

# **Understanding, experiencing and promoting resilience: the power of your story**

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*“I realise that the story I had to tell was hidden, and that this course has enabled me to bring that out into the light and therefore to reflect on it more”*

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## Acknowledgement

We wish to thank Lieutenant Colonel Lizzy Bernthal and Group Captain Di Lamb for originally arousing our interest in resilience and engaging with our early ideas, the six research participants, promised anonymity, who gave themselves wholeheartedly to the project, and formed a dynamic and creative workgroup, Prof Stan Tucker for his advice on research methodology, and Mike Miller and Jane Jackman for reviewing and critiquing this text and Mike also for his help carrying out the employer interviews.

## Phil's story

Now an independent writer and leadership consultant, I was formerly the Workplace Director of Agape, supporting and training MBA students as well as leaders in business, public administration, education and the church in the areas of communication, mentoring and leadership development. For the last decade, my focus has been on delivering training aimed at helping individuals thrive. Such training demands that we go fairly deep into people's lives, touching on what matters most. One of the challenges of ethical leadership at this level is to resist riding roughshod over individual integrity. The deeper you go, the more intrusive you will be, and this requires a high level of trust in the trainer and ownership by all the stakeholders, which is often a bridge too far.

The demand for more resilience, however, remains. In the last twelve months I have encountered it in health, education, business and the Ministry of Defence. On the global stage, resilience is the theme of the 2018 LAEMOS conference on Organisation Studies in Rio de Janeiro. There are a growing number of interventions on offer, but due to cost and client confidentiality, practitioners do not generally publish impact studies<sup>1</sup>. So what would persuade the relevant stakeholders to invest their precious time and/or money in a particular direction? And would it be worthwhile?

Using the remaining funds from a seminar series on ethical leadership<sup>2</sup>, and building upon multiple threads including mindfulness in seminar 3, spiritual leadership in Seminar 5 and themes of stability and identity in seminar 9, I invited Judith Miller to help design, deliver and evaluate a course across a mixed cohort of delegates. Our primary aim was to see if we could deliver a course that would help individuals understand, experience and promote resilience within their respective environments, with some means of assessing to what extent we had achieved those three objectives.

## Judith's story

Having spent 30 years providing operational and strategic leadership in education and the voluntary sectors, I am now a director of MJI Solutions, an experienced and qualified researcher, executive coach and mentor.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson S, Rickard C, Tamkin P, *Understanding Resilience*, Institute for Employment Studies, Jan 2014 <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/understanding-resilience>

<sup>2</sup> See [www.ethicalleadership.org.uk](http://www.ethicalleadership.org.uk).

When Phil approached me with the opportunity to help lead research into resilience and its impact on ethical leadership I was immediately interested. I spend most of my time with leaders, and had already begun shaping my thinking about resilience with respect to young people. As a qualified teacher and researcher, working in the education sector for over 35 years, I have had a growing concern that the high dependence on tick box performance indicators in primary and secondary education leaves our young people struggling to develop critical skills and behaviour later in life, often in complex and challenging situations. Employers and further/higher education tutors have for many years commented on the lack of initiative, adaptability and resilience in the young people they are now working with. So the opportunity to look at this in more detail, starting with leaders and influencers, across a range of sectors, was appealing.

Alongside our own thinking and planning, in January we met with two senior researchers from the Ministry of Defence based at Birmingham University. The obvious need for resilience among military personnel provided a different insight, yet the factors under consideration were remarkably similar. The two sessions with Lizzy Bernthal and Di Lamb helped to shape the direction and gave us greater clarity on what we were aiming to achieve. Then in February, we met with an education professor from Newman University, who confirmed our thinking that we might need to adopt a more flexible approach, allowing the participants to influence the shape of the programme, and for us as facilitators to be more open. What at first seemed risky, daunting and out of control soon became liberating. For me this marked the 'Eureka' moment, when everything fell into place. There was still a lot to do, and this approach would really test our own resilience, to adapt and step into the unknown, but our sights were set.

## **Our question**

What has this course done to help participants experience, reflect on and promote resilience?

## **Our assumptions**

For the sake of transparency, we should state that we are both Christians, something which influences our entire worldview, and has some bearing on the way we facilitate.

Secondly, despite the existence of measurement tools, we take the view that "resilience" is not an objective quality that can be easily measured, and to pretend otherwise may be disingenuous. Rather a complex set of factors comes into play when an evaluation is made, "John is not very resilient", "Cheryl is extremely resilient", affected by context and culture as well as individual characteristics, whether by nature or nurture.

We therefore followed a dialogic approach, adopting a subjectivist ontology and a feedback loop which generates new questions from new insights. That is to say, we considered that the combined wisdom and lived experience of the group would offer richer insights than the reflections of the two of us or any external researcher. Our key research data would be the actual discourse of the group alongside the numerical snapshot provided by our resilience "health check". From April to July 2017, the two of us together with the entire group became a team of insider teachers and researchers.

# Our method

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## Our participants

We recruited six participants, including a mix of self-selection and employer selection, drawing employees from public, private and voluntary sectors, “someone exercising some level of influence in their organisation or who has the power to do so”. In our recruitment, we emphasised “resilience” as the course aim, recognising that participants were likely to emerge because of a perceived resilience gap, whether self-appointed, or sent by their employer. A seventh participant joined us for our first morning, but had to drop out for health reasons. The main findings in this report are based on the discourse of the six participants, two women and four men, two from education, two from business, two from the voluntary sector.

## Our programme

We started and finished with a structured phone interview with the relevant employers to explore why specific employees were selected (where referred), to help establish what indicators of change the employers were hoping for, and to assess what change had actually been observed.

The duration of the course covered four full days, 3-4 weeks apart, and with a total of five hours of coaching in between. In the first group session, we asked about their own expectations for the course, with specific reference to resilience.

To frame the course, we designed a “resilience health check” for use in the first coaching session prior to the first day of the course, and in the last coaching session, after the final day of the course, to gain a subjective snapshot from participants in 15 resilience-related areas.

During the course, each participant kept a journal to record their reflections and emotions, which they discussed with their coach as they progressed through the course. With the full support of the participants, copies of the journals were submitted at the end of the course, forming a rich data source.

Participants shared resilience-related stories and reflections with one another at the end of the course which were recorded on audio and video.

## Our stories

Early in our planning, we had a shared desire to include storytelling in our programme. We had seen the power of student storytelling in our teaching, and the last twenty years have seen a large body of research exploring the way in which our sense of identity, coherence and meaning is shaped through the stories we tell<sup>3</sup>. Dan MacAdams highlights the contrast between *redemption sequences* in which negative events turn positive and *contamination*

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<sup>3</sup> See for example McLean, K. C., & Pratt, M. W. (2006). Life’s little (and big) lessons: Identity statuses and meaning-making in the turning point narratives of emerging adults. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 714–722

*sequences* which move from a positive situation to a negative outcome<sup>4</sup>. The significance of this will be seen in the definition of resilience constructed by our participants.

Toward the beginning of the programme, we both told stories of resilience from our own lives. On our first afternoon, we had participants in pairs practising both their listening skills and their storytelling in an iterative process, beginning with the simple “What did you do at the weekend?” moving on to “Talk about a time when you needed some resilience”, with the duration increasing as our participants began to feel more comfortable with one another.

By session 2, the trunk of the tree diagram co-created by facilitators and participants was labelled “identity and coherence”, giving an implicit mandate to strengthen our focus on storytelling, which we did in our final two sessions. Jason’s journal entries captured well the mood of the entire group.

*Storytelling was engaging (end of session 1)*

*Storytelling was cathartic (end of session 3)*

*Storytelling as a device has been fantastic (end of session 4)*

We will explore this in more detail under “identity and coherence”.

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<sup>4</sup> McAdams, D. P. (2013b). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by* (rev. ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

# Our findings

## Expectations

Expectations were established from the four referring employers by phone prior to the course, and from participants during the first group session. They are summarised here under the three primary objectives originally set by us. However, the question was asked completely openly without reference to these. The employers were not invited to articulate their expectations around “reflect” (See figure 1).

