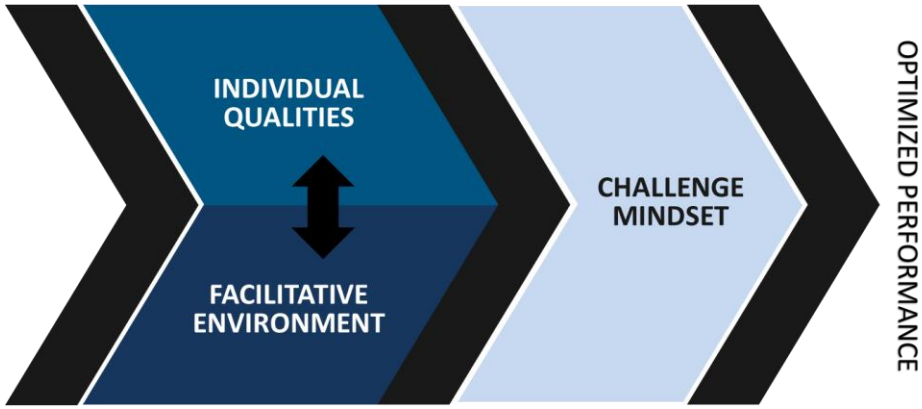

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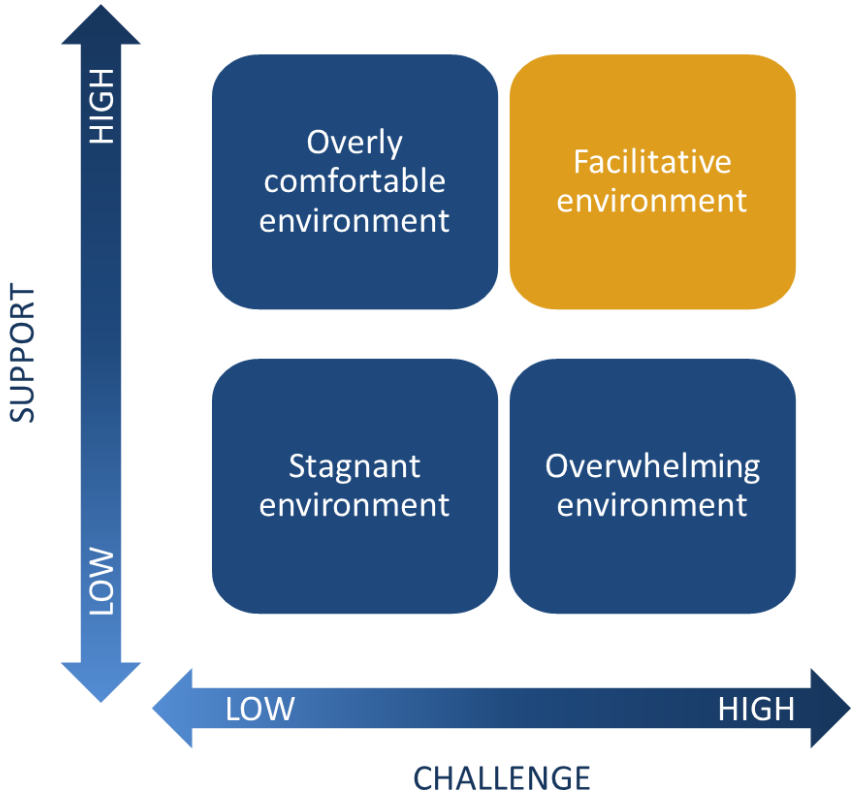

