

# Mental Toughness - Is This Your Leadership Superpower?

Exploring your resilience and your positivity

The key to Thriving

**Doug Strycharczyk**

CEO, AQR International



# Mental Toughness and Leadership

Leadership is essentially about achieving exceptional performance through harnessing the discretionary efforts from followers:

- Determination to deliver – Purpose, Focus & Effort.
- Engaging with individuals.
- Engaging with the whole team.

These behaviours are all challenging. All require a positive mindset.

The Mental Toughness framework provides a powerful capability to understand and to develop that.



# What is Mental Toughness?

- An aspect of our personality – often hidden from view - invisible
- Describes “*how we think*” – our *mental* responses to events
- Always been known to be important – influencing behaviour and wellbeing.
- Generally, not situational
- It explains “*why we act*” the way we do



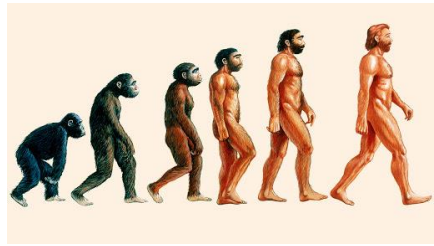
“A **personality trait** which determines, **in some part**, how individuals **respond mentally** when exposed to stressors, pressure, opportunity and challenge.. **irrespective of the prevailing situation.**” (Strycharczyk, Clough and Perry 2021)

# What you need to know

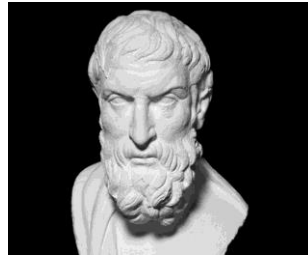
- It is not about toughness in the “macho” sense – it embraces resilience and positivity
- It is incredibly well evidenced – 200+ academic papers
- It is very practical – fit easily into coaching and development
- It “makes the invisible, visible”
- Inclusive – avoids labelling or typing
- Explains how the mentally tough can struggle and the mentally sensitive can thrive.
- It is about self awareness about why I can struggle at times and why I can thrive



# Where does it come from?



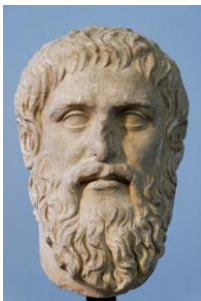
**Stoics**  
100AD



**Sport  
&  
Hardiness**  
1980's  
Jim Loehr  
S Kobasa

**Strycharczyk,  
Clough and  
Perry**  
2019  
The 8 Factors  
MTQPlus

**Plato**  
400BC  
Fortitude  
Contentment



**Stress**  
1960's  
Control  
Resilience  
Karasek

**Peter Clough**  
2002  
The 4 Cs  
MTQ48



# Is Mental Toughness Important?

It matters for individuals and organisations.

Research show a strong link between Mental Toughness and:



WELLBEING



PERFORMANCE



AGILITY



ASPIRATIONS

If we understand ourselves, it enables us to be the best version of ourselves that we can be.

This is not about being judgemental. It is about being developmental.

