

# Managing the Stress Arc:

**Using Evidenced Based Cognitive  
Strategies for Training Employees  
in Industry to Deal with Large Scale  
Disaster and Rapid Change**

*Dr. Rodney Luster*

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An examination of adaptive tactical strategies to help modify emotional stressors experienced as a result of pandemic onset and exposure to rapid onset of change (ROC).



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**The University of Phoenix Career Institute™** develops research-based solutions that break down broad, systemic barriers Americans face in their careers. To inform its ongoing mission, each year the Institute fields the Career Optimism Index™, one of the most comprehensive studies on career perceptions to-date, providing insights into workforce trends to identify solutions that support American workers. Authored by University of Phoenix College of Doctoral Studies researchers and faculty, this whitepaper series explores the research from the Career Optimism Index at a deeper level, exploring the “why” behind the data.



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# 1. Executive Summary

To date, the United States alongside other countries, have struggled with the scope of pernicious disaster phenomena that affects the psychological and physical lives and well-being of most people. Most recently this comes in the form of natural disasters and weather, such as the recent winter freeze that effected much of the United States and many Texas residents without. Add to this the COVID-19 pandemic which began last year and has become the agitator for much of the psychological destabilization in America today and you have the makings of a complicated psychological storm, where human lethality potentials increases for many effects like suicide, family violence, divorce rates and deaths.

“Symptoms of anxiety disorder and depressive disorder increased considerably in the United States during April–June of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.”

With the recent impact of weather in Texas, many hospital staff who have not only been dealing with the COVID-19 issues had to also endure the ominous prospects of rolling power surges and operating with alternative strategies for water outages. Grocery stores and fast-food restaurants also attempted to find ways to help circumvent the impact and deal with the surging issues of this most recent natural disaster in Texas. These leaders and workers, most notably in healthcare, have had to deal with the most tenacious aspects of stressors affecting their industry and lives as a result. But how are employees, most primarily in healthcare, trained to endure and deal with the enormous magnitude and psychological gravity of what they have been exposed to over the past year? As well, what preventative programming has this industry learned to do well to maintain focus, to challenge the erratic and most often spontaneous nature of issues which have struck hospitals recently and how can other industry leaders learn from this group to train their staff to learn to use such strategies to navigate their own industries with the same potency as healthcare?

This white paper will cover the psychological and functional implications of impacts felt around the country, including the most recent in Texas, moving to an introduction to the stress arc, examining psychological adaptability and strategy for managing the stress arc and finally, how industry leaders outside of healthcare can utilize these system dynamics in renegotiating strategy and helping their employees in times of rapid onset of change due to crisis events.

## 2. How should this information be used by leaders?

This white paper and its integral tactical capacities may be used by industry as a “provisioning” guide to help leaders not only understand the compounding elements of stress and its challenges to employees during crisis, but also as a means to developing and fostering better preventative programming optics that inform strategies for their unique industry positions. By utilizing this white paper’s key psychological insights, leadership in the various industries can augment the resiliency and lives of their crucial human capital by better supporting employees in the face of demands incurred as a result of rapid onset of change (ROC) events that influence the vital core of the mind’s executive functioning potentials of focus, logic and decision-making strategy. These guiding principles can be used for a variety of industries from grocery stores to restaurants to education including teachers and other paraprofessionals, as well as for student resourcing.

### **This white paper defines two core solutions areas:**

- Knowledge management
- Preventative programming measures for leaders in industry outside of healthcare

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Taking a mindful approach for understanding our complex psychology and general physiognomy is more of an imperative than it has ever been, as we begin to, as a country, struggle for ways to renegotiate the challenges of living daily for healthier outcomes in tandem with a current confluence of life challenges. Internal to this white paper is a brief technical overview of the psychological underpinnings of engaging adaptational strategies to help foster better emotional regulation techniques for many workers, staff and even students currently experiencing “diminished” emotional regulation capacity, stress impacts and fear-based reactive symptomology.