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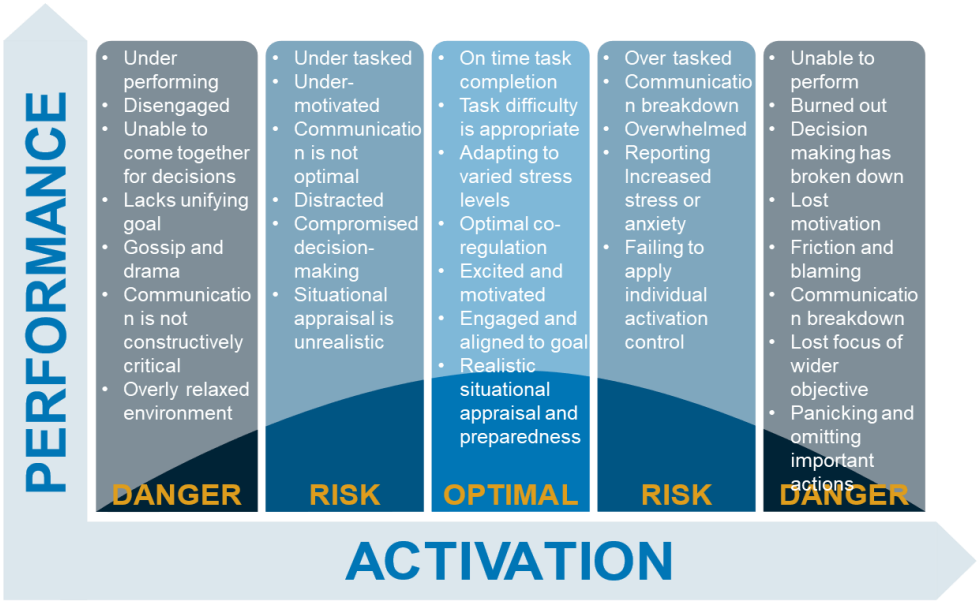

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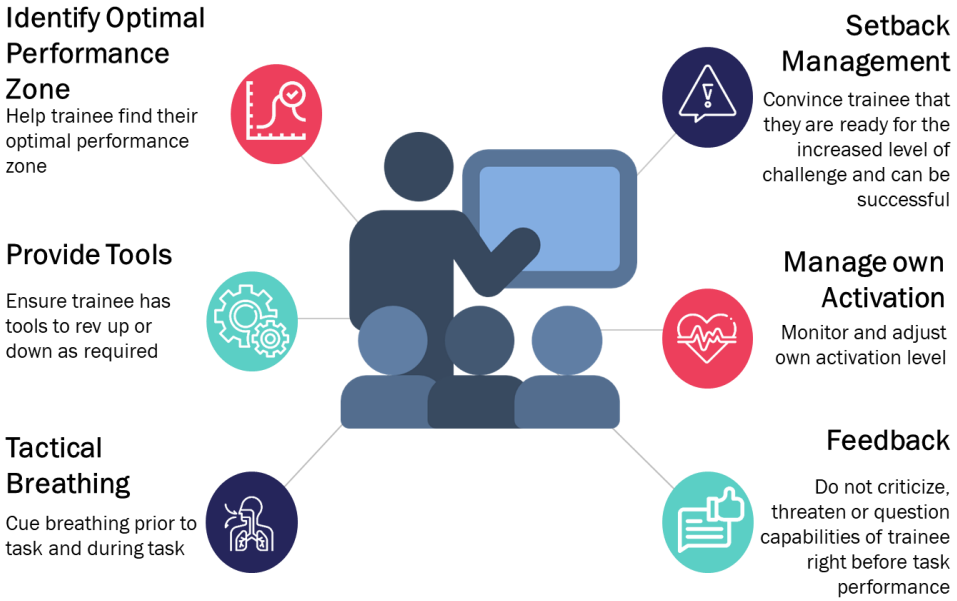