Expectations	Of employers	Of participants
<b>Reflect</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand what drives resilience</li> <li>• Deepen my understanding of my own resilience</li> <li>• Greater understanding – this always helps me build confidence</li> <li>• Great self-awareness</li> <li>• To have a reflective position on how to be resilient consistently</li> </ul>
<b>Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Self-worth and belief</li> <li>• Ability to take criticism better</li> <li>• Become more confident in their own capability, particularly in situations that don't go their way</li> <li>• Better listening skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have fun</li> <li>• Identify at least one positive habit to introduce into my life to create a positive change in self-resilience</li> <li>• Learn something new about myself through the observation/critique of peers</li> <li>• To gain more confidence in my abilities</li> <li>• Enhance my skills</li> <li>• To learn to accept self in this season of change</li> </ul>
<b>Promote</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to adapt course for our own organisation as this is a priority</li> <li>• Tools to cope with pressure/stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To manage at the next level</li> <li>• Be equipped to equip others</li> <li>• Feel confident to lead CPD sessions that explore resilience and help develop this in colleagues and students</li> <li>• The confidence to coach others to become more resilient</li> <li>• To embrace any opportunities to help others</li> <li>• Tools to take forwards for self-motivation</li> <li>• Expand my network</li> </ul>

Figure 1

## Creating a model

In order to design the health check we set out to construct a theoretical model, which we expected to be modified as a result of group dialogue. In taking this approach, we recognised that we were giving ourselves a bigger challenge than if we were to simply define a model and structure our course around it. Janet Ledesma's<sup>5</sup> review of resilience theory lists "self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk-taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance, and a high tolerance of uncertainty"<sup>6</sup> as key components that make for resilience. Alongside this review we considered four visual models on which interventions are based: the Resilience Development Framework (RDF), The Wellbeing Project (TWP), Personal Global (PG) and Energy Excellence (EE) (See figure 2)

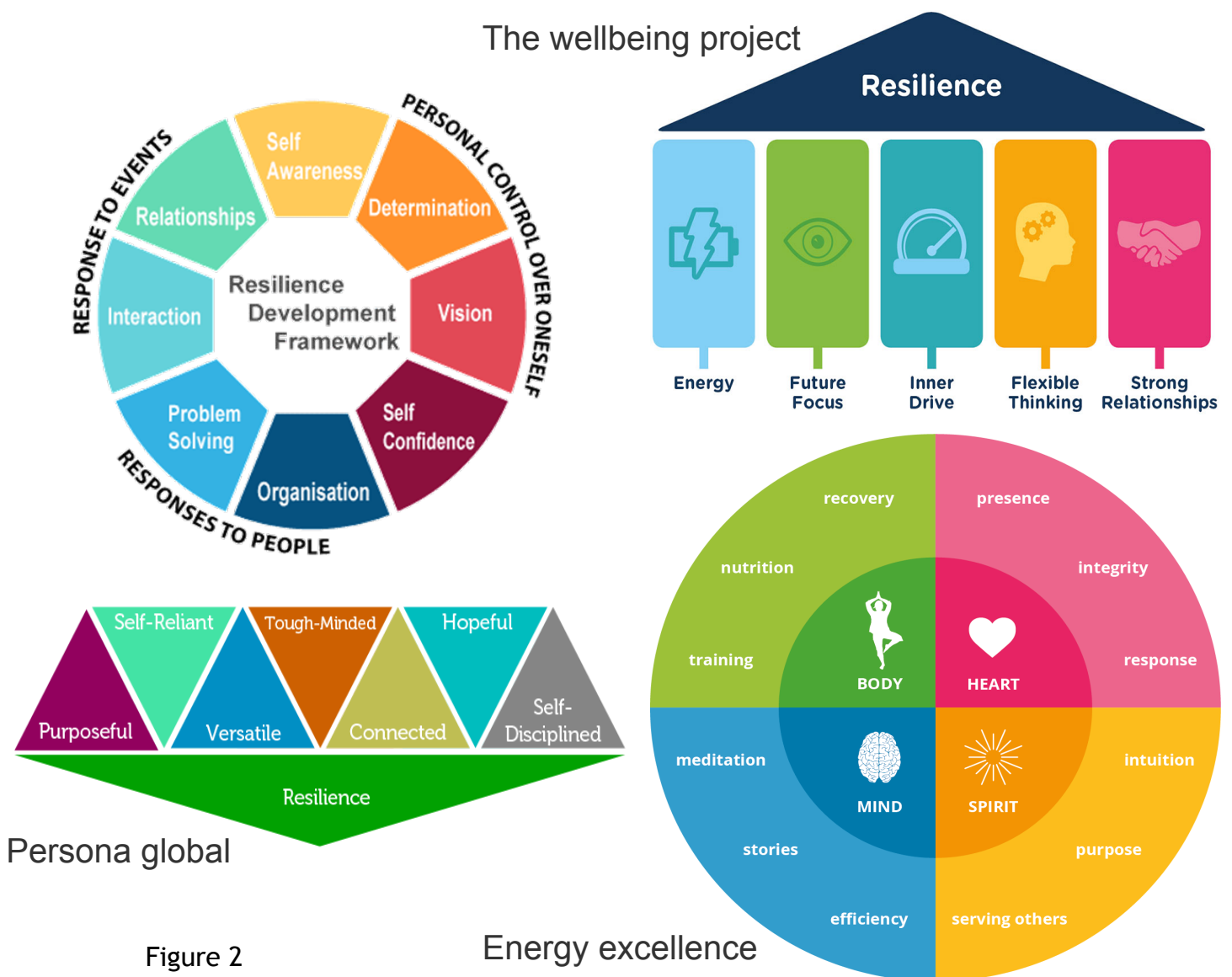


Figure 2

Energy excellence

<sup>5</sup> Now the Associate Dean and Professor of Leadership at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

<sup>6</sup> Ledesma, J. 2014. Conceptual Frameworks and Research Models on Resilience in Leadership. SAGE Open, July-September 2014:1-8.



Ledesma’s “strong social resources” appears in most models, and we included it as one of our major categories, based on a layered approach we had used successfully in other programmes (figure 3). In our health check, we combined “community” and “colleagues”.

In view of the growing public awareness of emotional intelligence theory, we chose to group self-awareness and adaptability under emotional intelligence. We took the view that greater self-awareness would have a knock-on effect on self-esteem and self-confidence, and was a more accessible concept to grapple with.

Ungar<sup>7</sup> notes that empathy is one of the characteristics reported to be present in thriving individuals, a concept closely associated with resilience. Furthermore, we sensed, intuitively, that there would be a strong relationship between empathy and resilience, and would be an area potentially responsive to intervention.

All of the models above include “purpose” either explicitly or implicitly, and to this we linked determination, low fear of failure and optimism. But we omitted the “self-reliance” of the internally-oriented persona global model which appears to stand in some tension with “strong social resources”.

PG is the only model which actually uses the word “discipline”, but the words “meditation”, “training”, “efficiency” and “integrity” in EE all imply it.

Included in Ledesma’s summary, but noticeably absent from three of the visual models is a sense of coherence<sup>8</sup>. EE includes stories, which we see as related to both coherence and identity. Indeed, all but the EE model seem to focus on the more external aspects of human behaviour, paying little attention to the deeper levels. The EE model is the exception, yet it seems to do so in an awkward way. Its categories are body, mind, spirit and heart, but it sets more technical factors such as nutrition and efficiency alongside what appear to be the more core factors such as stories and integrity.

We felt that our diagram needed a centre, and though we could have called it “heart” or “spirit”, we chose the word “soul” instead. Brian Draper uses “soulfulness” in preference to “mindfulness” to avoid the tendency toward the technical at the expense of the deep<sup>9</sup>. We

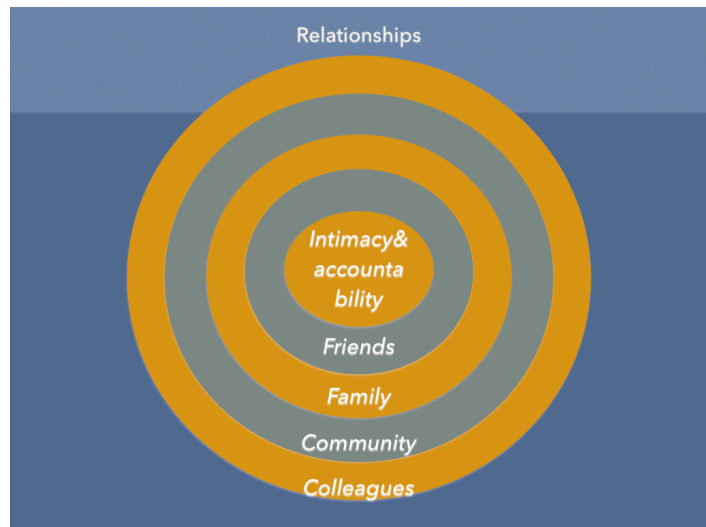


Figure 3

<sup>7</sup>Ungar, M. (2004). A constructionist discourse on resilience. *Youth & Society*, 35, 341-365.

<sup>8</sup>See especially O’Leary V. E. (1998). Strength in the face of adversity: Individual and social thriving. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 425-446.

<sup>9</sup>Draper, B (2016). *Soulfulness: deepening the mindful life*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