As well, the key components of evidenced-based psychological tools for strategic and tactical provisioning that can be used immediately to help educate and broker cognitive resources amidst the continuity of social impacts which began their onset in 2020 and currently continue into 2021. Written by Dr. Rodney Luster, a practicing psychologist and licensed counselor trained at Johns Hopkins in Trauma and Disaster Preparedness, with insights from real-time strategic engagement and tactical practices utilized by healthcare experts and psychologists from industry who have studied current phenomena, this paper can be utilized to produce and foster new adaptive ways of engaging stressful events.

By engaging psychological pragmatics utilized during rapid onset of change as a result of rapid impact phenomena such as destructive weather, disaster relief, emergency situations and unintended social incursions, leaders can learn to help their employees lead a better quality of life on and off the job.

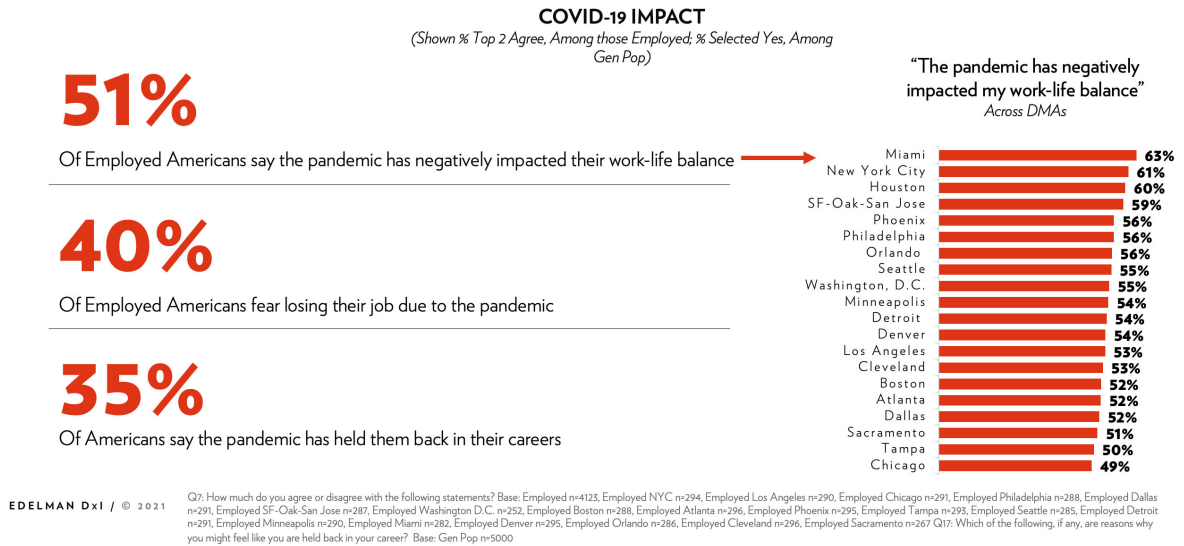


# 3. Introduction

To date, the evidence of compromised mental health and well-being and the consequences of durated exposure to a variety of lethal phenomena have begun to take its toll on the general populace. The unbridled tenacity of social ingressions experienced in the past year have become unprecedented, and the burden to the psyche has not been without costs. An example based on data obtained from the University of Phoenix Career Institute’s Career Optimism index that surveyed 5,000 nationally represented adults with oversamples of 300 adults in the top 20 metropolitan regions of the United States, reflects the following:

Figure 1:

## THE PANDEMIC HAS DISRUPTED WORK-LIFE BALANCE, HELD AMERICANS BACK IN THEIR CAREERS, AND THEIR GRIP ON THEIR JOBS FEELS TENUOUS



## 4. What do we know about how stress is affecting workers in various industries?

Stressors can be brought on by a variety of social and natural incursions such as divorce, life balance, mental illness, work conflicts, familial issues, traumata experienced and a host of natural elements such as inclement and dangerous shifts in weather, earthquakes, fires and health challenges. With recent urgent trends that have compounded matters such as COVID-19 and extremes in weather alongside social issues, American workers are feeling the pronounced effects in mental health.

