



Case Study - Strand B – Emotional Intelligence ‘resilience’ training as part of personal and professional development (PPD)

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Setting the scene

One strand of the Courage Project was to develop, pilot and evaluate resilience training (i.e. training that would develop skills in managing stressful and challenging circumstances) as part of personal and professional development of PGRs at the University of East Anglia, University of Suffolk and Norwich Bioscience Institutes. This case study presents one training opportunity, Emotional Intelligence

Action taken

The Courage Project organised two Emotional Intelligence workshops for PGRs. The aim of the workshop was to understand PGRs own and common emotional triggers. The workshop was particularly useful for building resilience for career success, emotional resilience and managing relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

This workshop introduced Emotional Intelligence and showed how Emotional Intelligence influences relationships and performance within a work environment. Participants worked in groups to identify their own and common emotional triggers whilst undertaking a PhD and learnt a range of helpful coping strategies in a safe and confidential environment.

This workshop was run by Dr Laura Biggart from the School of Psychology at UEA. Dr Biggarts workshop is informed by her research on emotional resilience. The skills acquired at this session contributed towards personal and professional development.

Key impacts/ outcomes

14 PGRs attended this workshop. The evaluation of the workshop was using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and UCLA 3-item Loneliness scale, as well as qualitative feedback from attendees. The scales were sent to attendees prior to workshop and then repeated two weeks after attendance at the workshop.

The qualitative feedback highlighted the importance of an opportunity for interactive discussions where coping strategies could be discussed, and experiences were shared. In addition, understanding the demands and resources for PGRs and reflecting on the demands and resources for a supervisor was important in the discussions. Attendees suggested that the workshop would be useful for all PGRs, at different stages to attend and would help in understanding that there are a range of coping strategies that can be employed to manage stressful and demanding circumstances.

Mental Wellbeing

- The WEMWBS is a 14-item response scale, each item was scored from 1 to 5 (1 = None of the time, 5 = all of the time). A total score is calculated by adding the individual item scores. The minimum total score is 14 and maximum 70.
- Amongst those who completed the survey, the mean Mental Wellbeing scale score was 47. Two weeks after the workshop had taken place, the mean score was 49.4, equating to an increase in mental wellbeing of 2.4 points. A change score of 3 or more is considered a meaningful change in mental wellbeing. On average, mental wellbeing improved. However, the sample sizes were underpowered to detect a meaningful change and further research is needed, with larger samples, in order to determine meaningful effects.

Loneliness

- This scale includes three measures and dimensions of loneliness; relational connectedness, social connectedness and self-perceived isolation. The scores are coded from 1-3 (1= hardly ever, 2= some of the time and 3= often). The scores for individuals are summed to give a score ranging from 3-9. Previous research has equated a score of 3-5 as 'not lonely' and 6-9 as 'lonely' (Stephens et al., 2013).
- Before the workshop, average loneliness score was 5.6 and two-weeks after the workshop, the average score was 5. Given the limited sample, these findings should be interpreted with caution.

A key challenge was low participation in the online survey. Getting the attendees to complete the survey before and after the workshop was a limitation of this approach and there was limited data that could be used. There were 12 people who completed the pre-event survey and 5 who completed the post-event survey.

This workshop was one of a range that were developed and implemented as part of the Courage Project Strand that focused on resilience training as part of personal and professional development. In other university contexts it would be useful to identify ways to explore emotional intelligence and emotional triggers of PGRs, as well as providing an opportunity to reflect on the experiences and challenges of their supervisors. A key lesson across Courage is that a range of different options for 'resilience' training are important for PGRs, some areas are more appealing than others to individuals and people respond in different ways to training that is designed to support mental health and wellbeing and having a range of options is important.

References

Stephoe, A., Shankar, A., Demakakos, P. and Wardle, J. 2013. Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 110(15) pp.5797–5801