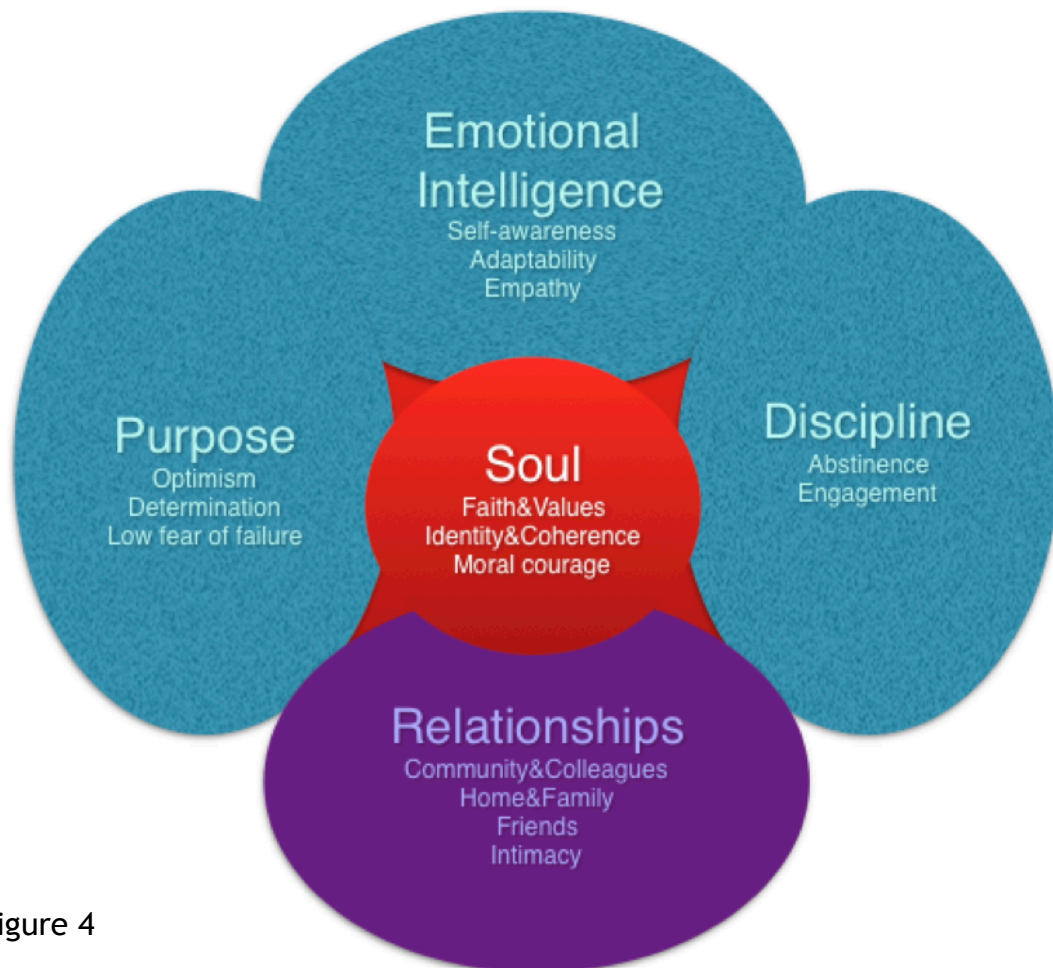


Figure 4

have followed this lead. Under the heading of “Soul”, supported by other literature, we added faith<sup>10</sup> & values<sup>11</sup>, and moral courage<sup>12</sup>.

The resulting working model is shown in figure 4. This set of categories and subcategories formed the starting point for our theorising, and the basis of the “resilience health check”. However, although the above model was somewhat implicit in the health check the participants had by now completed, we decided not to show the diagram in figure 4 to our participants, so as to avoid excessive influence on them from our own interpretation. Instead we introduced them to the same source material, theoretical models and critical questions we had reviewed ourselves, and invited them to come up with their own definition and a diagrammatical representation of resilience.

<sup>10</sup>See Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience. *American Psychologist*, 59, 20-28 and Patterson, J. L., & Kelleher, P. (2005). Resilient school leaders: Strategies for turning adversity into achievement. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

<sup>11</sup>On the importance of a strong faith for resilience in young adults see Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (2001). Journeys from childhood to midlife: Risk resilience and recovery. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Teaching in an ancient context, Jesus was most emphatic that specific expressions of moral courage are essential to building a resilient life (See Matthew 5 & 7 in the bible)

Interestingly, they found the visual presentation of the models in figure 2 inadequate. They seemed to consider that the artistic presentation of a model was as important as the words. The tree diagram they came up with (figure 5) was more nuanced and sophisticated than ours, using the richly layered metaphors of tree, roots, trunk, branches and fruit to convey meaning. The specific questions at the roots were adapted from Dallas Willard<sup>13</sup> and James Smith<sup>14</sup> but everything else emerged from group dialogue and consensus.

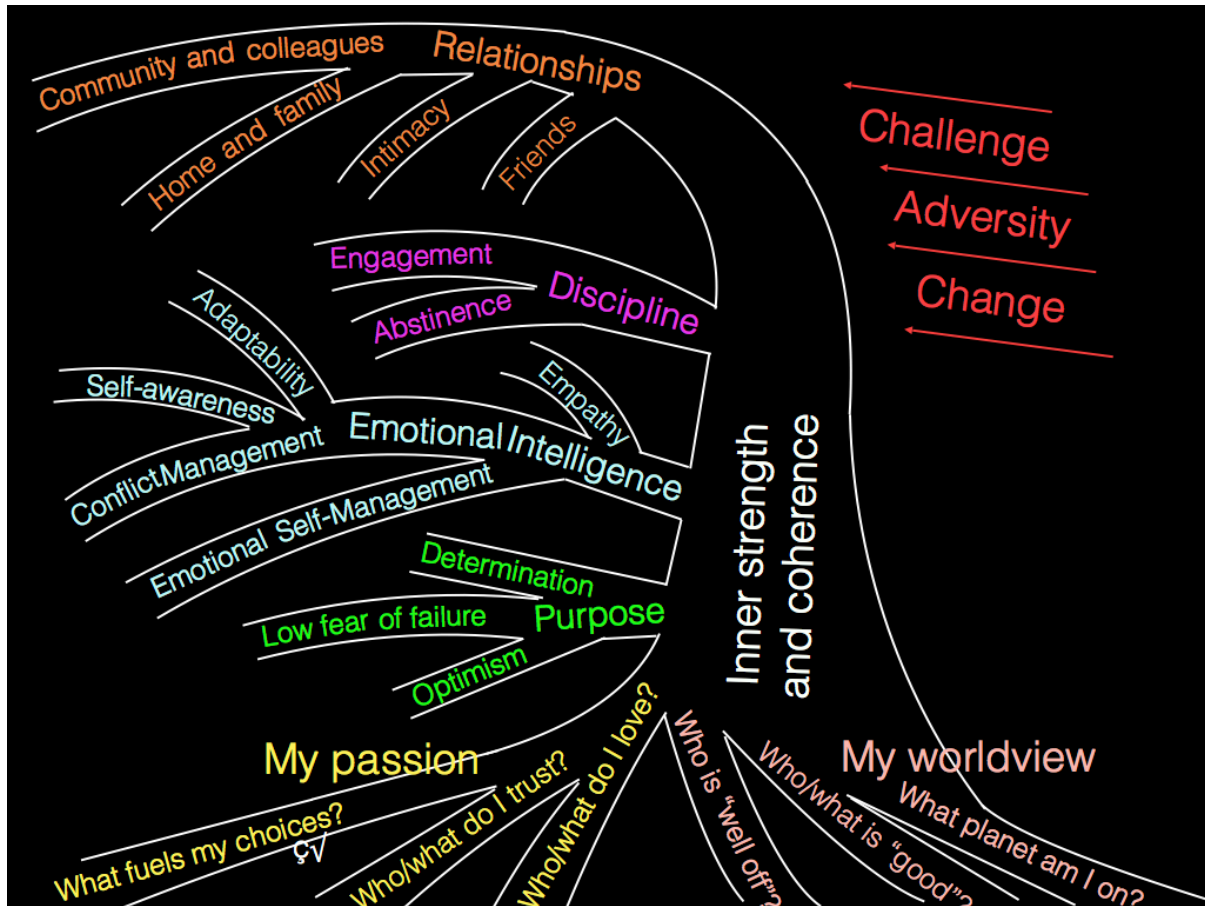


Figure 5

This tree model was largely constructed in our first group session together, with only minimal revision later. It therefore formed the structure for our next three sessions, as we explored the various branches and sub-branches of the tree. In choosing a tree as our key metaphor, we were able to represent the twin ideas of elasticity and growth. When the winds subside, the tree returns to a more upright position, yet the experience also creates growth on the leeward side.

<sup>13</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6hwsG7AUZ0>

<sup>14</sup> Smith, J. K. A. (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

## Constructing a definition

Alongside our exploration of models, we also reviewed various definitions of resilience, and at the end of session 1 we asked participants “what does the word ‘resilience’ mean to you?” The group was particularly drawn to Carver’s model<sup>15</sup> (figure 6), and on the morning of day 4 a strong consensus emerged around a definition which came closer to “thriving” than “recovery”. The strength of ownership of this consensus can be seen in the way they answered the same question at the end of day 4 (figure 7).

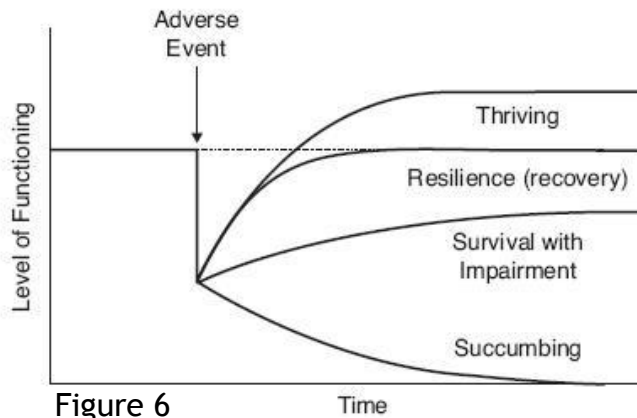


Figure 6

*Phil's diagram summed up my life... Functional and mastering everything. I reflected on the chart moving from thriving to survival. Where I am now – just above the mental health line – a simple thing can tip me over the edge. Need to take stock and be real. Being bounced around. Feeling that I can't cope - (Daina - Judith's notes, coaching session 1)*

What does resilience mean to you?		
	End of day 1	End of day 4
Jason	To be able to withstand and overcome challenges	To adapt and progress through and because of adversity/challenges
Mark	Remaining objective in the face of changes and challenges. Knowing yourself well enough!	Ability to adapt and grow
Tim	The ability to 'push on' and keep moving forwards when faced with obstacles or setbacks	The ability to adapt and grow through challenge or adversity
John	One's ability to manage and move forward through ups/downs, highs/lows and stresses/strains of daily life	The ability to adapt and grow through challenge or adversity
Daina	To have the resolve/ability to keep going and growing despite challenges that are uncontrollable coming your way. Ability to take challenges and turn them into opportunities.	The ability to adapt and grow through challenge or adversity
Jenny	Being able to face problems and carry on.	The ability to adapt and grow through challenge or adversity - we developed as a group. It is not about going back to the way you were before but about growing and adapting.