“The vast majority of American workers say they are stressed, more than a third say that their job is harming their physical or emotional well-being, 42% say job pressures are interfering with their family or personal lives, and half report more demanding workloads than they had a year ago.”<sup>3</sup>

Notable conclusions drawn from the “Attitudes in the American Workplace VII,” survey poll by The Marlin Company are that a staggering 80% of workers feel stress on the job, in addition to nearly half that report the need for assistance and the need for help in learning how to negotiate stress. Another 42% reported they feel their coworkers could benefit from assistance.<sup>3</sup>

In 2021, the burden of stressors has accumulated, impacting how people functionally deliver their job given social distancing and the pandemic. Results from a study by Oracle and Workplace Intelligence, where more than 12,000 employees, managers, HR leaders, and C-level executives across 11 countries were surveyed, revealed some disturbingly compelling effects. Overall, the survey outcomes reported that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic increased workplace stress, anxiety, and burnout for the majority of people globally, where 70% said “they were more stressed and anxious at work than ever before.”<sup>4</sup>





In addition, researchers at Texas A & M utilized a professional quality of life survey to engage students and faculty about their mental health during the COVID-19 crisis and found that “all participants scored at the 80% chance of incurring a major health breakdown within the next two years.”<sup>5</sup>

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To additionally note, the vicarious traumatic reactivity and nature of the situation was also underscored and captured in the survey where these same participants also related evidence of scoring “high in compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the most compelling events on workers has been the exhaustion of the Texas freezing snowstorm in February that has seen over 47 deaths and counting as of the date of the white paper. A photo that went viral on the internet, captured in San Antonio, Texas at a local Domino’s Pizza, displays the exhaustion of two workers after a four hour frenzy of customers seeking food that dwindled down a volume of supplies that should have lasted for days, within a matter of hours. The stress and exhaustion of employees was captured in a now moving photo of the impact to the workers.



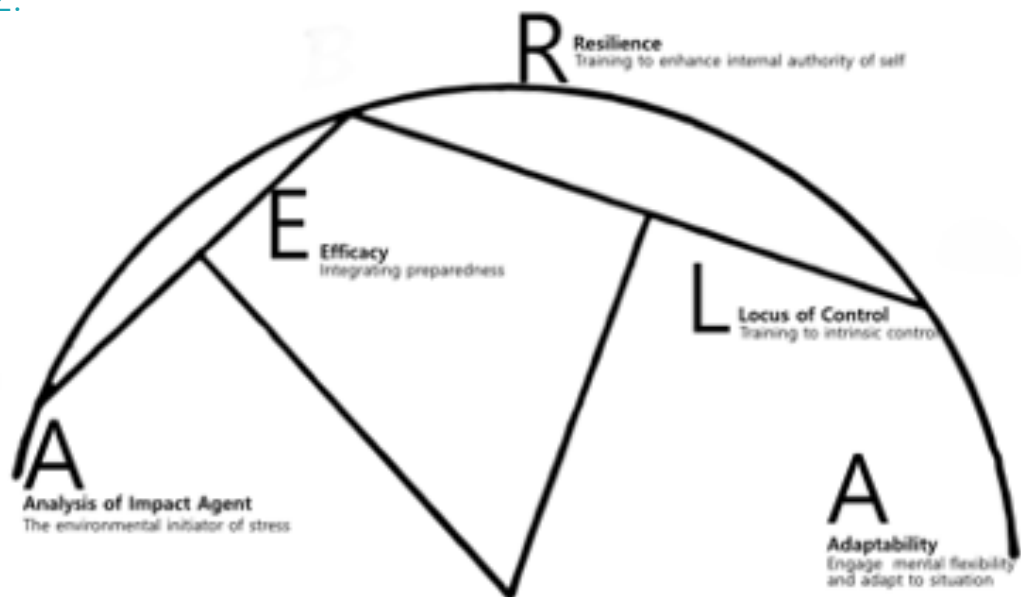
## 5. Introducing the “Stress Arc”

