Mental Toughness

The Contents

What is Mental Toughness?

Mental Toughness describes the mindset that every person adopts in everything they do. It is closely related to qualities such as character, resilience, grit, etc. It is defined as:

"A personality trait which determines, in large part, how people respond to challenge, stress and pressure, irrespective of their circumstances".

Most personality models and measures assess the behavioural aspects of Personality (how we act). Mental Toughness differs in that it assesses something more fundamental – "how we think". In other words, why we act and respond emotionally to events. It enables us to understand mindset in a very practical way.

Research carried out under the direction of Professor Peter Clough of Huddersfield University identified by 2002 the four key components (constructs) of Mental Toughness. These are called the 4Cs. In 2017, work by Doug Strycharczyk, Dr John Perry and Professor Clough, allowed the concept to be expanded to eight factors to be understood and assessed around the 4Cs. This is shown below:

Mental Toughness Scale	What does MTQ assess… the 8 Factors
CONTROL	**Life Control** – I really believe in myself, I can do it
	Emotional Control – I can manage my emotions and the emotions of others
COMMITMENT	**Goal Orientation** – I set goals and like the idea of working toward goals
	Achievement Orientation – I do what it takes to keep promises and achieve goals
CHALLENGE	**Risk Orientation** – I stretch myself, welcoming new and different experiences
	Learning Orientation – I learn from what happens, including setbacks
CONFIDENCE	I**n Abilities** – I believe I have the ability to do it, or can acquire the ability
	Interpersonal Confidence – I can influence others

It is consistent with motivational models such as Maslow and with all Leadership models providing an additional level of understanding to support development in these areas.

It is also relevant for all soft skills development such as team building, interpersonal skills, communication skills, emotional intelligence, etc. It has a particularly strong role in Coaching and Mentoring where it supports the development of a client's self-awareness of their strengths and their development needs…and why these exist.
It is also widely used in talent management programmes to support the transition to new and challenging roles.

Usefully, the Mental Toughness concept embraces a number of similar ideas such as Mindset, Grit, Character, Resilience and Learned Optimism in one comprehensive framework.

How can we assess Mental Toughness?

We are also able to assess mental toughness in terms of these components in individuals and groups through a range of unique high-quality psychometric measures in the MTQ product family.

They are normative which enables users to assess mental toughness before and after an event such as a training and development or coaching programme.

Equally importantly the measures are generally accepted as being reliable and valid through independent studies. This means that we can evaluate the effectiveness of programmes in a valuable way. If we can see a change in mindset we can more confidently expect to see changes in behaviour.

	MTQ4Cs	MTQ48	MTQPlus
Overall Mental Toughness	✔	✔	✔
Control	✔	✔	✔
Life Control		✔	✔
Emotional Control		✔	✔
Commitment	✔	✔	✔
Goal Orientation			✔
Achievement Orientation			✔
Challenge	✔	✔	✔
Risk Orientation			✔
Learning Orientation			✔
Confidence	✔	✔	✔
Confidence in Abilities		✔	✔
Interpersonal Confidence		✔	✔
Typical time for completion	5 Minutes	8-10 Minutes	12-15 Minutes
Typical applications	Organisation Development Evaluation of programmes Culture Survey	Coaching Individual assessment Organisation Development Evaluation of programmes Recruitment & Selection	Coaching Individual assessment Organisation Development Evaluation of programmes Recruitment & Selection

Why is Mental Toughness important?

Published research and case studies from around the world show that Mental Toughness is a major factor in:
• **Performance** – explaining up to 25% of the variation in performance in individuals
• **Agility** – Positive Behaviour – more engaged, more positive, more "can do", dealing well with change
• **Wellbeing** – more contentment, better stress management, less prone to bullying
• **Aspirations** – more ambitious, prepared to manage more risk

It is a major factor in retention, particularly in higher education, employability and is a key aspect of an organisation's culture. It has applications in virtually every sector. In the world of work, it is key for leadership and staff development, particularly within change programmes as well as in talent management programmes.
It is also widely used for developing young people in education, in youth work and social mobility programmes.

Can we develop Mental Toughness?

We can. We can either help someone change their mental toughness or we can show someone how to adopt the behaviours that a mentally tough person would adopt. Either way, many of the benefits of developing mental toughness can be achieved.

AQR has programmes and toolkits of interventions which suits all applications and are easy to use. The toolkits describe exercises in cue card form – these explain how to use the exercise, why it might work and how to handle feedback and optimise the outcomes.
Usefully, it fits well with much of what managers, trainers and coaches already do, enabling them to "do it better".

MTQ48 is a really valuable tool. It certainly makes you think about your performance and positive behaviour – and what you can do about both. We liked the report structure which equipped the manager/coach and the individual with relevant information and practical development suggestions.

Liz Chandler
Director for Corporate Development, Merseytravel

How does Mental Toughness relate to other concepts?

Usefully, the Mental Toughness concept embraces a number of similar ideas such as Mindset, Grit, Character, Resilience and Learned Optimism in one comprehensive framework. Research indicates that it is a fundamental concept which underpins a number of important ideas.