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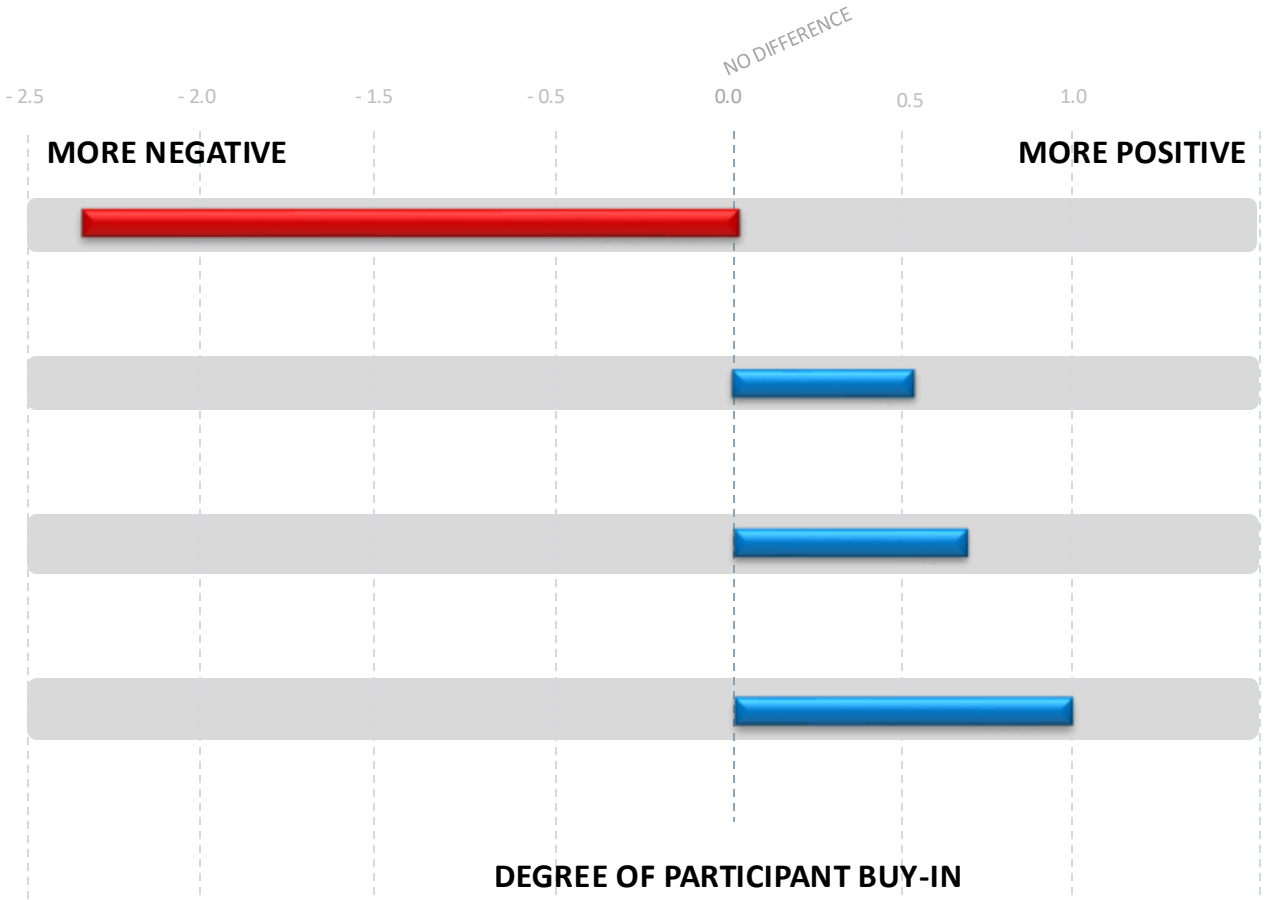
Leader Actions: Prepare

FACILITATIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Establish & communicate goals, expectations, roles
- Emphasize use of and assist with application of mental skills
- Help members identify IZOP
- Check on individual and team readiness
- Conduct ongoing training
- Help individual/team anticipate, plan for and mitigate risks & challenges