As of late, the inclusion of rapid change conditions in the lives of many has become the norm. Amidst great social unrest, a pandemic of monolithic proportions, disastrous weather changes, and circumstances that continue to perpetuate economic instability, society at large has struggled with “adaptability” on this scale and magnitude.<sup>6</sup> A large aspect of being human is that our bodies work on balancing complex homeostasis while also being continuously confronted by other factors occurring externally. Just as change occurs, our body responds and reacts to change. When change happens swiftly, the body also responds rapidly to keep pace, where internal nitrosative states that attempt to balance conditions are suddenly thrown into an activation sequence, thus ratcheting up the stress response.<sup>7</sup> Also, stress habituation, or the consistent exposure to stress-inducing potentials, predominates as of late, as we are exposed to the many social variables creating stressful experience.<sup>8</sup>



However, one of the best resources for understanding how we meet stress is captured in the following stress arc developed by Dr. Rodney Luster. How to manage the stress arc is understood best by looking into that segment of society that must handle aggressive change daily in their work lives and note, for these purposes, their preventative maintenance strategies. There is much to learn from an industry like healthcare, whose workers must continuously refine their preparedness and practice for the unknown circumstances they might face daily. Healthcare does some phenomenal preventative programming that helps blunt the prospects of unintended impacts within the landscape of their inherent working processes. The stress arc [see figure 1] can help clearly distinguish the tools that help these industries emerge successful even during enormous challenges. This may allow the other industries to learn from and integrate such tools into daily practice.

Figure 2:



Each of the areas depicted in the stress arc provides insight into components that can assist us in our unique daily engagement of life. These five areas make up the stress arc and are the core components of successfully handling the rapid onset of change based on the working environments of Healthcare as an industry leader in this process.

What generally makes healthcare an industry that is more successful at negotiating rapid change conditions? If we look closely, it is truly governed by their strength in “adaptational processing.” Healthcare has demonstrated their ability to work in the wake of the most challenging anomalies as expansive as the phenomenon of the coronavirus pandemic to technical migration emergencies, adverse weather impacts, and more. Let’s begin by looking at the first component of the stress arc for navigating socio-environmental challenges.

## 6. Analysis of the impact agents of change

Most of the research available on disaster preparedness reveals the extent to which society at large is sorely lacking when it comes to a variety of emergencies that could affect working and living conditions. Texas currently has become a beleaguered state dealing with the catastrophic potentials brought on by the unanticipated effects of a winter storm. The result left power grids down, water outages and food supplies cut. Workers in this industry moved swiftly in mindset to adapt quickly.

“For Ramirez, a nurse at Houston Methodist Hospital, five years of catastrophes made the ice storm feel almost routine. Like so many others in Houston’s health care industry, the 29-year-old nurse has come to expect the unexpected – chaos on top of chaos.”<sup>9</sup>

Many healthcare workers in Texas exemplified their ability to work under such extreme conditions. As reported from the Houston chronicle, “Saldana said at least half of his staff’s nursing homes were affected by the storm, and some were unable to commute throughout the week. But he said they never felt particularly overwhelmed – the challenges posed by COVID-19 over the last year have forced staff to become more agile and they’re now used to working in unprecedented conditions.”<sup>9</sup> Healthcare, and another industry like IT, have both worked hard to develop their upfront analysis and assessment of situations. Both industries typically address egress “route-selection” strategies to engage the various ways in which to quickly route and process emergencies.<sup>10</sup>

There has been a substantial amount of research conducted to understand the behavior of humans in hazardous situations, which has helped inform those industries by understanding and refining their responses to rapid change effects.

