

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions, recommendations and limitations

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the conclusions, recommendation and limitations of this research. The conclusions serve as an attempt to answer the main research question, namely, *What is the effect of strengths-focussed training on team performance?* It further endeavors to address both the general aim of this study which is: *To determine the effects of strengths-focussed training on team performance*, and the specific objectives of the study, which are fourfold:

- *To establish a theoretical foundation for using strengths-focussed training to improve performance;*
- *To identify parameters and criteria for determining the effects of strengths-focussed training on team performance;*
- *To gain new insight on how people who have undergone resilience training as an example of strengths-focussed training, experienced it; and*
- *To gain new insight on whether the people who have undergone resilience training as an example of strengths-focussed training, implemented the training within the workplace / organisation.*

The recommendations also include recommendations for further research. The limitations reflect the shortcomings of this study.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions from the literature study as well as the empirical investigation are provided. The literature study was utilised to determine parameters and criteria for all the methods of data collection that were utilised for this study. The effects of the strengths-focussed training on the performance of individuals within the team (as the team consists of individuals), are therefore categorised in terms of the following aspects:

- Perceptions regarding, and experience of, strengths-focussed training.
- Effects resulting from the implementation of strengths-focussed training.

6.2.1 General conclusion

The effects of strengths-focussed training on the performance of the individual within the team was influenced by three main sets of variables: (a) psychological, emotional and physical (b) team performance as such and (c) barriers to effective implementation of the training. Each variable was, in turn, influenced by a number of significant contributing factors.

The patterns that emerged within the research were relevant for all the specific objectives of the study and, as such, relevant for the main research question. A theoretical foundation for using strengths-focussed training to improve team performance could be established. Through this premise, parameters and criteria could be identified to determine the effects of strengths-focussed training on team performance. Through these criteria, insight could be gained on how employees subjected to strengths-focussed training perceived and experienced it and to what extent they could implement it in the workplace to improve performance. From a didactic perspective the resilience training achieved its outcomes, as the skills attained by the learners were applied effectively within the working, home and community environment.

The general conclusion from the literature review and empirical investigation, regarding these identified variables and the way in which they interact to enhance team performance, therefore, is that resilience training as a component of strengths-focussed training has a positive, enhancing effect on team performance within the context of this study.

6.2.2 Perceptions and experience of strengths-focussed training

The research revealed that the individual within the team is affected generally in a positive way in terms of personal, psychological, social and emotional skills acquired during the resilience training. The perceived effect varies from initial doubts about the value of the training, to realisation of the real benefits of the training. Definite skills were acquired despite aspects that were experienced to be barriers for effective implementation of the learning in the workplace.

Although initial perceptions of the resilience training are not positive, definite benefits are experienced and new skills are acquired from the resilience training programme. Resilience training is perceived to be valuable and compares favourably with other forms of training, in terms of the sound learning facilitation approach followed during resilience training.

Resilience training provides the opportunity to identify own personal strengths and as a result, to become more resourceful and to cope better. The training creates greater awareness of own values and deficiencies in personal relationships, and as a result enhances the ability to do self-reflection and provide the opportunity to learn from other learners' experiences. The two resilience training learning facilitation interventions that had the most powerful effect on attitudes and behaviour are the utilisation of the Karpman Drama Triangle and understanding of life scripts within the context of performance in both the workplace and at home. These insights confirm the definition and scope of psycho-education training as the training that equips the individuals with skills, insights and competencies to enable them to live a more meaningful and purposeful life.

However, specific barriers regarding the resilience training in general have to be accommodated or removed to render resilience training more effective. Barriers vary from the lack of sufficient assimilation time between training modules, to failing to understand the "bigger picture" of the training. Practical barriers include frustration caused by lengthy debates, the level of the training being too

low, and composition of groups. Lack of trust, concerns regarding confidentiality and the challenge to raise personal issues in front of subordinates make participants in resilience training feel vulnerable.

However, the barriers that were experienced in the context of this study did not negate the value that the resilience training had for the participants. The resilience training in general was found to be excellent.

Planning of resilience training should allow more time between training sessions to apply learning. Learning facilitators should create a more holistic structure to resilience training content to allow learners to form a “bigger picture” especially on the first day of the resilience training. Since resilience training is conducted with adult learners, due attention should be given to adult learning principles and facilitation methodology and to proper use of the workplace as the learning environment. Perceptions expressed and barriers experienced by the learners in this study confirmed that adult learners have specific learning needs and that they want to make specific contributions, such as the suggestions stated above to their own learning.

