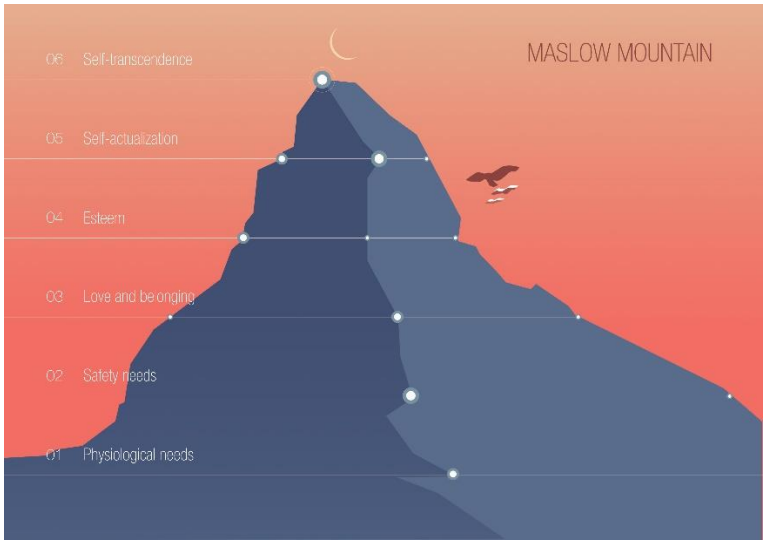
Blog Series #2

The Psychological Shift: Building Resilience Amidst Managed Concern- 3 ways to resource during a crises

One of the major impacts on our psyche is the "fear" reaction. It challenges the potential for resilience in many ways. Elements that promote the contents of fear and anxiety are provoked by many things in our environment. *Scarcity*, living with unknowns, vulnerability and lack of options (trapped animal effect) ushers in emotional reasoning that overrides logic, thus competing for cortical real estate in the landscape of thinking processes. But in many ways, the challenge to extremes and the Rapid Onset of Change (ROC) can allow us to also uncover and engage another, more beneficial and important aspect of approaching extreme situations, as well as developing our possibilities through incorporating a "managed concern" perspective through it. In this installment of Part II of the Psychological Shift, we will examine the ideas of *orienting*, *adaptive-bridging,* and *renegotiation* using *managed concern* as a goal for encouraging new ways of thinking and instituting "internal resilience resourcing" during rapid change.

Our brain is divided into seemingly elegant components that today are still being examined and uncovered for its potentials. Psychology looks at the divisions of anatomical aspects and their functions in variations of descriptives that help us understand how we react and respond to things and their point of origin so that we can begin to understand the complex linkages. Much like for any unanticipated event (especially given its potential for harming us in some way whether through a sudden loss of a job, family or daily living circumstance, and/or the potential for harm to ourselves) our physiological reactions are governed by specific parts of the brain. According to Peter Levine, from his book "Waking the Tiger," the involuntary and instinctual parts of the brain and nervous system look very much like those of other mammalian and reptilian animals. He describes the triune brain as composed of a reptilian brain (instinctual), the mammalian or limbic brain (emotional), and the human brain (rational) [1]. The same parts activated by fear because of trauma or even sudden or rapid change onset are those we share with animals. Levine's premise is in learning from other animals and their ability to move through a "fluid adaptation" process. If we take that a step further, looking at how and what we orient to, what captures our focus and using some adaptive bridging techniques to modify that process, thus renegotiating how we "see" the rapid onset of change during the COVID-19 era can teach us a tremendous amount and provide great resource states for the rest of our lives. A good place to begin is to look at what Abraham Maslow founded in the world of psychology through the lens of a hierarchical structure of "needs" known today as Maslow's Hierarchy.



In a short excerpt from the Academy of Management Learning & Education, Maslow constructed this idea of "needs" from an observation that took place. "In December 1941 **Maslow** had a revelation. Sitting in his car, watching a parade of veterans pass by, he reflected on the world going to war once again. At that moment, he resolved to devote his life to developing a psychology for peace. **Maslow** wanted a psychology that would speak to human potential and wholeness" [2]. He saw this overbearing imperative beginning at its most base and essential, which was meeting our physiological needs first for the basic components of survival. In the days of COVID-19, we have seen this play out in the response reactions of hoarding mentality based on the potential for the scarcity of items, the rise in gun sales and thermometers, and a variety of peculiar behaviors emerging. This would derive from the basic need for survival and hypervigilance ratcheted up. However, what if we took this same progressive ideology and inverted the whole thing.