“Healthcare and IT often implement some form of egress training to help identify weak flanks in performance; such as simulating crisis environments to train workers how to negotiate stressors to successfully egress, allowing each of these industries to help modify their pedagogical approaches to crises.”<sup>10</sup>

More often than not, how the general populace alongside other industries unfamiliar with such extremes evaluates crisis is typically from an “emotional” response primarily. Emotional reasoning can feel a lot like logic, but it is not. It is a limbic response propped up by emotion. Learning to analyze rapid change requires us to move to our executive functioning, removing emotion by engaging logic immediately. This is a huge advantage that forces our brain out of its emotional center, which takes up a huge amount of cortical real estate, and allows focus to begin to set in on the situation at hand.

Initial analysis requires we not engage forecasting, emotionalizing events or immediately reacting out of panic. It only takes a moment to assess, but it requires an awareness that the mind be directed toward moving the moment, not necessarily solving the entire gravity of the problem. Emotional schema therapy developed by psychologist Robert Leahy, explains that in order for us to understand our thoughts about what we are feeling, we must learn to “temporize” the immediate moment.<sup>11</sup> This is understanding the moment of greatest intensity will pass if we understand that all situations are temporary, which allows us to bypass the limbic-emotional reactivity state and put emotions occurring in the moment in their proper place. By bypassing this, we are down regulating emotion so that we can focus on the task at hand.

## 7. Self-Efficacy and Response-Efficacy

One of the essential components to current healthcare worker's management of anxiety and stress alongside their ability to handle rapid change has to do with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy allows us the opportunity to believe in ourselves, the idea that we can execute on things, and have the potential for success in our responses to events that occur. Moreover, this concept can be leveraged by an organization, operating on self-efficacy as a tool for managing crises and change.

Self-efficacy allows us the opportunity to believe in ourselves, the idea that we can execute on things

Leadership from organizations like the Red Cross, who must respond rapidly to conditions, understand self-efficacy from their unique institutional lens as well. Taking stock of this component of efficacy can greatly enhance our self-regulatory mechanisms, ultimately strengthening how we respond to events and translating the unmanageable into what "could be" manageable. In a study on self-efficacy and disaster preparedness, researchers Wirtz and Rohrbeck found that the greater one's predisposition with self-efficacy, the greater their likelihood to prepare for and handle challenging situations.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the researchers also found that the complementary factor to self-efficacy known as response-efficacy, or the idea that one's belief of success of a chosen response, was a strong predictor of outcome behaviors in stressful situations.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, having self-efficacy influenced confidence in response-efficacy or decisions rendered. Industry leaders who manage employees need to help upgrade this potential by further training on emergency preparedness processes that simulate situations allowing for "stretch zones." This allows room for mistakes while building confidence rather than employees learning the hard way in "panic zones," according to Khalique and Singh.<sup>13</sup> When employees are given these kinds of "safe" situations, they can learn, address solution processes and allow their own internal authority to grow as a result.

## 8. Bolstering resilience with employees

Our understanding of resilience has significantly increased over the past 10 years. Whereas resilience was once considered more of a recognized “inherited” characteristic, recent research suggests that resilience is learnable and can be molded into one’s skillset.<sup>14</sup> Resilience is our ability to bend with the stressors of life, to reconstitute, to learn from events and to thrive despite social incursions.