6.2.3 Effects resulting from implementation of strengths-focussed training

6.2.3.1 General effects

Resilience training prompts the implementation of relevant changes in the workplace, within the individual in the team and the team as such. The skills, attitudes and behaviour acquired during the resilience training are implemented effectively in the workplace. Insights obtained from the empirical investigation confirmed and illustrated relevant aspects of Bandura’s reciprocal interaction theory and Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory. The fact that motivation positively affects learning and performance because of the improvement in the self-efficacy of the individual, as well as the desire to

improve general quality of life, was well illustrated in the observed effects on team performance.

The netto results are constructive communication within the workplace as well as better interpersonal relations within the team. This in turn leads to a more effective department which can meet customer expectations and better performance results within the workplace.

These general effects can be summarised as follows: In terms of changes to the individual in the team, and the performance of the team, resilience training results in increased self-esteem, sense of work-pride, shop floor visibility, interaction with lower level operational staff, and interest in career enhancement outside of the current working environment. It also results in increased awareness of self-improvement within managerial roles, improved contribution to the dynamics within the team, greater ability to accept and give constructive criticism, and increased ability to interact with influential people within the organisation. Better communication and listening skills, more determination to perform and an increased awareness regarding relationships with subordinates are also evident. In total, the resilience training has a positive influence on performance, both from an individual and team perspective.

6.2.3.2 Specific effects on the individual within the team

The effects of resilience training on the individual within the team are evident in terms of four sets of skills: mastery, supporting, bounce-back ability and resourcefulness of the individual.

In terms of mastery skills, resilience training creates awareness within individuals that their performance is determined more by themselves than by other external factors. Participants realised that they could add value and influence other main departments through cooperation and advice rather than by getting frustrated. Decision-making is influenced through better consideration of view points and more active listening prior to making decisions. Resilience

training leads to a more focussed approach to setting priorities. It creates a clearer focus on the outputs of the team in terms of higher priorities being given to addressing lack of sound practices within specific departments. The overall improvement in self-efficacy, brought about by resilience training, leads to individuals fulfilling a more active role within divisional activities, improving networking ability and applying skills in the larger business arena, beyond specific divisions.

In terms of supporting skills an increase in self-efficacy, inner strength, hardiness, and the ability to receive and give is evident. Participants take a more active role in their own career development activities, show the desire to communicate better in the business, share opinions and experiences and have improved listening skills. Increased systemic support is highlighted by the realisation by participants of wider roles within both the team and divisional activities. An increased ability to be mindful is evident: Empathy and concern regarding the impact on both the individual and the team are displayed when a participant goes through a difficult situation. Development and entrenchment of team values (trust, attention to detail, follow-through, ethics at all time, leadership in every action) and the firm belief that the team could achieve their goals, highlight the spiritual strength demonstrated by some participants.

Resilience training leads to higher capacity to bounce back in difficult situations. After the resilience training the ability to handle stress was evident: The handling of stressful situations due to increased pressure at work and traumatic events at home. New learning is evident when an increased sense of motivation results in team members implementing their knowledge and skills within the business context. These new skills are shared with other sites within the broader organisation. This creates an environment in which more effective utilisation of past successes in team members' lives become evident. This results in a positive mindset for the present resulting in increased self-esteem within the individual team member and the team as such. Optimism due to higher self-efficacy is evident when individuals become positive towards their future prospects within the organisation.

Increased resourcefulness of the individual within the team is evident with more out-of-the-box thinking leading to financial gain for the organisation. This results in an increased sense of self-efficacy and the desire to perform better. An increase in the ability to utilise networks and share learning within the broader organisation leads to more effective problem solving within departments. This results in an increase in both performance and continuous improvement leading to higher collective efficacy within the team.

6.2.3.3 Specific effects on team performance

Resilience training affects team performance positively in a variety of ways. In general, it has a significant impact on shared commitment of the team, synergy between team members, mutual accountability and interaction amongst team members.

A positive influence on shared commitment of the team is displayed through increased intensity with respect to own individual goals as well as the team's vision and goals. Team members expect the team to endorse this commitment which creates a strong sense of shared commitment within the team.

Resilience training leads to synergy and agreement between team members. There is improved sharing of knowledge and experience after the training. Members of the team, to a larger extent, allow other members to comment on and make suggestions to, each other's departments. These comments or suggestions created an environment in which team members could learn. Continuous improvement led to improved performance of the team, which results in larger benefits for the business.

Increased effectiveness in terms of goals, roles and responsibilities is evident after the resilience training. Goals, roles and responsibilities provide focus to a team that wants to perform. Team members are more committed and open towards comment and interference, or support and guidance. This leads to more

agreement and synergy between the team members, resulting in the focus on the goals to improve continuously. When a team member is committed to the performance of the team, it is imperative that there will be commitment, synergy and agreement among the team members. But a team's performance cannot be measured unless there are goals, roles and responsibilities within that team.