If we look at the very peak of the Maslow ladder we find *self-transcendence*, or *actualization.* But, rather than this gradated convention proposed, we are now presented with the opportunity to access it more deliberately. Not subverting the original theory, but borrowing from it by accessing the functions of arriving at a more *managed* state of mind through re-orienting and renegotiating how we engage ROC amidst COVID-19. Through the lens of Maslow's hierarchical structure, we can use an *inverse* triangle to build into ourselves the possibilities of a vector towards transcendence amid rapid change and emergency that inherently balances and strengthens our movements to render better decision making and behavioral outcomes during emergency crisis events. **Here are three powerful ways to build an enhanced resilience during any kind of ROC event.**



Managing your Orientation

Pat Ogden mentions in her book *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy* that there are options to how we respond to things, to the social ingressions of life [3]. In psychology, orienting is defined by the American Psychological Association as "a behavioral response to an altered, novel, or sudden stimulus, such as turning one's head toward an unexpected noise" [4]. We must learn to track our orientation, what we are attending to and how we are responding. This means we must bring present moment experience to our direct attention rather than allowing our minds to move to the flooding of thoughts. In the first blog post I mentioned the analogy of the emergency room and the precision with which the emergency room team handles rapid change conditions. It is because they are "in" their direct experience, paying close attention to the details at hand rather than allowing their minds to wander, to catastrophize the situation. Learning to orient is a skill.

A great way to demonstrate this is through a Hobermann sphere breathing exercise. As you try and match your breathing inhalation and exhalation to mimic the sphere, pay attention to the nuances of where you are and what you hear. Your visual focus maintained on the sphere, your attenuation to your body, the warmth or cold of your surroundings, your conditions. In this kind of focus, there is not much room for irrational or emotional thinking because you are attenuated to your orienting response to the sphere and your heart. A simple exercise I use with clients to retrain the orienting response might be for situations that are anxiety-provoking such as going out, especially now. Our orienting response is on social distancing. But as you do so, what if you chose to instead of thinking of the viral potentials, you engaged in a focused orientation such as

managing your progress, mentally collecting important environmental aspects such as time of day, the color of the sky, colors of clothes worn by others, or rehearsing a verse or chant?

Adaptive Bridging

Part of modifying how we react to ROC is to meet our circumstances with situation appraisal. Too often clients begin their anxiety spiral by engaging in thinking reinforced by a lack of appraisal where fortune telling (predicting outcomes), catastrophizing, and other cognitive distortions take hold. We know that how we perceive a situation makes the biggest difference. In a study on cognitions and moods of U.S. soldiers during traumatic events, the researcher 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" [5].

Adaptive bridging requires us to psychologically and mindfully holding the reality of the event on trial for all its potentials, including what is irrational. Then we are able to use evidence, rather than fear, to make our judgements and actions. This means seeing things as they are distinct, minus the aberrations of negative thinking, conjecture, or other false beliefs. Here you are "bridging" or creating a new neural pathway for a situation by creating an evidence-based, fact only perception rooted in the here and now, not the past nor the future. A simple strategy is to *put your thoughts on trial* (analogous to a real trial in a court of law). You must play the jury and judge, examining the facts and only the facts, not supposition or speculation. Try it with fear surrounding *the scarcity of goods*. Ask yourself questions that challenge the thoughts of "if I don't find this there will be no more." Perhaps the cross-examination would be "how do you know this to be true?" and "have the factories stopped altogether or are they simply slower?" There are many ways to do this so that you pull back the veil of irrationalities in rapid change. Staying rooted in a function like adaptive bridging moves you to a much more realistically ground mental space.

Renegotiating Positional Self Agency for Psychological Empowerment

In psychology, we can take from Albert Bandura's expression of agency as the opportunity to influence one's self and functions through one's actions [6]. This expression of "self-agency" is important because it means that if we understand that we each have the potential of 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. Thus we are moving towards psychological empowerment even during crisis. In this, we must meet old cemented ways of thinking with more positive and flexibly adaptive modes under conscious control. If your current or former agency is to respond to COVID-19 for example by engaging the "scarcity" principle and stocking up on things beyond what is required, then renegotiating this behavior might be better served by practicing "managed concern." By this, an *altruistic* approach that imagines the need to only take what you can use while brokering the potential for others who may not have any supplies. Perhaps you should take stock of your family around you and find ways to ensure their comfort by asking them questions on the things they need, the small adjustments to their situation you can help with? This also extends to a managed concern for yourself as well by practicing self-care, focused thinking, unburdening thoughts not based in

facts and orienting towards more positive behaviors. This is the opportunity to move to that inverted triangle I referenced earlier and defy circumstances through practiced behaviors and thinking that inspire growth at a time when getting to know who you are is fueled with options.

In part three of the four-part blog series *The Psychological Shift*:

We know that stress can be hugely impacting on how we live and work. It is one of several potential symptoms for those who have moved through traumatic situations. Psychologist Dana Rose Garfin, Ph.D. (from the University of California, Irvine), alongside other researchers, has studied people who experienced acute stress shortly after traumatic events. Their report of findings suggests that "individuals were more likely to have negative long-term mental and physical health outcomes, including poor general health; increased pain, disability, and mortality; increased depression, anxiety and psychiatric disorders; and more family conflict" [7]. For many, the outcome effects of things like compassion fatigue from watching news saturated in COVID 19 material to those on the front lines of helping people, stress is a burden that can affect our immune systems, tearing us down if left untreated. In Part III of the Psychological Shift, Dr. Luster will look at ways to effectively manage the *stress arc* so that anyone can adapt to the effects of rapid change.

Referenced Works

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7 Garfin, D. R., Thompson, R. R., & Holman, E. A. (2018, September). Acute stress and subsequent health outcomes: A systematic review. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, *112*(), 107-113.