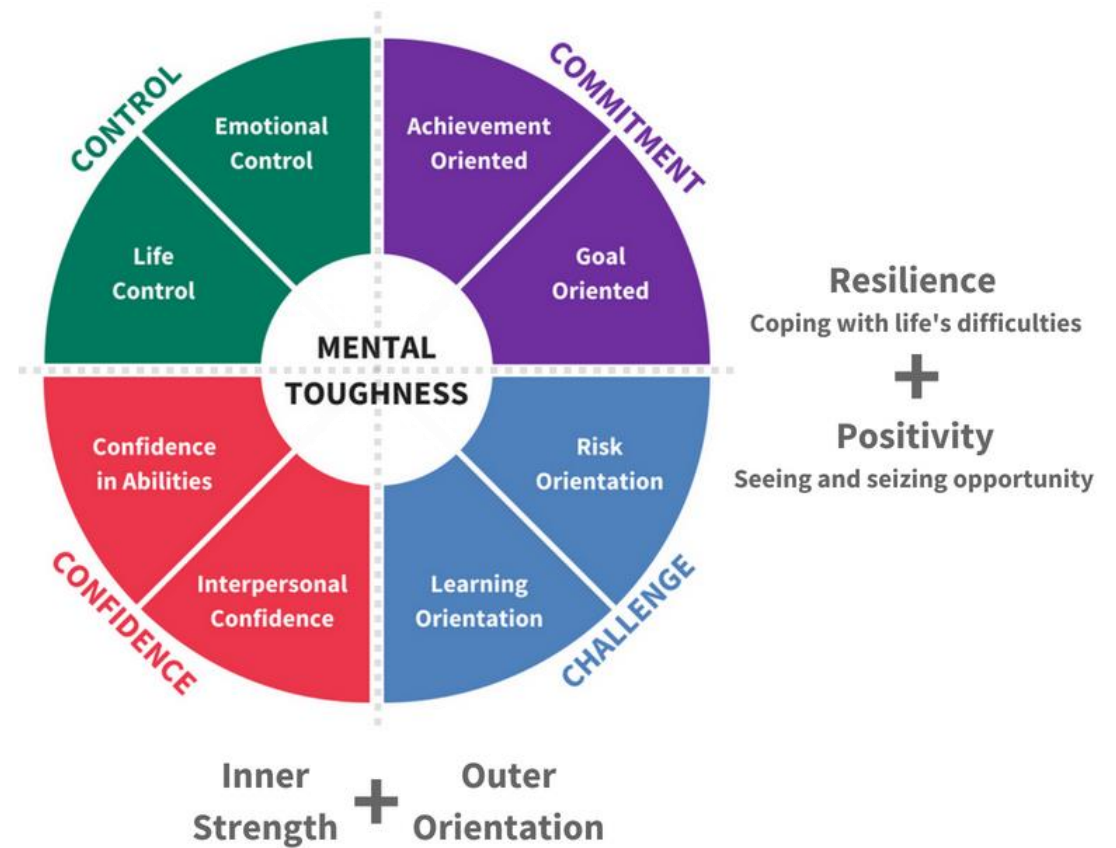


# Mental Toughness – An overview

## Overall level of Mental Toughness

- 4 Constructs (the 4Cs)
- 8 Factors

There are 40,320 combinations of these factors. Explaining how and why we respond differently to the same events.



# Control

The extent to which a person feels in control of their life. Some believe that they can exert considerable influence over their environment, they can make a difference and change things.

In contrast, others feel that the outcome of events is outside their personal control and they are unable to exert any influence over themselves or others.

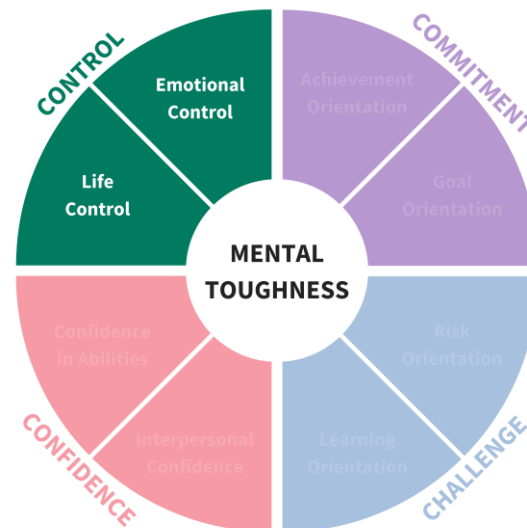
## Life Control

“I really believe I can do it”

Those scoring highly are more likely to believe they control their lives.

They feel they won't be thwarted, and they can make a difference.

Feeling accountable, they will attempt most things.



## Emotional Control

“I can manage my emotions”

Individuals scoring highly are better able to manage their anxieties.

They keep emotions out of their decisions and actions and are less likely to reveal their emotional state to others.





# Commitment

This describes the extent to which an individual is likely to persist with a goal or work task. Individuals differ in the degree with which they remain focused on their goals.

