

Measuring Resilience

Picture this...a person walks into a gym, warms up, uses a few machines, hits the treadmill, then leaves – you observe this pattern of behavior for weeks. This isn't a critique, in fact it's quite possible that the individual is getting in a good workout. So what's noteworthy about this description? As far as we can tell, nothing was measured (e.g. reps, weight, time, speed). We all have areas of our lives that we say are important, but don't measure.



So how do we measure our progress? Moreover, measuring #gainz at the gym is one thing, but how do we measure something like resilience? Our definition of resilience matters, but many measures of resilience share common constructs, including:

1. Propensity for **optimism** that leads to positive expectations and action
2. **Acceptance** of circumstances for what they are **versus perseverance** on what they are not
3. Ability to remain **solution-focused** under stress
4. **Taking responsibility versus blaming** external forces for successes and failures
5. Similarly, **not accepting the victim role** in stressful circumstances
6. Building **support networks**
7. Ability and tendency to **plan flexible strategies** for dealing with future contingencies

Below are some thoughts on measuring resilience in various domains based on the principles above:

Physical – Focus on function over form. Our society is hyper-focused on appearances and weight management. Maintaining a healthy weight is important, but accepting our bodies as they are and focusing instead on what they can *do* can leave us feeling more optimistic, inspired, and motivated to take responsibility for action to achieve desired goals.

Mental – How flexible are you in your thinking? How long can you stay on task? How do you talk to yourself in private? Developing greater awareness of our mental states through feedback from others and self-reflection can help us decrease unhelpful and rigid thought patterns, increase our persistence with tasks, and awareness of factors contributing to our moods. This can help us improve performance, the quality of personal and professional relationships, as well as our beliefs about the future.

Emotional – How rich is your emotional vocabulary? Count the number of feeling words you can use to describe your current experience. Are the words you use to describe your day-to-day experiences varied, or do they have a typical quality? Do they reveal connections to underlying beliefs about your ability to act and influence current and future circumstances, or do they suggest a more passive stance?

Social – Is our social network adequate for our support needs? Where is it lacking? We can track the number of social invitations we accept/reject as an indirect measure of social resilience. We can measure progress toward improving communication skills (e.g. active listening, reducing the frequency of interruptions), or the frequency with which we engage in pro-social activities that benefit others.

Spiritual – When was the last time that you experienced awe, connection to something bigger than yourself, or “small” in a positive sense? What situations or activities provide you with the greatest sense of meaning or purpose, reinforce morals and values, and how often, or with what level of enthusiasm do you attend to these.

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