Figure 7

<sup>15</sup>Carver, C. S. (1998). Resilience and thriving: Issues, models, and linkages. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54,245-265.

<b>Health Check Group Summary</b> (subcategory scores out of 30)	Initial score	Final score	% increase
<b>Soul</b>	66.5	74.8	12.5%
<b>Faith and values</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>19.2%</b>
<b>Moral courage</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>10.1%</b>
<b>Identity and coherence</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	40.2	47.5	18.3%
<b>Abstinence</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>32.4%</b>
<b>Engagement</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>7.4%</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	64.7	74.7	15.5%
<b>Optimism</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>18.2%</b>
<b>Determination</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
<b>Low fear of failure</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
<b>Relationships</b>	86.3	97.0	12.4%
<b>Community and colleagues</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
<b>Intimacy</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>10.7%</b>
<b>Friends</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>28.4%</b>
<b>Home and family</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>8.4%</b>
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	65.2	76.6	17.5%
<b>Adaptability</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>24.2%</b>
<b>Self-awareness</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>15.6%</b>
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>13.2%</b>
Percentage increase		14.8%	
Average (mean)	21.5	24.7	15.52%
Standard Deviation	2.5	1.7	8.04%
Upper boundary	24.0	26.4	23.56%
Lower boundary	19.1	23.0	7.48%

Figure 8

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## Learning and growing together

Our journey together with the participants was structured around full day group sessions over a three week period. Three 1-1 coaching sessions were interleaved, with Judith coaching the two women and Phil coaching the four men. Framing the entire journey before day 1 and after day 4 was our resilience health check, conducted in the same coaching pairs, which had a twofold purpose:

1. To increase self-awareness in the participants
2. To apply a quantitative correlation to the participants' discourse in terms of increased experience of resilience during the course of our journey together. Conclusions were never drawn from the numbers in isolation from the accompanying discourse.

The health check took the form of 45 questions, organised around the 5 categories and 15 subcategories in Figure 4 and carried out at the start and end of the course. We asked participants to indicate how close to their ideal they were in each area on a scale of 1 to 10. We allowed participants to comment on their numbers if they so wished. The table in Figure 8 is colour coded red, orange, green, white from lowest to highest to aid quick viewing. In the commentary that follows, we have interspersed statistical analysis with participant discourse in italics, changing names to protect anonymity. PQ = Participants Questionnaire, J = Journal, GS = Group Session, CS = Coaching Session, V = Video)

### **What do the numbers in figure 8 suggest?**

Firstly, the overall increase in scores by an average of 14.8% suggests that participants were feeling significantly more resilient at the end of the course than at the beginning. Daina showed a very high variance at 41.2%, and in our final session told a powerful story of transformation. John (2.1%) and Mark (5.9%) also attributed some of their increased scores to a move closer to their ideal. It was clear from the discourse during the health checks that some numbers had either gone down or their increase had been depressed due to increased self-awareness and/or higher aspirations as a result of deeper understanding. So the shift represented by these score increases is probably understated.

Secondly, the standard deviation between the two sets of subcategory scores dropped from 2.5 to 1.7, indicating the tendency for participants to see greater progress in their weaker areas. Across the whole cohort, in 13 of 15 sub-categories, the below average scores have seen above average increases and vice versa. The two exceptions are optimism and self-awareness, where above average initial scores have seen above average increases.



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## Abstinence

The biggest percentage score increase in any subcategory was in the area of abstinence (34%). The question “How good are you at saying no?” saw increases between 2 and 4 for all six participants, and “To what extent do you experience inner peace?” saw increases of between 1 and 5 across all six. The third “abstinence” question “How good are you at resisting what’s bad for you?” saw no significant variance.

Abstinence	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Mark	10%	21	23
John	13%	23	26
Jenny	19%	16	19
Jason	35%	20	27
Daina	53%	15	23
Tim	110%	10	21

This suggests that our participants were getting better at saying no to things which are not bad per se, but may not be the best, more focused on doing the right things to align with their goals and values.

The reported improvement in inner peace reflects our emphasis on mindfulness/soulfulness, which was highlighted and practised in various ways on each of the four days. This is about abstaining from noise, excessive busyness etc.

*(What changes have you experienced during the programme...)*

*Tools: Journal... boundaries.*

*More soulfulness and reflective thinking. Much more outdoor/nature walks.*

*(Daina - PQ - GS4)*

Our biggest focus on self-discipline was on Day 3, through an action learning challenge in which participants were asked to design and teach a session on self-discipline. Tim threw himself into this challenge in a very creative way.

*This group session felt a lot more relevant and applicable in life, enabling me to take solid thoughts and ideas to implement. Self-discipline is definitely something I want to improve for the good of me and my family. The interactive and dynamic approach made it more engaging, more appropriate to my learning and very very beneficial.*

*(Tim - J - GS3)*

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## Friends

The second highest subcategory increase was in the area of friends (28.4%). We explored the layered diagram in figure 3 above, and payed particular attention to friendship, drawing on insights from ancient wisdom, and, consistent with the pattern emerging from hundreds of participants on other courses we have run, with an average group score of 17 out of 30, friendship came out bottom across the 15 categories, compared with Home & Family which came out top at 25.7 out of 30. Four of our six participants reported significant score increases, especially Daina.

Friends	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Mark	0%	24	24
John	4%	23	24
Jenny	23%	13	16
Tim	28%	18	23
Jason	29%	21	27
Daina	467%	3	17
Average		17.0	21.7

*I need to look at “my vision of friendship and is it ambitious enough?” and how friendships effect my resilience today? Look at my friendships in depth - who have I given permission to speak into my life and who is trespassing? (Daina - J - GS2)*

*The last resilience session on 24th May [GS2] really made me dig deeper than I have ever before. “Friendships” really kept challenging me and my thoughts and behaviours towards my friendships. The fact that I had very little friends for my 45 years of existence didn’t quite worry me. It was more to the fact that my quality vs quantity was being challenged. I now realised following a “true friendship” review that mine weren’t friendships at all. They were partnerships or “functional” relationships in that they were 99% based on my efforts and what I do for them. I then questioned how this could be even though it did speak volumes on how over the years when I’ve been through seasons where I couldn’t do or perform for people they were nowhere to be seen. (Daina - J CS2)*

*I have moved away from my friends, now no close friends within an hour of where I live. Used to have weekly social gatherings when I lived in another country. (Jenny - Judith’s notes CS1)... Priorities for the future include going back to Namibia for summer holiday (Judith’s notes CS3)*



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## Adaptability

Third highest is adaptability (24.2%). This time, all six participants contributed to the increase.

Adaptability	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Mark	4%	24	25
John	8%	24	26
Tim	20%	20	24
Jason	23%	22	27
Jenny	28%	18	23
Daina	69%	16	27

Jenny, Jason, Tim, John and Mark considered that they had become notably better at responding to criticism.

*Having reflected on one of my personal aims from the project (trying not to make others feel uncomfortable if they discover an error of mine) I have found myself being much more conscious of reacting appropriately when such situations arise. The fact that I am now aware of how I respond is making me really 'think' before acting and seems to be the first step to me changing my response in certain situations (John - J CS3).*

Daina and Jason think they are notably better at using reflective thinking to reinforce learning.

*I would reflect on things for work and for other people to help them, but self didn't come into it. The reason why I am so emotional when I come to these courses is because it's the first time ever in my life that I've come and it is about me (Daina - J GS4)*

Daina, Jenny and Jason think they are definitely more active in seeking personal growth.

*[The programme has] really helped me to crystallise my thoughts about what helps me to be resilient and to focus on areas of my coping mechanisms that I would like to develop further (Jenny - J GS4).*

Tim's score increased by only one point, but his final participant questionnaire indicated that the change was significant for him too.

*(What changes have you experienced during the programme?) More of an openness to change, outside support and putting myself out there to build more positive relationships (Tim - PQ GS4).*

## Low fear of failure

Low fear of failure	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
John	4%	24	25
Mark	4%	23	24
Jason	5%	19	20
Tim	16%	19	22
Jenny	22%	18	22
Daina	171%	7	19

Next came low fear of failure at 20%, but this time there was a significant gender difference. The average increase for male participants was only 6%, while the average increase for female participants was 64%. The sample is, of course, too small to draw general conclusions, but it would be interesting to investigate further to see whether this gender difference represents a broader trend.