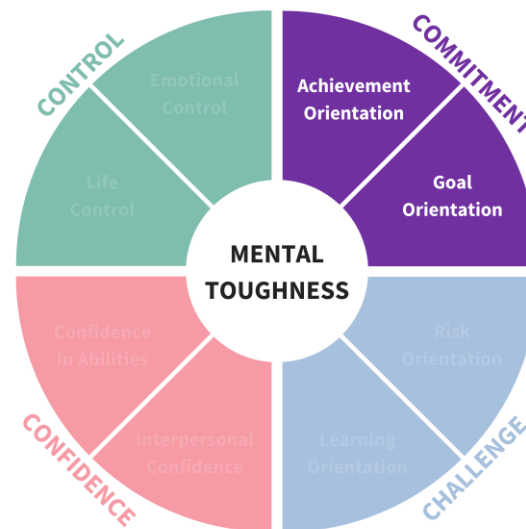
Some may be easily distracted, bored or divert their attention to competing goals, whereas others may be more likely to persist with their intended goal.

## Goal Orientation

“I have a sense of purpose”

Individuals scoring highly are more likely to visualize what success looks like, have purpose and to set goals and targets for activities.

They are likely to be effective at prioritising, planning and organising.



## Achievement Orientation

“I will do what it takes”

Those scoring highly are more likely to deliver that to which they are committed. They tend to visualize what success feels like.

They are likely to “do what it takes” and gain satisfaction (and perhaps relief) from achievement.



# Resilience

**Resilience** is generally defined as

“The ability to recover from an adverse situation”

The Control and Commitment constructs and factors are significant

However, they are:

- Passive – “I am responding because something has happened”
- Rearward looking – it is focusing on past events

Suzanne Kobasa identified something else



# Challenge

Where some see challenges and problems to be opportunities, others may see a threat.

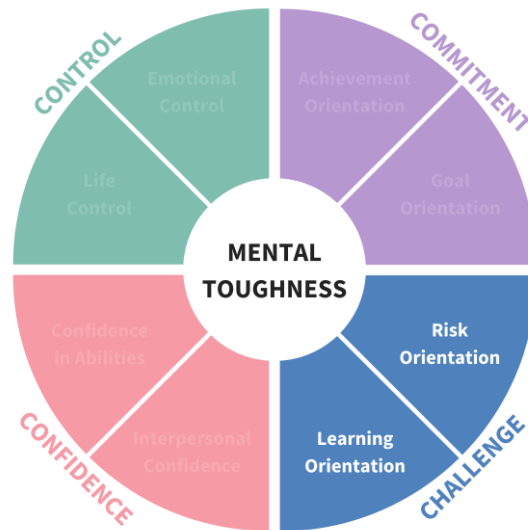
This describes the extent to which an individual is likely to view a challenge as an opportunity. Those scoring highly on this scale may actively seek out such situations for self-development, whereas low scorers may avoid challenging situations for fear of failure.

## Risk Orientation

“I am happy to stretch myself”

Individuals scoring highly will see opportunity and will be inclined to grasp the opportunity.

They are open to new ideas and new solutions to their situation. They are comfortable with change and chaos.



## Learning Orientation

“Even setbacks are opportunities for learning”

The more mentally tough learn from all their experiences – even the negative ones. They will learn from others.

Generally optimistic and solution focused, they will steadily improve the way they deal with events.



# Confidence

This describes the self-belief in ones capabilities to successfully complete tasks that may be considered too difficult by individuals with similar abilities but lower confidence.

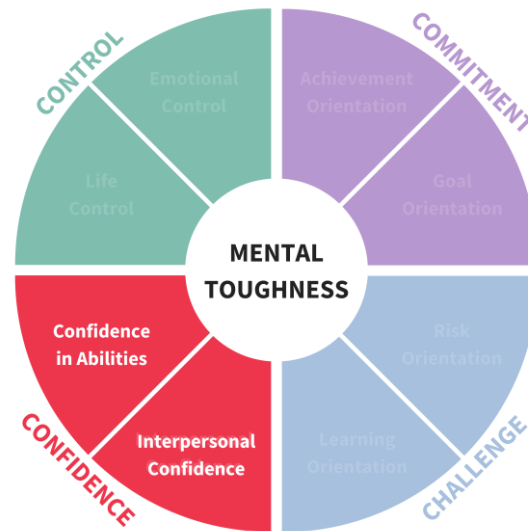
It reflects the confidence to deal with whatever happens and that you can attempt things knowing that you have the abilities to deal with all outcomes – good and bad

## Confidence in Abilities

“I believe in my ability to do it”

Some will believe in themselves and their ability to deal with life & work. They believe they can thrive because they have the knowledge and skills to do so – and can acquire these.