“Currently, a quarter of all employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, in a study on stress, epigenetics, and brain plasticity by BS McEwen, the idea becomes more apparent that the brain has tremendous potential for resilience during times of stress. He posits that this can occur when there is the accompaniment of “interventions designed to open windows of plasticity” or tools we might engage to help redirect the brain’s function toward better health.<sup>16</sup>

People in business are seeing the potentials in mental training practices for employees that increase mindfulness dispositions. Neuroscientists Malinkowski and Moore have studied mindfulness and found that such practice increases cognitive flexibility or the potential for one to engage greater flexibility and internal authority over thinking processes.<sup>18</sup> In addition, mindfulness training leads to the potential for better judgment practices, more accuracy in decision making and enhanced problem-solving capability.<sup>17</sup> What has also been learned is that resilience can be created and nurtured with some key components such as optimism; engaging balance in the ability to manage any surge of strong emotional content; having a feeling of safety; and a good system of support. The opportunity for any organization is to adopt a structured approach to mindfulness training. For businesses, adding “mindfulness” training as a core skillset to teach employees as well as seeking it out as a core talent potential raises the prospect of better engagement of critical change and reduction in mass employee stress and burnout.



## 9. Locus of control for affecting confidence states

The potential that underlies the positivity of understanding the “controllability” factor, in any event, helps us also understand how we can then affect those impacts caused by environmental changes when they happen quickly. Situations of rapid change attempt to undermine an individual’s perception of treatability because often individuals are caught off guard.<sup>18</sup>

The enormity of the dynamics of disaster scenarios can eclipse a person or institution’s perceived ability to handle a situation that may seem ultimately inevitable, and in turn move the locus of control externally, or beyond our perceived ability of control.

Locus of control is the strength of belief a person has in the control they have over events.<sup>18</sup> This is the person’s internal belief of control and for those with a low locus of control, the diminutive state can lead to system breakdown or failure to act in crisis situations successfully. For an organization, leadership must bring this to the table through their own effective modeling of what strong locus of control looks like in such situations.

So, when locus of control moves externally, we have given up the possibility of helping ourselves. Instead, we hand over control to external forces. How we are challenged by events is unique to every one of us. Exercising a locus of control ultimately comes through how we decide to view our situation. The IT industry prepares for events by assuming rapid response plans that help maintain the stability of locus of control by staying prepared and addressing variables. In the healthcare industry, first responders move through a checklist of important priorities taking control of their environment immediately as a form of control over factors in a situation.

A shining example of positive reactive behavior occurred inside of the Texas winter storm outage that effected more than 4 million Texans, where one local H.E.B. grocery outlet's leaders reacted well. On Feb. 16th, the power went out in a Leander, Texas, H.E.B. store with hundreds of shoppers inside. Leaders did not allow frustrations, concerns, and fears to engage, and they instructed cashiers to allow people to simply take their groceries free of charge.<sup>19</sup>

The story has gone viral since. What did this behavior do for everyone? For the people, the store's selfless act on behalf of its constituents demonstrated kindness and has built loyalty along with an unforgettable moment in the minds of its customers. They ensured safety by not creating clogged social distance issues in the store, they empowered employees to act altruistically, they went above and beyond in a situation where there could have been a multitude of other decisions rendered as less effective over this one, and they ensured their place in the public's mind as a community leader. The store leaders assumed a locus of control that was internally manifested and based on what was within their reasonable potentials for control, and what offered the best optics for everyone from customers to employees, and it worked incredibly well.

In our daily lives, ensuring that we can apply a solid analytical appraisal and focus on events as they arise can help us engage more of that prospect for locus of control which may also help instill confidence that as individuals or business leaders, we can handle a situation and offer better approximations on better than average outcomes. Maintaining a locus of control is essential to successfully navigate situations that arise and is something that businesses can help foster.

# 10. Adaptability and mental agility can define the circumstance

Thomas Theorem, a theory affiliated with sociologist William Isaac states that reality in its initial stages is malleable, but hard-set in its consequences.<sup>20</sup> In other terms, how we define our circumstances defines its outcomes. This kind of mental acuity provides the opportunity for growing better outcomes for people, employees and leaders. This however requires some mental flexibility in adaptation to situations and events. Learning to adapt and become mentally agile is no small task.

Adapting to the harsh elements of environment has been an essential part of the survival of the human species for a long time.