*I am the most recently qualified teacher. I get quite nervous when being observed (Jenny - PQ GS1). I wrote [an expectation] that I wanted to gain confidence in my abilities (J GS1). Little nervous at the start of challenge – to think of a task that would involve self discipline for adults seemed hard. (J GS3)*

Daina had been subject to panic attacks, and didn't make it to session 3. On the afternoon of session 4, she said to the group:

*I struggle with anxiety and panic attacks which are unpredictable but really don't want to miss this opportunity to grow because of it (PQ GS1 - Daina)*

*It's hard to think that for 36 years I've been afraid, crippled emotionally, mentally and spiritually about things that were not my fault. But now that all is out & I am down I know the only way is up and I get to write my own story with God's will for my life being the blueprint. Over the months I have realised that I have a destructive cycle of thinking that needs to be broken to enable me to become more resilient – at least to get back to the survival position at least.*

*No longer will I:*

*Feel guilty when doing something for me*

*When feeling better or stronger be quick to give my energy to others than spend it on me or my family unit*

*“fearful” of letting people down*

*Value people's feeling or expectations more than my own*

*Old feelings of fear and people affecting my thoughts and actions today.*

*[To the group] I just want to thank you. I'm so glad I didn't abort the journey and get off the train, because telling my story, and listening to you guys' stories, I can actually feel the weight lifted off me. I'm ready to embrace my future now and not live so much in that fear and anxiety. (Daina - V GS4)*

Despite the modest numerical indicator above, Jason’s discourse suggested a higher level of significance.

*[The course] has evoked a fearlessness in my approach to life (Jason - J GS4)*

In Jason’s case, however, the numbers become hard to interpret, for he seemed to equate fear of failure with the drive to achieve. This version of fear of failure appears to energise him rather than paralyse him, and he has both achieved a lot in his life, and had to deal with a period of non-achievement due to family responsibility. Despite his comment above, low fear of failure has become by far his lowest score in the final health check as all his other scores have moved upwards. It is unclear at this point whether this remains a weakness to work on or whether it has more to do with how the question is interpreted. This could be connected to the major paradigm shift Jason has undergone in his value system during the timespan of the programme, which he refers to as his "journey towards Christianity".

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## Faith and Values

Faith and values came next at 19.2%, but with more variation across the board, ranging from 0% to 50% increases. Not surprisingly, those who indicated more dissatisfaction initially tended to report the greater increases.

Faith & values	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
John	0%	25	25
Mark	12%	26	29
Daina	10%	20	22
Jenny	15%	20	23
Tim	183%	6	17
Jason	200%	9	27

Tim and Jason dominated the field, and both chose “faith and values” as the area they wanted to work on in their coaching sessions, reflected in a dramatic increase for both participants.

*After an honest and direct discussion with Phil, I was able to clearly identify what I needed to think about to make everything more relevant to myself. It was clear through the initial questioning that I felt in myself that my morals were right and firm, however I couldn’t confidently say where these came from or what grounded them. My next step is to better understand my core values and what feeds these...the ‘roots’ of the tree.*

Early on in the process, Tim addressed the six questions at the root of the tree model: What drives my choices? Who/what do I trust? Who/what do I love? (See figure 5)

*These questions highlight what drives my passion....the answers became clear to me quite simply. (Tim - J CS1)*

Who is well off? Who/what is good? What planet am I on?

*These highlighted my 'world view'. On reflection, the answers to the first two questions bring out what I want for myself now and in the future. (Tim - J CS1)*

While Tim's enquiry led him to a deeper awareness of what he already thought, Jason's quest led him on a dramatic journey in an entirely new direction.

*What have I gained? Opportunity to explore what makes me tick/my values; questioning my core intentions; sits well alongside my Christian journey [which began on the day of the first health check]; coaching was brilliant and exploring deeper meaning/faith/motivation (Jason - J GS4)*

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## Optimism

With an average increase of 18.2%, this was the first of only two subcategories which started above average but still saw above average increases.

Optimism	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
John	-4%	28	27
Tim	-4%	25	24
Mark	0%	25	25
Jason	21%	24	29
Jenny	33%	18	24
Daina	125%	12	27

The scores are interesting. The initial scores fall along gender lines, with the men all scoring higher than the women. Daina and Jenny's scores each go from being below their own average to one of their highest.

Daina expressed her new found optimism in the context of her Christian faith...

*I know that the truth will set me free and in finally understanding what I do and can now work on "transforming my mind". I know and embrace this season of "transformation" for myself. I accept His healing power and know I will be restored and made whole if I stay of the path and trust Him. (Shalom) (J CS2)*

...while Jenny found a new discourse around "hope".

*I hope that I am helping to foster resilience in my children. They are teenagers now and starting their GCSEs next year. This period of reflection has made me realise that I have been resilient for many, many years but also my support networks are not quite as strong as they were in Namibia. Now that I am more secure at work I hope to work on my personal life and friendships and even be more mindful (J GS3)... I now have a much clearer 'path' in my mind that will help me to (hopefully) explore*

*resilience among our staff team...This focus on a particular aspect that I would like to develop/improve has already had a positive impact (J GS4)*

However, Jason's final score was in line with that of the women when it comes to significant score increases, which he connected to his faith journey.

Perhaps what is contributing to the gender split is a slight tendency for men to inflate their scores at first, and a slight tendency for women to deflate them. Jason was the exception. Although he thought that his final score of 29 might be overstating the case, he explained that he wanted to register a significant increase from his previous score in order to reflect his dramatically improved state of mind, self-awareness and level of optimism.

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## Self-awareness

With an average increase of 15.6%, the self-awareness increases were all in a positive direction, and seemed quite significant. The group began with a high self-awareness average and moved still higher.

Self-awareness	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
John	4%	27	28
Mark	8%	24	26
Tim	11%	19	21
Jason	17%	24	28
Daina	23%	22	27
Jenny	53%	15	23

*The models we were shown helped me identify and gave me clarity on my own personal resilience model. How I have changed over the past 7 months. Awareness of self has become so important to me – though its hard to focus on self I now know without a sense of self there is nothing. (Daina - J GS1)*

With a relatively high average initial score of 22, the average increase of 15.6% was almost half the maximum possible (36.4%). Many participants commented on how increased awareness was itself enough to bring about change in all sorts of areas. Usually that awareness was connected to self. As increased awareness was one of the goals of the health check, there seems to be strong evidence that this goal was achieved.

*Greater understanding of self-awareness, self-management in resilience. Inspired to explore about Emotional Intelligence (Jason - J GS1)*

*I especially enjoyed the session on Emotional Intelligence - the awareness of self (Mark - J GS1)*

Closely related to this, Mark chose emotional self-management as his focus to work on during the coaching sessions.

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## Empathy

The average empathy increase was 13.2%, just below the average increase across all areas, but empathy is one of six scores which moved more than 40% of the way from the initial average score to the maximum possible. This is a significant increase, but note that Tim's score has gone down by 13%. It seems unlikely that Tim has become less empathic over the duration of the course. It seems more likely that his ideal has been stretched.

Empathy	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Tim	-13%	24	21
John	0%	24	24
Jenny	14%	21	24
Mark	14%	22	25
Jason	21%	24	29
Daina	33%	21	28

In his classic book on people skills, Robert Bolton suggests that we communicate badly with people about 90% of the time, because we do not give them time and space<sup>16</sup>. If we accept Bolton's assessment, then in a population of bad listeners, one would expect people who are only moderately bad listeners to score themselves high. We chose to devote a significant part of day one to listening skills not only to seek to build those skills, but also to inspire the participants towards a greater vision of themselves as empathic human beings.

*What went well? New methods of listening. Important difference to previous techniques (Jason - J GS1)*

*The coaching session with the three chairs was very useful – explicitly requiring you to see the other person's point of view and to respond to this (Jenny - J GS2)*

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## Home and Family

Home&Family	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Tim	3%	29	30
John	4%	28	29
Jason	4%	27	28
Mark	11%	27	30
Jenny	16%	19	22
Daina	17%	24	28

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<sup>16</sup>Bolton R, People Skills (1979), How to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflict, NY: Schuster and Schuster.

At 25.7, the average initial scores in this section were the highest of all the subcategories. Yet still the final scores moved halfway toward the maximum possible, with two participants actually hitting the maximum 30.

Daina and Jenny both articulated some aspirations in this area:

*Getting family unit to understand and support me where I am...Family getting the best of me and I the best of them. (Daina - J CS1)*

*Family and friends ...often know without words what you are going through, it is good to have a shared history. I am glad to be going back to Namibia to reconnect.*

Although we did not single out home and family as a separate subject in the course sessions, our exploration of conflict management and boundaries in session 2 were clearly helpful.

*I've found lots of boundaries – which are not clear to others. Communication is the key....The Les Miserables video highlighted the role and importance of forgiveness. Forgiveness can effect change, take us out of a circle of conflict (Jenny - GS2)*

*Understanding the complexity of boundaries and how many of them are unclear/ unwritten which is what causes us every day to feel like we are in conflict. (Daina - GS2)*

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## Determination

This was another category in which the score started high and went higher. We had no particular strategy to address “determination” as such, though we did reflect a little on day 3 on the possible pitfalls of over-optimism, of trying too hard and of wanting success too badly. It may simply be that when everything else gets better, determination tends to increase as well. It is interesting to note that Tim, Jason and Jenny also registered the highest increases on “faith and values”. Perhaps there is a link between clear values and increased determination?

Determination	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Mark	0%	28	28
John	4%	26	27
Daina	8%	24	26
Tim	14%	22	25
Jason	16%	25	29
Jenny	19%	21	25

Jenny registered the lowest initial score and biggest increase (equal with Jason). Two of the goals set by Jenny were “more self-belief “and “increased self-confidence”. Her comments give us a glimpse into her own journey through the course.