This is illustrated in the below image which represents the 4 Cs and 8 Factors in a way that explains several other important ideas. The Control and Commitment factors correlate with what is widely understood as Resilience – the ability to recover from an adverse situation. On its own Resilience helps you to "survive". Add the Positive factors associated with Challenge and Confidence and we have Mental Toughness – the concept that helps you to "thrive". The image illustrates how some ideas can be usefully explained by the 8 factors in combination.
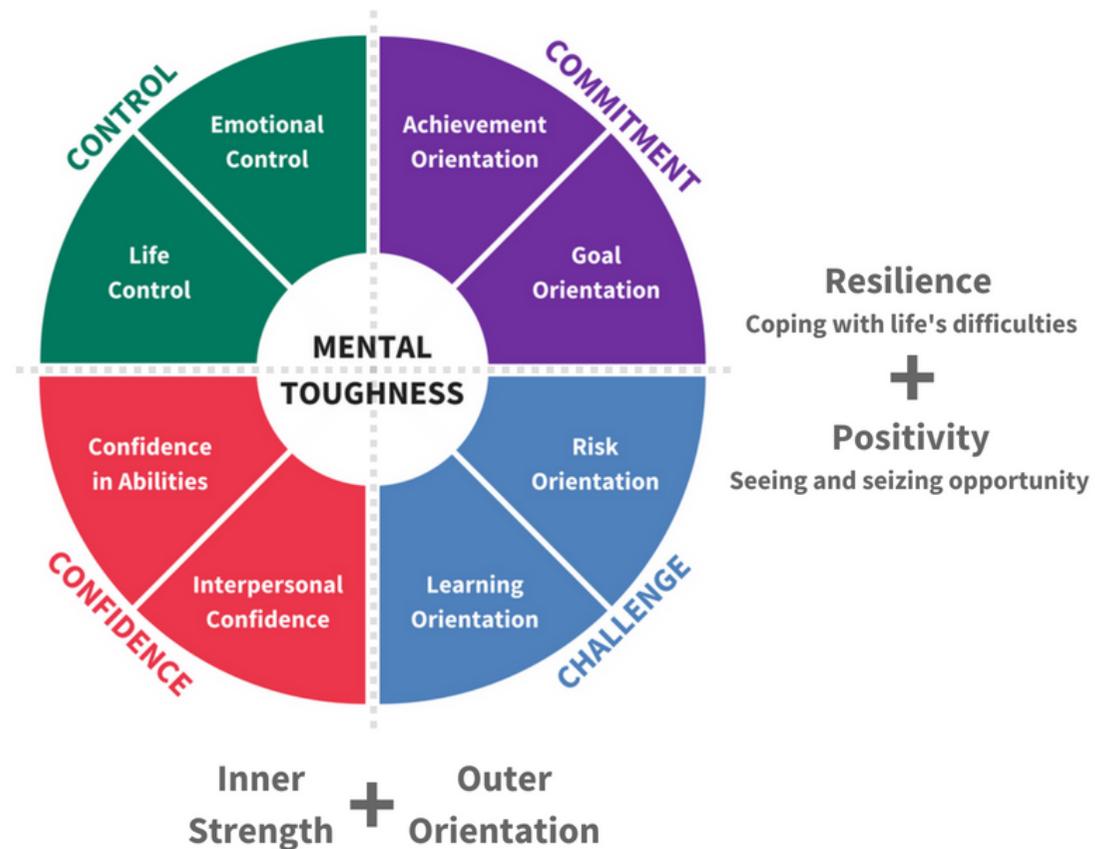
Interested in using the Mental Toughness concept and measure?

This involves completing a comparatively short Licensed User Training programme available in online and classroom formats.

There are also programmes available for senior leaders, practitioners and individuals who wish to understand how to use the concept successfully in their work.

To conclude...

AQR's work means that we now have:
• The ability to define, describe and measure an important aspect of our personality – Mental Toughness.
• A concept which is accessible to everyone and which helps to explain performance, wellbeing and positive behaviour.
• Development materials which deliver measurable results.

The result is a complete package. It applies to every aspect of developing and maintaining human capital.

Literature
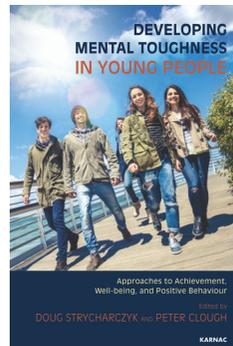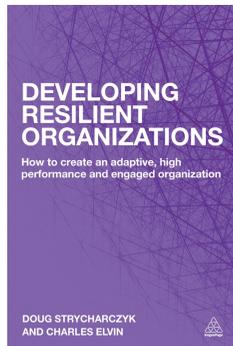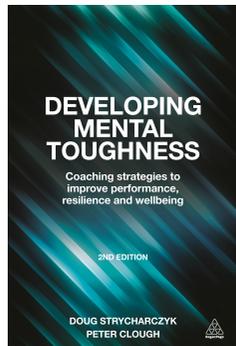
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