Our lens of being able to adapt can be assessed in response to the recent challenges in 2020 and 2021, where the move to ensure safety (as a result of COVID-19) brought many educational systems online. It was swift, and many teachers were hard pressed to become quick adapters of a system they may have never had any intention of engaging.

In such circumstances, those who resist the change, the event or situation become less agile almost immediately. They begin to see control outside of themselves and often recede back into fear and panic or frustration. In my experience as an administrator who has supervised thousands of educators over the years, I have noticed that teachers who are highly dogmatic and structured were, more often than not, challenged when discrepant or impromptu events presented themselves in their teaching situations. These same educators would become quickly stressed due to a perceived “lack of control” due to a change that forced the classroom environment into a different direction. Those who were not highly structured, but adopted a more “flexible” demeanor or teaching style, were more readily able to roll with the sudden change.

This adaptation has had a year’s journey to saturate and mesh with industry and struggles still ensue in the education community. However, there are success stories amidst this situation as well. But for those who have met the reality of change begrudgingly, their road has been fraught with issues where teachers feel woefully unready or supported by administrators and where resistance to adapt has been an ongoing issue for certain institutions attempting to “ride-out” the storm of a pandemic.

Teachers or institutions that have become used to the tried-and-true version of education and in person instruction are having a hard time acclimating to the online environment. For those who have seen success in teaching, they have engaged adaptability and used it as innovation in many circumstances. Adaptability is influenced by our internal processes.

*How we cope is most notably broken into two distinct channels of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.*

In a study on parents whose children were dealing with adjustment difficulties in Hong Kong, insights revealed how those particular parents and their children who migrated to Hong Kong from non-native environments relied on both problem-focused strategies and emotional- focused strategies to help mitigate the stressors brought on by dropping into a new and foreign environment.<sup>21</sup>

Problem-focused coping is concentrated on effectively addressing and dealing with a problem using problem solving and supportive measures to help confront and resolve issues.<sup>21</sup> Much of this can be seen in the readiness of IT as a vigilant industry that must respond to and plan daily for issues that can hijack their infrastructures such as cyber-attacks or emergency disasters. In emotion-focused coping, the strategy is to reinterpret a situation or event such as accepting responsibility and addressing the possibility of positive reappraisal.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps we can also look to industries such as BOSH Infosystems who in the onset of the pandemic, quickly reappraised their strengths in the wake of COVID-19 and moved to 3-D printing capabilities to manufacture thousands of face shields rapidly in order to contribute to healthcare worker's immediate safety needs. This kind of adept flexibility in adapting to situations is important to a person and organization's stability, otherwise, it becomes a house of cards and the ability to endure is compromised. People and organizations can learn to adopt problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies that allow for better reappraisal of situations and the chance to move through events and situations optimally.

## 10.1 Adaptive Bridging

Part of modifying how we react to any rapid onset of change event is to meet our circumstances with the correct situation appraisal. Too often in the practice of psychology and dealing with clients who have weakened appraisal systems, counselors oftentimes witness patients engage an anxiety spiral by locking into “catastrophic thinking” patterns reinforced by a *lack of appraisal* where processes like fortune telling (predicting outcomes), catastrophizing, and other cognitive distortions take root.

We know that how we perceive a situation makes the biggest difference. In a study on cognitions and moods of U.S. soldiers enduring traumatic events during wartime situations concluded that “resilient persons are neither Pollyannaish nor delusional; rather, they can recognize that dire circumstances are not permanent, that they are not personally responsible for the pain and suffering they see, and that change for the better is very likely.”<sup>22</sup>

Adaptive bridging requires us to psychologically and mindfully hold the reality of any internally challenging event on trial (psychic analogy) so that we question our own insights, including most especially, what is *irrational*.