*I always shake when being observed. I am a nervous person, becoming more confident. I sometimes lack hope, used to things going wrong (Jenny - J CS1). Little*

*nervous at the start of challenge – to think of a task that would involve self discipline for adults seemed hard (J GS3). Things going much better with teaching partner. Planning for the new year with a greater level of confidence. (J CS3). [The course has] really helped me to crystallise my thoughts about what helps me to be resilient and to focus on areas of my coping mechanisms that I would like to develop further. This focus on a particular aspect that I would like to develop/improve has already had a positive impact (J GS4).*

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## Moral Courage

As we move now toward the roots and trunk of the tree, we enter territory which we did not expect to be susceptible to noticeable change in the short term. Yet four of our participants reported an increase in moral courage through their scores.

Moral courage	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
<b>John</b>	0%	25	25
<b>Tim</b>	0%	23	23
<b>Daina</b>	10%	20	22
<b>Jason</b>	12%	26	29
<b>Mark</b>	13%	23	26
<b>Jenny</b>	14%	22	25

*Well I can honestly say I am still in shock. The past week events and my ability to resist old “destructive” behaviours is amazing me (Daina - J GS2)*

When illustrating the leap from 6 to 10 under “How good are you at saying no?” (one of our abstinence questions), Jason told a story about how he had been offered sex on a first date. “Previously I would have been right in there”, he said. This time Jason suggested “That wouldn’t be good either for you or for me”. But this is as much an example of moral courage as it is of self-discipline, reflected here in a shift from 26 to 29. (Jason - final health check).



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## Identity and coherence

Identity & coherence	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Tim	-4%	25	24
John	0%	27	27
Mark	8%	26	28
Daina	16%	19	22
Jason	20%	25	30
Jenny	22%	18	22

Our key device for addressing identity and coherence (the trunk of the tree) was storytelling, and this turned out to be more powerful than we anticipated.

*I have had an opportunity to reflect on my story and where I am going (Jenny)*

Daina's full story took 18 minutes to tell in session 4.

*My story is important and does make sense (Daina - J GS1).*

Mark had been reticent to tell his story because it made him feel exposed and vulnerable.

*I quickly realised I have a story to tell (Mark - J GS1). What a blessing to share and listen to others as they in turn shared their stories. I think we all benefitted from the experience. It was raw and real, often poignant, full of truth and reality. It also felt releasing to be able to share what has for me been often kept secret, hidden from view....I realise that the story I had to tell was hidden, and that this course has enabled me to bring that out into the light and therefore to reflect on it more (Mark - J GS4)*

As the youngest member of our group, Tim demonstrated a high level of teachability, and on this point he realised the power of stories and of overcoming his natural reticence to share openly about himself. Once again, his discourse indicated that his score went down because his ideal had gone up.

*Realising and understanding what everyone has been through has opened my eyes to how useful and important support networks are. I am able to move forwards from this point with a clearer idea of how to improve my life and others, through the use of resilience and transparent communication. (Tim - J GS4)*

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## Intimacy

Intimacy	Percentage increase	Initial score	Final score
Mark	-4%	27	26
John	-4%	28	27
Tim	0%	21	21
Jason	21%	24	29
Jenny	27%	15	19
Daina	44%	16	23

The increased intimacy scores were very much focused in Jason and Jenny who were single and Daina who was reconstructing her marriage after a period of separation.

*Signing up for on-line dating. Getting out more, join mixed-gender social groups (Jenny - Judith's notes CS3)*

*My husband and I are renewing our vows at the end of this month (Daina - J GS4)*

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## Engagement and Community

We said very little about these in our group sessions, and the modest average increase in scores in each case was more or less entirely focused in Daina, who was in the process of reconstructing all her relationships. She also had a strong sense of community, which she felt was significant in her life and the lives of others.

It has been our experience from previous programmes that when life begins to improve in a few key areas, it tends to improve across the board.

## Did we achieve our objectives?

Our aim was to help people reflect on, experience and promote resilience. We have drawn from both participant and employer discourse, bearing in mind that only John, Jenny, Tim and Jason were referred by employers, and as Jason was only just in post, the data from the employer was inevitably thinner.

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### Did we help participants reflect on resilience?

Numerous comments under “our findings” above suggest a resounding “yes” in answer to this question. Specifically reviewing in session 4 the list of participant aspirations articulated in session 1, the group felt that these had all been met.

#### Pre Programme changes hoped for by participants

- To understand what drives resilience
- Deepen my understanding of my own resilience
- Greater understanding – this always helps me build confidence
- Great self-awareness
- To have a reflective position on how to be resilient consistently

John’s comment...

*Greater ability to reflect and consider the importance of taking time to reflect and talk (PQ GS4)*

was repeated almost verbatim in the phone call with his (referring) line manager

*He feels the course has helped him to become more reflective (John’s line manager - post-course phone interview)*

Tim observed

*I gained a much greater understanding of what is behind resilience and was able to deconstruct it. This helped me see it as smaller aspects which I could link to my everyday life, creating familiarity and relation. (J GS1)*

This was probably the easiest of the three goals to achieve, as the theories, models and definitions are available to feed and substantiate the dialogue. The action learning approach we took integrating theory and practice helped to embed these reflections. This was well illustrated by the way in which participants owned and repeated the definition we had co-constructed when asked in their final participants’ questionnaire what resilience meant to them (See figure 7 above).

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## Did we help our participants experience resilience?

This we thought would be a more difficult challenge. We would do our best, but we were not convinced that a programme lasting only four months could make a significant difference to a person's experience of resilience. But five pieces of evidence suggest that in varying degrees we did.

### 1. A resilience self-rating in the participant questionnaires

We asked participants to rate their own resilience on a scale of 1-10 at the beginning and end of the course, via the participant questionnaire. This can be seen in the three columns on the right in the table below. Jason, Jenny and Daina thought they had become more resilient, while Mark and John thought they were about the same. Tim registered a decrease from 8 to 7 with the one word comment "educated", presumably to indicate that he did not consider himself less resilient, but more aware of his vulnerability.

### 2. The health check scores

The health check overall scores are also shown in the table, with the three most significant increases by the same three people (Jason, Jenny, Daina) and in the same order as the resilience scores. These health check categories were drawn from the resilience literature, both ancient and modern, as factors recognised as having a connection to resilience. Mark and John's increases are relatively small, but Tim's increase of 10% seems more significant.

Global scores	initial health check score	final health check score	% increase	initial resilience score	final resilience score	% increase
Tim	314	346	10%	8	7	-13%
John	384	391	2%	9	9	0%
Mark	370	392	6%	9	9	0%
Jason	348	412	18%	8	9	13%
Jenny	271	326	20%	7	8	14%
Daina	250	353	41%	3	10	233%

### 3. Participant discourse

Again, goals relating to greater experience of resilience articulated in session 1 were considered to have been met in session 4.

#### Pre Programme changes hoped for by participants

- Identify at least one positive habit to introduce into my life to create a positive change in self-resilience
- Learn something new about myself through the observation/critique of peers
- To gain more confidence in my abilities
- Enhance my skills
- To learn to accept self in this season of change

The numerical scores above were corroborated by the participants' observations about themselves...

*Really improved my feeling of being resilient (Jason - J GS4)*

...as well as the observations made to the participants from those close to them

*Over the last few months, since I've been on this course, people, family, work colleagues, people in the church and the family unit have noticed a difference in me. (Daina - Video GS4).*

Directly related to the question at the head of this section is the nature/nurture debate. How is resilience actually learned and developed? Through the participants' questionnaires at the end of sessions 1 and 4, we asked the participants to what extent resilience arises from nature or nurture. The same pattern emerged - a tendency to see nurture as the more significant influence.

To what extent do you think resilience arises from nature or nurture?		
Participant	Questionnaire start of session 1	Questionnaire end of session 4
Tim	I feel resilience is predominantly from nurture, attitude that is moulded from those around you and life events	I still feel nurture is the strongest influence, it is what you experience that helps develop your characteristics
Jason	I believe resilience is predominantly learned through nurture and experience	I believe resilience is learned but is boosted by having faith and value systems
John	I certainly believe it can be nurtured but would also feel there are different 'capacities' in different people	My views are still [the same]. Some aspects are through individual traits but some can be nurtured.
Mark	I believe we can build on our natural resilience and nurture its emergence. So both arise; it [sic] how we attend to the changes and challenges	[No further comment added]
Daina	I believe both nature and nurture have a part to play in a person's resilience or strength of resilience	I still agree...over the past 4 months I have appreciated nature so much more which has helped me so much. Because of this I've finally had my garden done with beautiful flowers
Jenny	It can be a natural trait but this will be compounded by experience and challenging situations will lead to future resilience	We can build our resilience by developing our core values and emotional intelligence through relationships

#### 4. Employer discourse

The employers expressed a similar view. Resilience may be inherited, but can be learned.

	To what extent do you think resilience arises from nature or nurture?	
Employer of	Pre-programme interview	Post-programme interview
John	Don't know, difficult to quantify for e.g if parents are less resilient will they naturally nurture a less resilient child?	Don't know, moot discussion point. From nature point of view families can affect children detrimentally (passing on genes)
Jenny	Part nature but believe mainly learnt behaviour ie nurture – reason for teaching children.	Probably more nurture than nature as teachers we teach ability to keep going and face/deal with issues as they arise. Some children are naturally more confident than others.
Jason	Nurture has very high impact as we learn from our parents' life experiences. Parents are our first role model therefore this foundation has a high impact on our resilience.	Both – do not consider nature or nurture predestined. Your upbringing does not necessarily mean that you may lack resilience. Nature is more of an effort which depends on how you are wired.
Tim	Nurture – believe that resilience is learnt from early childhood.	Feels this is a 80/20 split between nurture and nature. The former enables you to develop coping mechanism to learn from failure. Don't blame others and always seek to find positives from any given situation.