More likely to use those abilities.



## Interpersonal Confidence

“I am comfortable about engaging with others”

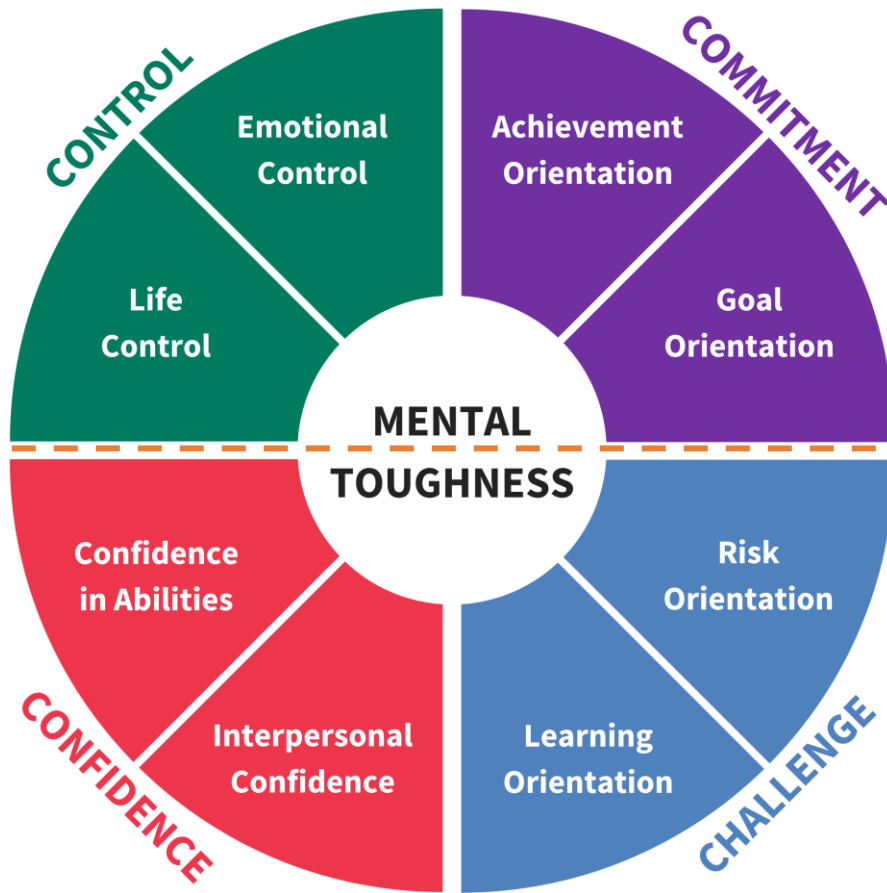
Describes about engaging comfortably with others to influence them and make the best of a situation.

Happy to ask “stupid” questions to be able to learn from others.

Happy to ask others for help & support.



# Resilience + Positivity = Mental Toughness



## Resilience

The ability to recover from adversity

- Broadly explained by Control and Commitment
- Passive – it's a response
- Rearward looking – dealing with what has happened
- It helps you to survive

## Positivity

The quality of having a positive attitude

- Broadly explained by Challenge and Confidence
- Active – it's an optimistic anticipation
- Forward looking – dealing with now and what's ahead
- It helps you to thrive

Mental Toughness embraces both Resilience and Positivity



# Questions.

Can we see the relevance of  
Resilience and Positivity to  
Leadership behaviour?



# MT - Each factor explains to what extent ...



Each enables me “to be the best that I can be”.



# How can the Mentally Tough struggle .... and the Mentally Sensitive succeed?

An example: Someone with a high level of LIFE CONTROL



Think in terms of advantage and disadvantage ... and circumstance.

They can:

- Take on difficult tasks
- Wont hesitate
- Believe they (and others) can do it
- Accept responsibility for actions

Generally, these are advantages

They can:

- Take on tasks that are too hard
- Take on too many tasks – cant say “no”
- Think others can do what they can do
- Treat those not like them as “losers”

Generally, these are disadvantages

Whether these are strengths or weaknesses depends on self awareness and circumstances.