Then we are able to use such reflective evidence, rather than erroneous unactual fear, to make better judgments and actions. This means seeing things as they are, distinctly, minus the distractions of aberrations and negative conjecture or false beliefs. As a result, the experience can help foster “bridging” or creating of new neural pathways, alternatives for any situation that rely on an evidence-based, facts-only, kind of processing.



## 10.1 Adaptive Bridging Cont.

An example of irrational thinking took place earlier in 2020, as the pandemic grabbed hold of public perception, igniting an insidious reactive-state in the general populace surrounding the potential scarcity of goods. The fear-based reactions of many probably sounded a lot like the following, “if I don’t find these things, I need, there will be no more.” However, what if a cross-examination of that same thought process were to occur, based on *facts*, then it may have looked more like this, “how do I know this to be true?” and “have the manufacturing plants stopped altogether or are they simply attempting to meet demand thus moving a bit slower right now?”

As a result of such fear-based reactive thinking, many grocery chains had to keep reassuring people that eventually, things would return on the shelves and emphasizing people to buy sensibly and not more than they needed, but that did not equate well for those processing in fear, and as result, limits on items were enforced to help protect the overall replenishment process. When people and organizations are hit with rapid change due to unforeseen circumstances, pulling back the veil of irrationalities can help illuminate the truth of a situation and lend clarity in ways that help inform a situation correctly over succumbing to fear-based reactions. Staying rooted in a function like adaptive bridging can help achieve a more realistically grounded mental space.



# 11. Leaders can teach employees to renegotiate positional self-agency for psychological empowerment

In psychology, we can borrow from Albert Bandura's expression of agency as the opportunity to influence one's self and functions through one's own actions.<sup>23</sup> This expression of "self-agency" is important because it means that if we understand that we each have the potential for things like self-efficacy (or, in other words, our inherent potential within) then it is feasible that we can influence and even change the course of our reactions by renegotiating our self-agency.

Moving towards psychological empowerment during crisis moments is a benefit for leaders in organizations whose staff need to feel supported and capable.

Moving towards psychological empowerment during crisis moments is a benefit for leaders in organizations whose staff need to feel supported and capable. In this, we must teach people to address old, cemented ways of thinking, with more positive and flexibly adaptive modes of thinking that are objective and under conscious control. Leaders can also help staff to re-orient their focus, by practicing "managed concern." By this, an altruistic approach that imagines the need to take care of one's self, but not to ignore ways to help others in crisis as well. Managed concern was demonstrated earlier in the year when many operational staff working call centers for companies like ATT were also expressing sympathy and support during phone calls where people may have been having internet issues.

Training and teaching to this aspect of managed concern can produce powerful intrinsic feelings for people engaging those who are scared in such situations. Knowing that a kind word can go a long way can empower staff to feel better and more invested in their own workplaces. Taking stock of those around you and finding ways to ensure their comfort by asking them questions regarding things they may need, addressing small adjustments

to their situation, are empowering tools during a crisis with a strong return for the helper. As well, teaching employees to extend that same managed concern for themselves by showing them how to practice self-care, engage focused thinking, and decentering stress can lead to reducing the potential for burnout.

There is great potential in the use of psychological tools to defy circumstances that challenge the lives of people, companies and leaders. Taking any of the tools mentioned in this white paper and applying them to yourself as an individual, to your staff if you are a leader, can help cut through irrational pretense that oftentimes governs emergency situations and move to more positive outcomes. When we inspire our own mental hygiene, there can be valuable growth and alternatives that are more productive in any kind of situation.

## About the author:

Dr. Rodney Holds a Masters in Sociology and Psychology and a Doctorate degree in Counseling with a specialization in Trauma. He is also a licensed practicing counselor in Austin, Texas, a researcher, writer and author. He has spoken around the country regarding trauma and has received trained under noted Psychologist Peter Levine in somatic-trauma counseling. Dr. Luster currently is Chair for the Center for Leadership Studies and Organizational Research for the College of Doctoral Studies and is also a Director of Research Communications for the school.

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