Finally, the employer phone interviews gave confirmation that significant change had occurred in our participants. John, who scored himself 9 at both start and finish had no expectation of a change in his resilience, even though we did manage to help him strengthen his response to criticism. Nor did his line manager observe any change. But each of the other three referring employers did.

Employer of	Pre-Programme changes hoped for by employers	Post-Programme changes observed by employers
Tim	To become more confident in .. own capability , particularly in situations that don't go his way. To develop better listening skills.	More relaxed. Previously would tend to be agitated if things didn't go well. Taking time to reflect and assessing post meeting performance (Tim)
Jenny	Confidence. Self-worth and belief. Ability to take criticism better. Tools to cope with pressure.	Positive towards the future. Less tearful and no longer defensive, more likely to be proactive with ideas to meet current objectives (Jenny)
Jason	Don't know him very well currently Dealing with stress. Practical tools to manage pressure/stress	Became a Christian and was baptised (Jason)

## **In summary**

With a pre-course resilience rating of 9, it is not surprising that John and Mark could not detect an improvement in their resilience. But through their resilience rating, their health check scores and their discourse, Jason, Jenny and Daina felt they could.

In Tim's case, the aggregate numbers are potentially misleading because some of his scores are moving down as a result of his awareness increasing, while other scores are moving up as he observes greater alignment between ideal and reality. His health check score suggested that he too experienced a modest improvement in his resilience.

Daina's change in resilience rating from 3 to 10 is no doubt influenced by her euphoric sense of transformation. The health check increase of 41% may offer a more nuanced picture than the 233% increase in the resilience score!

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## Did we help participants promote resilience?

### Pre Programme changes hoped for

- To manage at the next level
- Be equipped to equip others
- Feel confident to lead CPD sessions that explore resilience and help develop this in colleagues and students
- The confidence to coach others to become more resilient
- To embrace any opportunities to help others
- Tools to take forwards for self-motivation
- Expand my network

In John's case, all the evidence thus far suggests that we achieved this objective.

John articulated his expectations at the beginning of session 1 in the context of a group exercise:

*To manage at the next level*

*Feel confident to lead CPD sessions that explore resilience and help develop this in colleagues and students*

At his pre-course interview, his employer expressed the hope that they would be

*able to adopt the course for our organisation as this is a priority...Looking to see how this type of research can be used in wider organisational context to ensure staff become more resilient.*

Aware that there was no evidence of significant change in his experience of resilience, John emphasised

*"The experience bit is not significant for me. It's the reflect and promote that are really important for me." (Video GS4)*

*Now that I've completed the course, I feel I have a clear idea of what a programme might look like and what I'd like it to achieve. I intend to form a discussion group to explore what resilience looks like in our organisation and to build an ongoing programme from this. (PQ - GS4)*

And in his post-course interview, his employer talked about some next steps.

*To create a healthy workforce which will be beneficial to the organisation. We have already held a group discussion session which was well attended.*



Among the others, there were some caveats, though their aspirations around promotion/ dissemination were more modest than John's. In addition to the two expectations articulated by John above, the following were collected on a flipchart on our first morning together.

*Be equipped to equip others*

*The confidence to coach others to become more resilient*

*To embrace any opportunities to help others*

*Tools to take forwards for self-motivation*

*Expand my network*

Daina's primary focus was on promoting her own resilience into the future, and listed the following tools which would equip her for that:

*Tools - journal, friendship circle, resilience chart, boundaries (PQ - GS4)*

Jenny's primary focus was also on her own resilience. Nevertheless, she wrote:

*I now have a much clearer 'path' in my mind that will help me to (hopefully) explore resilience among our staff team and this, in turn, will help to promote the right attitudes and behaviours in the students. The coaching techniques and conflict management and emotional intelligence aspects could be used to promote resilience concept amongst the children (J - GS4)*

Mark saw storytelling as a key way to promote resilience:

*The forum this has created has given me a forum to be able to realise that my testimony is a testimony of someone that has overcome, and it will encourage others to believe that they can overcome as well. I know that it will be of benefit to others as all your stories have been to me. (Video, session 4)*

But he also recognised the challenge of dissemination within the context of the construction industry:

*How can I promote this in my workplace, in my family setting, in my church setting, also amongst the leaders I work alongside? Does this have a place in the nitty gritty of work in or on a building site? (J - GS4)*

Tim also felt better equipped to promote resilience at work:

*I have a "Resilience model" in my mind which will help me focus my development therefore enabling me to disseminate and help others. I was sceptical at points of the course but grew with greater understanding. (J - GS4)*

But Tim also added a caveat:

*However one question about the course still hangs over my thoughts. How would you go about developing resilience without using a religious reference? (J - GS4)*

# Conclusions

The research set out to answer one key question:

What has this course done to help participants build their capacity to experience, reflect on and promote resilience?

In response to the research question our findings suggest that nurture plays a big part in building resilience, consonant with the views from both participants and employers that 'resilience can be learnt'.

The level of engagement and the wealth of positive, transformational feedback from participants, overwhelmingly support our decision to adopt a dialogical methodology to the research. There was definitely a lean towards 'action learning'<sup>17</sup>.

The dialogical approach provided a safe environment in which participants could engage in open conversation, share their stories and be supported through a reflective process. Storytelling became a much more influential element of this conversation-based dialogical approach than we had first anticipated. The extent to which it impacted on the outcome for participants is well illustrated by Mark:

*I realise that the story I had to tell was hidden, and that this course has enabled me to bring that out into the light and therefore to reflect on it more ( Video - GS4)*

In the final plenary session the group confirmed that this method worked well to engage them in a journey of self-discovery through the medium of storytelling, coaching and journaling. Storytelling and coaching provided opportunities for participants to truly reflect and share their journeys.

The data demonstrates common trends, but also some contrasting outcomes between the male and female participants. However the small size of the group makes it difficult to make any significant gender related comparisons.

The health check data indicated a number of significant movements between the pre-programme and post-programme responses of the participants. The analysis of figure 8 offered in the section "learning and growing together" is based on the absolute scores and their percentage increases, with abstinence, friends and adaptability heading the list.

There is another way to view the score increases, however, which better matches some of the discourse. The higher the score, the less room there is for improvement, so the table in figure 9 shows the impact the programme has had in helping participants close the gap between their initial scores and the maximum possible of 30.

**Adaptability, optimism, abstinence and self-awareness** remain at the top of the list, with **home and family, determination and empathy** above 40%.

In the 25-40% bracket come **faith and values, friends and low fear of failure**, but also **moral courage, identity and coherence** and **intimacy**.

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<sup>17</sup> Learning by reflecting on/reviewing experience, pioneered by Reg Revan

One of the unexpected outcomes was the impact on moral courage, with two thirds of our participants reporting an increase in moral courage over the duration of the course.

Finally with less than 25% movement towards the maximum possible are **engagement** and **community**.

In summary, 100% of our participants indicated in numerous ways that the programme had helped them to become more self-aware, providing a reflective space supported by powerful and supportive conversations. 66% indicated through their resilience rating and health check that the course enabled them to experience resilience, two of whom told powerful stories to support this claim. 66% also said they now have the confidence and resources required to promote resilience with colleagues and family. Based on the findings we would conclude that the programme has had a positive impact on the participants. The programme design and delivery provides a powerful reflective process which helps to recognize and build resilience through coaching, storytelling and journaling, and participants feel empowered to share their learning with colleagues in order to positively promote resilience in their place of work.

Health Check Summary as progress towards 30			
	Initial average score	Final average score	Distance travelled towards max possible
Adaptability	20.7	25.7	53.6%
Optimism	22.0	26.0	50.0%
Home and family	25.7	27.8	50.0%
Abstinence	17.5	23.2	45.3%
Self-awareness	21.8	25.3	41.8%
Determination	24.3	26.7	41.2%
Empathy	22.7	25.7	40.9%
Faith and values	20.0	23.8	38.3%
Friends	17.0	21.8	37.2%
Moral courage	23.2	25.5	34.1%
Identity&coherence	23.3	25.5	32.5%
Low fear of failure	18.3	22.0	31.4%
Intimacy	21.8	24.2	28.6%
Engagement	22.7	24.3	22.7%
Community etc	21.8	23.2	16.3%
Average increase			37.6%

Figure 9 **Recommendations**

When we asked participants what they would change, they were very clear that they would change nothing. Each of the four sessions made a vital contribution to the whole, and the coaching sessions in between were critical in making the journey more personal.

During the feedback sessions with the group we also discussed the future of the programme. These were then incorporated into our discussions to form the following recommendations.

- The feedback and impact of the programme supports the view that we should retain the current structure and the timing of each element. Coaching and storytelling should be recognised as key drivers in a reflective, conversation based programme, underpinned by clear theoretical and contextualised information.
- The programme has a high level of flexibility and could be made available to a wider audience. It could also be adapted for further and higher education students at critical transitional phases in their development.
- The programme should be delivered with small groups of 6 -10 as group dynamics have a significant impact on the quality of conversation and provides the opportunity to share experience in an environment that feels safe.

- We should consider enhancing the use of the Health Check to assess the distance travelled and to gain a better understanding of the numerical movements and how that relates to changes in behaviour.
- We should include conflict management and emotional self-management in the health check.
- All participants should receive a follow-up interview nine months after the end of the programme to assess the level of continued growth and sustainability.