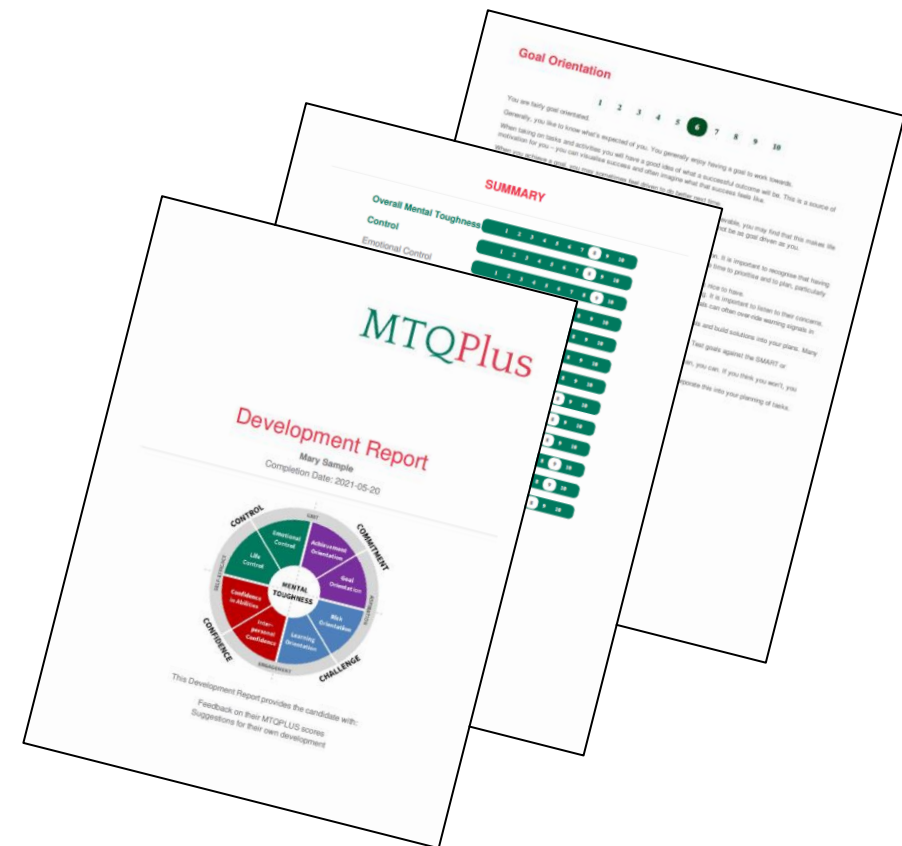
# Can we assess MT in individuals confidently?

Mental toughness is invisible. Its in the head.  
It is almost impossible to assess easily and accurately through discussion alone.

## MTQPlus

### We can! MTQPlus

- 63 items – valid and reliable
- Language set to age 10+
- 15 minutes to complete
- On-line, quick and easy to administer
- Several reports – **inc. group analyses**
- Connects individual development to organisational development
- Enables evaluation and real ROI