Importance of Leadership Support

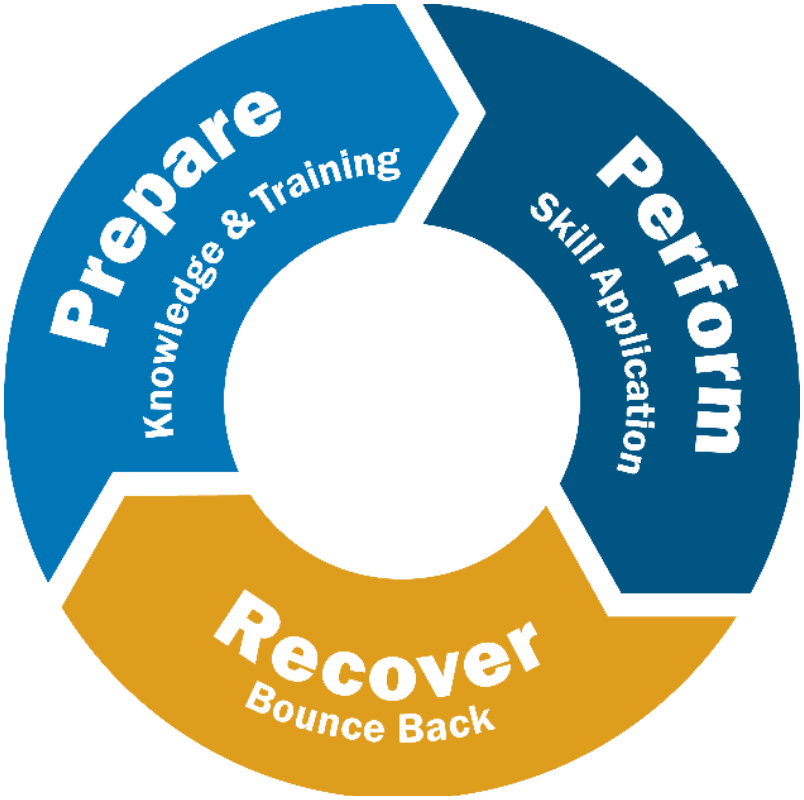


Leader Actions: Perform

FACILITATIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Engage in positive coaching behaviour
- Monitor performance, well-being, coping
- Provide opportunities for micro recovery
- Provide guidance and support as necessary
- Remain calm
- Keep people informed
- Recognize demand for change and help team regain situational awareness

Leader Actions: Recover



FACILITATIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Provide constructive feedback and help with setback management
- Conduct debriefs
- Provide emotional support (AIR)
- Monitor individual wellbeing
- Monitor team functioning
- Acknowledge effort and show appreciation
- Ensure deliberate recovery

Tailoring the Content

- Expand on performance skills taught in occupation training
- Integrate mental skills alongside other skills required to perform in occupation/environment (physical, technical, tactical skills)
- Specific sources of stress in role/unit environment
- Contextualize skills to the unit/role environment, challenges and performance requirements
- Context specific skill application in role/environment
- Additional key skills required for improved performance
- Context specific recovery activities
- Specific barriers to care in role/unit
- Role/unit testimonials/examples

Early R2MR Program Evaluation

Based on the data from 28,000 CAF personnel between 2008 and 2013 (does not include DND civilians and CAF families):

- Significant increases in **knowledge** and **confidence**:
  - I have a good understanding of mental health and coping strategies.
  - I am confident in my ability to identify CF members at risk for mental health issues
  - I am confident in my ability to help CF members get assistance for MH a problem
  - It is possible for a CF member who is exhibiting the first signs of mental illness to become healthy without ever developing a full blown mental illness
- Moderate effect sizes on stigma related questions
  - I would be seen as weak if I sought help
  - I would be afraid to talk to my supervisor about a mental health issue
  - I would not be ashamed to seek help if I noticed mental health symptoms