## Appendix: nine months on

An obvious question to ask is how were our participants faring nine months later? We were able to make contact with four of our six participants, and with these four we conducted one more health check, with interesting results.

Figure 10 shows the graphical summary of results of the original health checks at the start (blue) and end (red) of the course for just these four participants. Visually we can see that each subcategory score has gone up roughly by three points, depicting the 15% average increase across the board referred to in the report above.

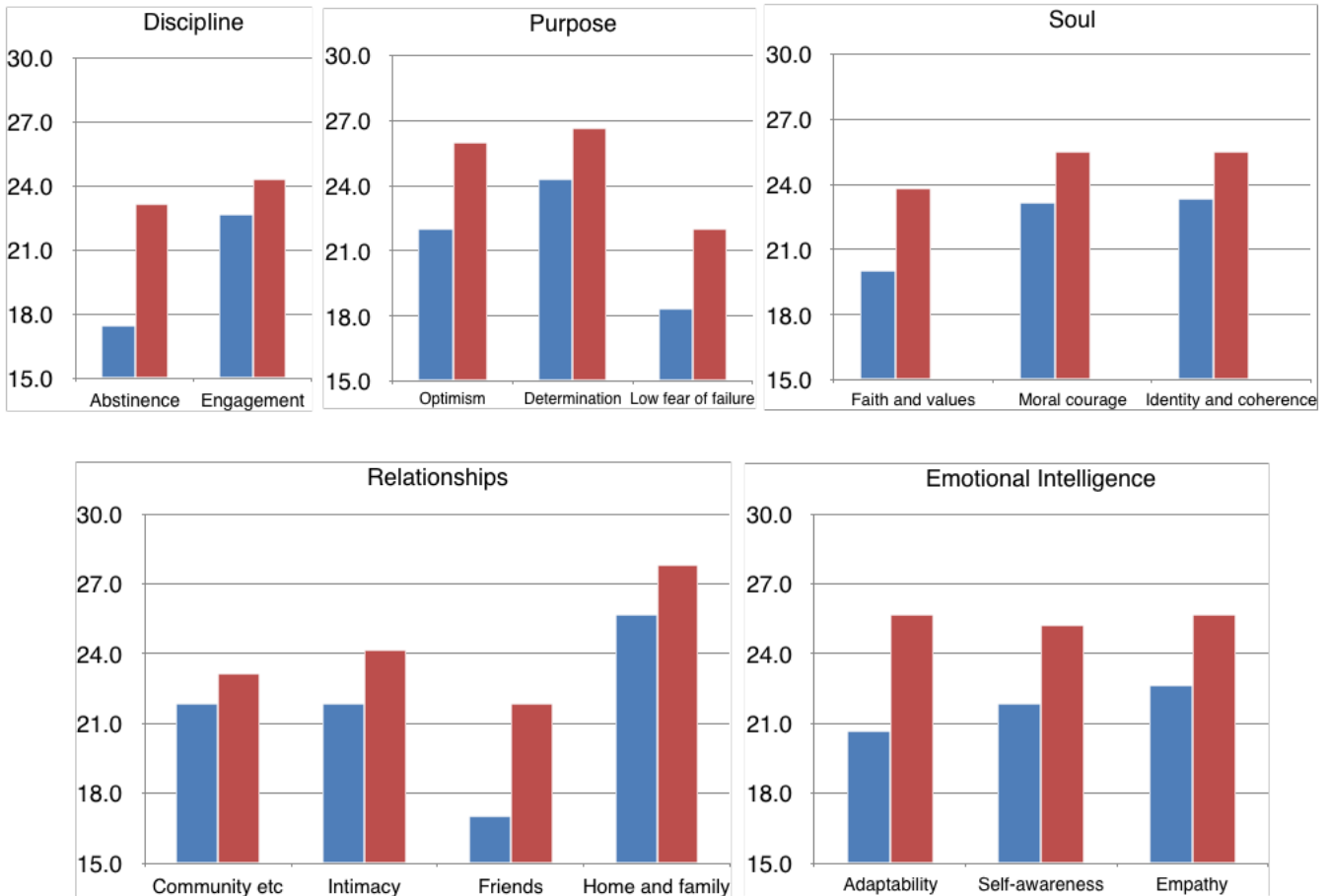


Figure 10

Ten months on from the end of the course, with the memory beginning to fade, we might have expected these scores to tail off a little, but hopefully not down to their original levels. So what did happen? Figure 11 shows the progression across all three scores, with the third set shown in green.

Three scores did indeed drop slightly (engagement, determination, faith and values), but none by as much as a whole point, and none of the participants attached any real significance to this.

The remaining twelve scores continued to rise, half of them rising by more than 1.5 points, and participants did attach significance to some of these increases. So the overall picture is not at all one of scores tailing off. On the contrary, they have continued to rise.

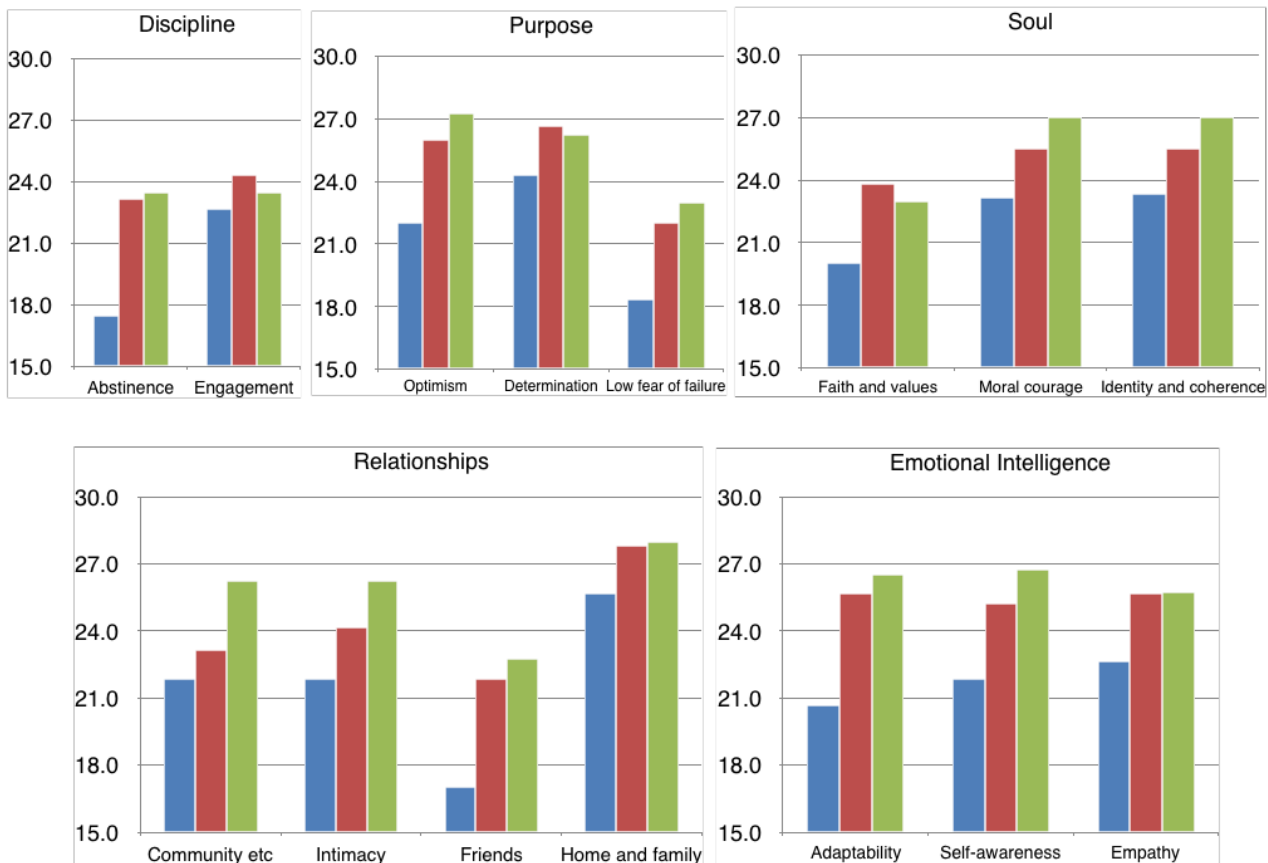


Figure 11

All four felt that they had lived with a heightened sense of awareness around resilience since doing the course. For John, this continued to be about how to build resilience in the school context, and his determination remained despite the hindrance of some staff short-ages. His own resilience scores remained fairly stable across all three health checks.

For the other three, this was expressed in an increase in their own self-awareness, with an average final rating of 9 out of 10 over the three self-awareness questions.

For Tim, this had a knock-on effect in the area of intimacy, as he consciously applied the material we had discussed around relationships and emotional intelligence to his relationship with his partner following the birth of their first child.

Daina commented on how her boundaries were now *“rock solid”* something we had explored particularly on Day 2 of the course. Her husband had finally left her two months previously, but whereas previously she would have fallen apart, she now felt strong enough to ride the storm, and not to take responsibility for her husband’s decisions.

In response to the observation that his overall resilience self-rating had remained at 9 out of 10 from the start to the end of the course, with not much room for further growth, Mark commented that it was now *“a more certain, more self-aware, less clandestine nine, as my story is no longer a secret”*. Mark had also encountered a situation in which greater moral courage was needed, and he felt that the course experience had contributed to his resolve.

Mark summarised his feeling around the dinner table at our one year reunion:

*“This is the best course I’ve ever been on”*.