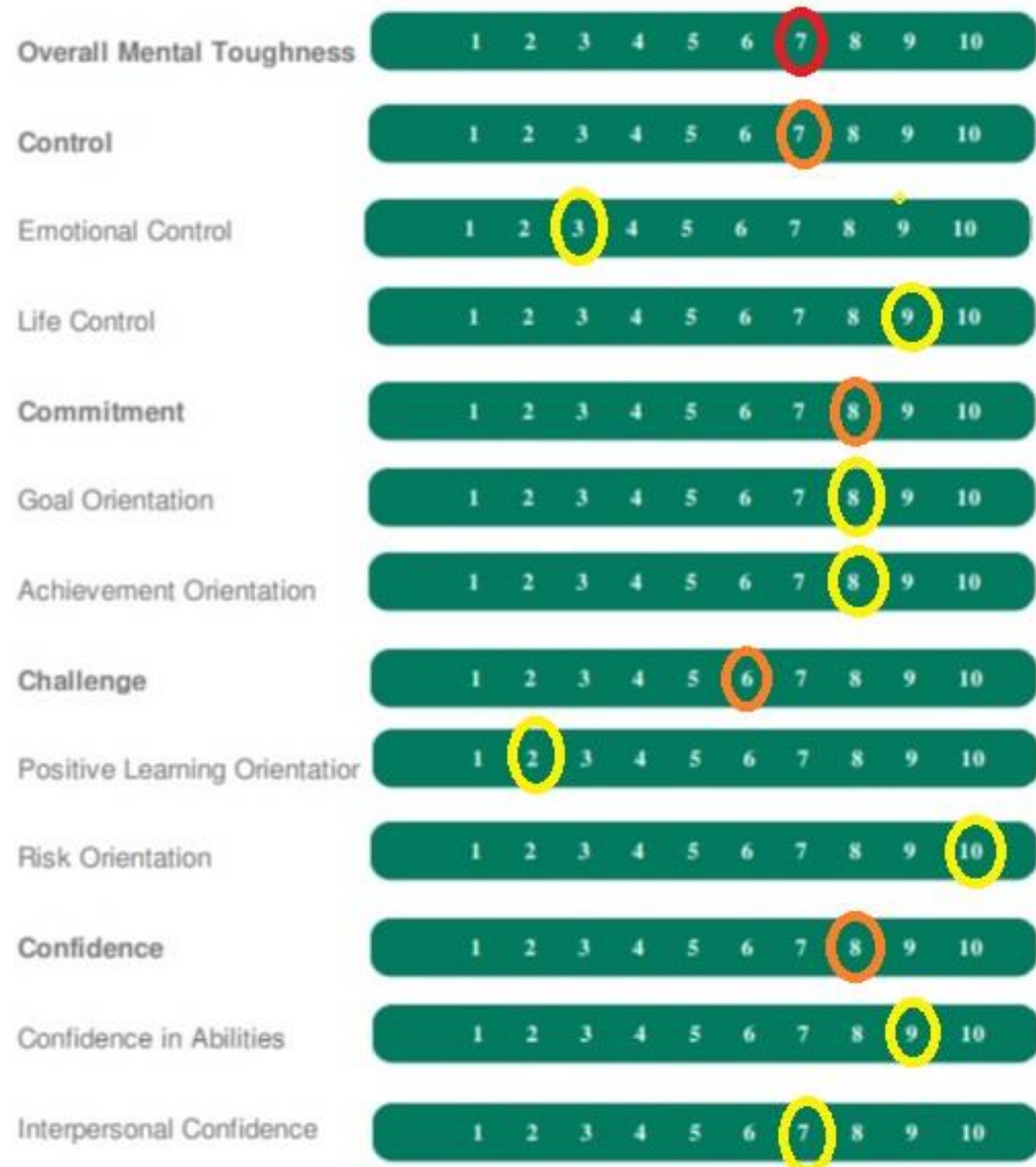


# Reliable assessment of individuals

Is this person Mentally Tough  
or Mentally Sensitive?

A real case study

It's the detail that matters



# The MTQ Measures – adding value

- Helping to better understand people, their nuances and their complexity .... and signposting for interventions
- Assessing something otherwise almost impossible to assess – “making the invisible, visible”
- Bringing a capability to assess teams and groups.
- Real evaluation of difference – causality?, did we make a difference?, where did we make a difference?, what produced the best results?, what else can we do?, etc

MTQPlus

MTQ4Cs

MTQLite



# Mental Toughness Development?

We can either:

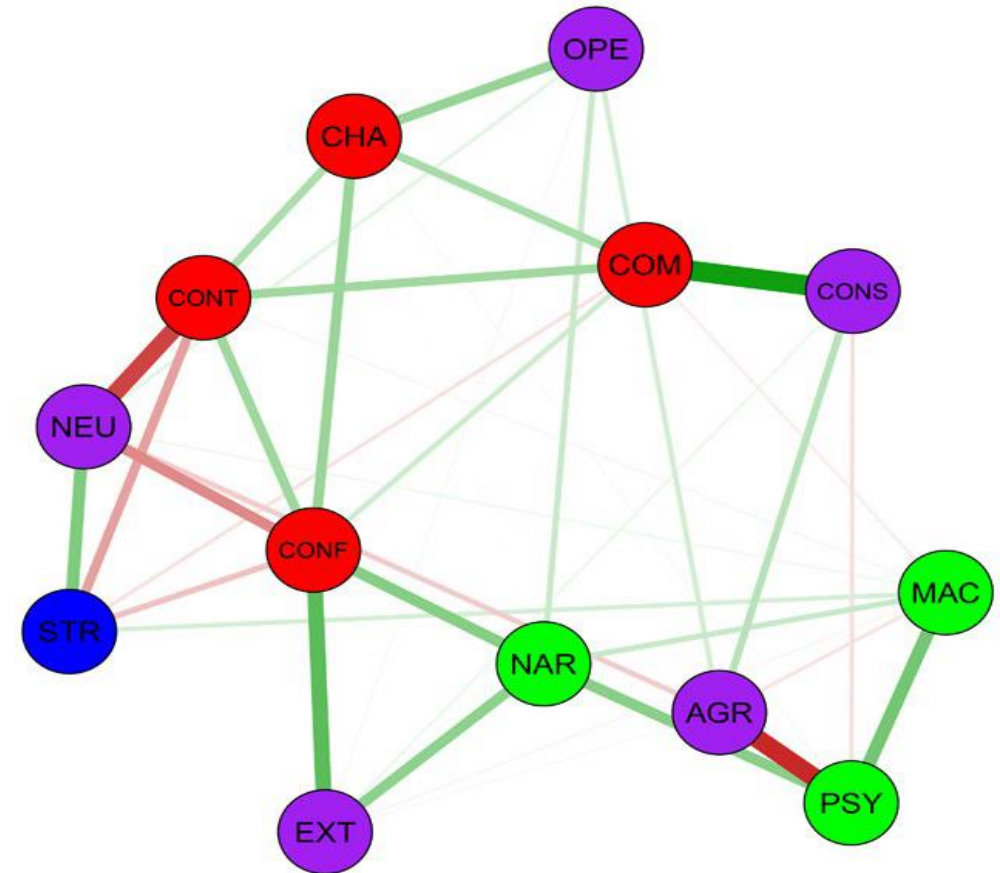
- Change our Mental Toughness or
- Learn how to cope with our Mental Toughness profile

Everyone can develop!!

Self Awareness comes first

Note:

- All interventions work. They don't all work for all people!
- They take time and practice – 12 weeks
- Commitment matters



# Mental Toughness Development - How?

6 broad themes

## Visualisation

Guided Imaging, etc

01

## Positive thinking

Affirmations, Thought Stopping, Self Talk, etc

02

## Anxiety Control

Controlled Breathing, Relaxation, Distraction, etc

03

04

## Attentional Control

Dealing with Interruptions, Attention Span, etc

05

## Goal Setting

SMART Goals, "Eating the Elephant", Balancing Goals, etc

06

## The test itself

Reflection and good feedback

Coaching is one of the best approaches.

All techniques work .... But not for all people. The clue is in the profile.



# Research – Oxford Uni – March 2023.

A major independent study embracing using a sample of 143 British organisations.  
Looked at mindfulness, coaching, wellbeing apps and courses and relaxation interventions

**FOUND:** No evidence for these programmes making a difference and in some cases they had a negative impact.

Issues:

- X Programmes were individualized but not customized (MTQPlus attends to that)
- X “One size” fits all approaches
- X Organizational context was missing – necessary changes weren’t being made
- X Who benefits – not always presented for the benefit of the individual – care and compassion ?
- X Employees feel their “wellbeing” was their fault”. “Here is a programme so that you can do better”



# What might this indicate?

## A two pronged joined up approach?

### An opportunity for Leadership

- Taking employee engagement to another level? Involvement and care
- Understanding why this matters for people under pressure
- Tools, techniques and approaches and customisation

### An opportunity for developing the Resilience and Positivity of people – which they need to embrace

- Self awareness
- An accessible simple strategy for most/many
- A more specific strategy for the most sensitive – we need them all.