An environment of increased interdependence and interchangeable interaction is evident amongst team members after resilience training. This is due to increased mutual commitment, agreement, synergy as well as the increased focus on goals, roles and responsibilities of the team members. It is further evident due to the increased ability to allow others to advise and support their teams and the desire to share more knowledge. When people understand that they are interdependent and that the various skills of all the individuals within the team are important for the success of the team, the team experiences an increased sense of optimism. This optimism can be seen in improved performance against set goals within that team. It is evident that the more positive interaction and shared learning there is between the team members, the better the team performs and the higher the collective efficacy beliefs of the team are. People who do not feel threatened by other people will allow team members to criticise and support them in the team environment. They will also have the liberty to ask for help and support as a resilient individual realises when he or she needs help and support and has the courage to ask for help. Higher collective efficacy of the team results in increased team performance.

Resilience training results in the team being more accountable to team members. Not only would a team not be able to perform if there are no goals, roles and responsibilities to provide direction, but also if no one is accountable to perform against the specified goals. This increased sense of commitment is evident towards team goals as well as individual goals of team members. The ability to allow others to give criticism or advice reflects on the ability of individuals to allow team members to hold them accountable for the performance of their department against specified departmental goals. This also reflects on the individual's capability to understand that the performance of his or her

department contributes to the success and performance of the whole team. This is the result of a team's ability to interact interchangeable and interdependently with each other. If the team does not allow interdependence or interaction at all levels, the team will not create an environment whereby the members hold each other accountable for performance against goals.

6.2.4 Implications for Human Resource Development and management

The problem focus of this study is the trend in the training industry to focus on performance gaps, deficiencies and weaknesses to develop individuals within all walks of life and more specifically within organisations. Motivational theories were therefore used to justify why resilience training should be considered to support the concept of strengths-focussed training mentioned in the problem statement. It became evident through resilience training that employees do not recognise all their strengths and only become aware of them during the training. Where they are aware of their strengths, they are not aware where and how to exploit them.

A positive learning and working environment leads to higher morale, whether for the employee on the shop floor or a manager within the management team. When employees' strengths are known and utilised accordingly, morale and self-efficacy are affected in a positive way. When employees feel positive and energised, they in turn want to influence their performance positively. It is therefore evident that employees should rather be handled according to their strengths rather than weaknesses, which focus on the negative. The environment in which employees work utilises negative concepts such as mistakes, gaps, problems, shortages and loss. These aspects must be addressed to ensure an environment of continuous improvement. But should the environment in which the employee works be negative and the employee is handled negatively, it affects morale, self-efficacy and performance likewise. Resilience training creates the environment whereby learners can identify and utilise their strengths.

An employee who feels valued within the organisation, team or at home has higher self-efficacy and self-efficacy beliefs than the employee who does not experience being valued. These higher self-efficacy and self-efficacy beliefs enable the employee to withstand production pressures and stress more easily. Motivation affects both performance and learning. Therefore, the way that a manager handles the individual within the team has a direct effect, not only on the motivation of that individual but also on the desire of the individual to continue learning and their motivation to perform. Giving resilience training is a way of creating a learning environment whereby such functional skills can be attained by the learners to enhance their abilities.

Resilience training as a component of strength-focussed training which was presented to the management team in an organisation within the food and beverage manufacturing industry enhanced their team performance. Presenting resilience training to adult learners, within an adult learning context, with the work situation as learning environment, enhances self-efficacy, increases performance and provides an effective predictor of performance.

A more positive approach, such as strengths-focussed training, rather than traditional development interventions, which merely concentrate on the closing of gaps, significantly enhances employees' performance.

6.3 MORE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The recommendations for further research are:

- Investigating the generalisation of training to other types of training programmes that focus on the strengths of learners, as only resilience was used as a component of strengths-focussed training in this study.
- Exploring the wider possibilities of strengths-focussed training within other industries and environments.
- Investigating related ways in which human performance can be addressed other than strengths-focussed training.

6.4 LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this study is that it was conducted within a small selected group of senior managers from one site within the food and beverage manufacturing environment and might therefore not be suitable for generalisation within that specific organisation's manufacturing division.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

This study met its main aim and specific objectives, resulting in the main research question to be addressed. A theoretical foundation for using strengths-focussed training to improve team performance was established. Parameters and criteria were identified to determine the effects of strengths-focussed training on team performance. Insight was gained on both how the participants of strengths-focussed training experienced it and whether they would implement it in the workplace to improve performance.