Summary of R2MR Program Evaluation

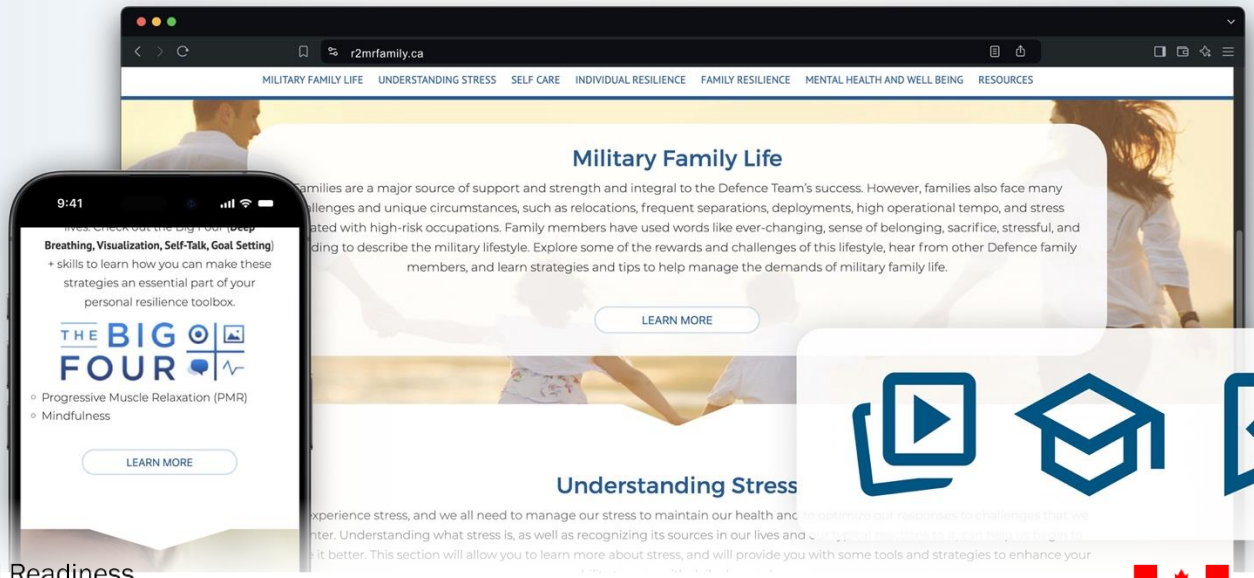
- Good understanding of mental health and coping strategies I can use on deployment (Khan, 2015)
- Can identify positive and negative coping strategies, understand process of MH treatment, there are specific things I can do to ease post-deployment transition (Zamorski, 2011)
- Perceived helpfulness of training: greater contribution of pre & post deployment training to more severe sources of stress (Zamorski, 2016)
- Increase in perceived need for care, care-seeking, and perceived impact of care (Fikretoglu & Liu, 2014)
- 86% Able to recognize own signs of stress, 65-80% indicated that using Big 4 skills made things better (DGMPRA HDO Survey, 2013)
- Those who received training more likely to use positive coping; higher levels of emotional, social, psychological wellbeing (Lee, 2018)
- Improvements in performance & well-being: MH literacy, stress management skills, attitudes toward MH Treatment (Fikretoglu, 2016)
- Pilot training: 97% endorsed mental skills integral to learning to fly, 83% indicated skills enhanced ability to manage setbacks (data from 13 serials)
- BMQ v2022: understand how to practice Big 4, can name 3 steps for adjusting self-talk, can name emotional coping strategies (Wood, 2022)

R2MR for Family Website

Road to Mental Readiness for Family Life Website

Wellness tools for the entire Defence Team

r2mrfamily.ca



One App, All the Tools

The R2MR app is designed specifically to allow you to use the R2MR tools on the go.

- Mental Health Continuum
- Tactical Breathing
- Self-Talk
- Goal Setting
- Visualization
- Attention Control
- Memory

Available on the App Store

ANDROID APP ON Google play

Comments/Questions?

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