### The Solution

- Customisation
- Content
- Context
- Care & Compassion



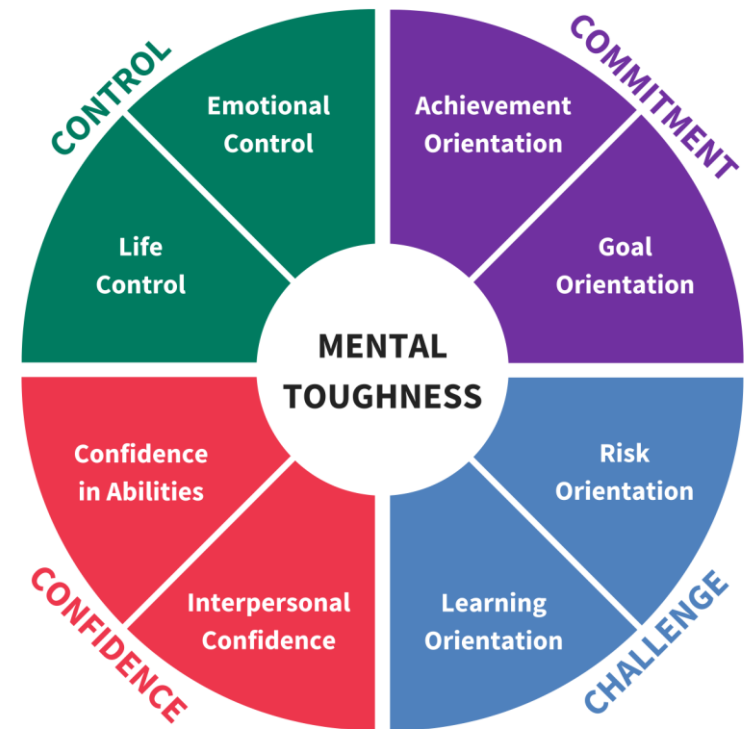


# So is Mental Toughness your Leadership Superpower

No! but ....

**... Self Awareness about your mental toughness profile is!!**

It's the key to your superpower





# Thank you for listening

## Questions?

To keep up to date  
connect with me on  
LinkedIn

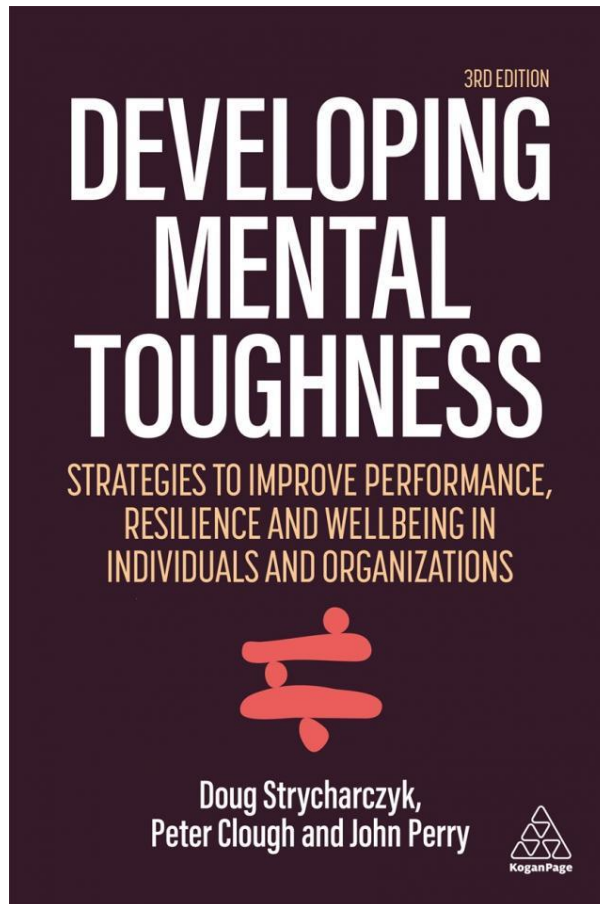


Doug Strycharczyk

For more information  
about Mental Toughness  
and the Mental Toughness  
measures,

please email

[headoffice@aqr.co.uk](mailto:headoffice@aqr.co.uk)



# FINALLY - TRUST



- AQR International together with Institute of Leadership is developing an Organisational Trust Measure
- This builds on their considerable expertise in this area
- It is a core Leadership issue!!
- The measure has 55 questions across 6 Trust factors
- Reports on how staff perceive the senior leadership team

## SPECIAL OFFER

- The measure is in Beta form. Very easy to administer
- Piloting right now
- Participate in the pilot FREE OF CHARGE this summer
- Contact [headoffice@aqr.co.uk](mailto:headoffice@aqr.co.uk) or Institute of Leader

