

Developing resilient leaders: a training for students

Journal of
Leadership
Education

21

Amy L. Jansen

*Department of Library Services, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven,
Connecticut, USA, and*

Alice Wieland

*Department of Management, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven,
Connecticut, USA*

Received 6 June 2024
Revised 30 July 2024
Accepted 23 September 2024

Abstract

Purpose – This assignment is designed to enhance resilience among students in leadership courses. It leverages the US Army's Master Resilience Training (MRT) framework and positive psychology to develop resiliency skills.

Design/methodology/approach – A three-part experiential workshop integrates academic readings (providing a foundation of resilience concepts), explores the influence of personal identities on leadership and connects leadership skills with resilience concepts.

Findings – Participants reflect on self-awareness tools and positive psychology and create personalized action plans. Participants' resilience skills are enhanced with their personalized resiliency plan.

Practical implications – The program provides a structured approach to resilience training, which can be integrated into university curriculums. Students gain self-awareness and psychological tools to manage challenges, which are valuable for personal growth and professional development. There is a persistent gender gap in leadership, and for women to attain greater parity in leadership positions, resilience skills are imperative. By focusing on identity-related factors, the program prepares future leaders for challenges in attaining leadership positions.

Originality/value – This program is uniquely tailored for students aspiring to leadership positions, with an emphasis on the role of identity, such as gender, in leader emergence and overcoming related challenges.

Keywords Resilience, Leadership, Gender, Experiential learning, Master Resilience Training (MRT), Positive psychology, Reflective learning, Management education

Paper type Technical paper

Resilience is the cornerstone of personal growth and development. This perspective is shared by many, as it is widely acknowledged that most accomplishments are built upon experiences that challenge us, regardless of their scale or frequency. As highlighted in Seligman's seminal work in positive psychology, resilience is the key that enables us to learn from these experiences, evolve beyond them, and ultimately achieve success (2011). Resilience is a collection of knowledge and skills that can be honed and strengthened and is entirely cultivable. Some liken it to a muscle that grows stronger with consistent exercise through strategies such as positive self-talk, leveraging support networks, and extracting insights from challenges. Essential principles of positive psychology for nurturing resilience include depersonalizing setbacks, recognizing their finite impact, and

© Amy L. Jansen and Alice Wieland. Published in *Journal of Leadership Education*. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>

Funding: This project was funded by a SCSU Faculty Development Curriculum Related Activities Grant.



Journal of Leadership Education
Vol. 25 No. 1, 2026
pp. 21-28
Emerald Publishing Limited
1552-9045
DOI 10.1108/JOLE-06-2024-0073

treating them as transient. These principles empower individuals to adapt to obstacles, manage stress effectively, and recover from hardships more swiftly. With persistence and the right strategies, resilience can be cultivated, thereby enhancing one's leadership capabilities.

Developing resiliency skills is especially relevant for college students, who are in a pivotally important stage of their development as future professionals and leaders. Higher education institutions, with their robust learning infrastructure and skilled educators, are ideal for delivering resilience training (Ang *et al.*, 2022). The transition to higher education often brings significant challenges, such as becoming an independent learner or entering a new life phase. The college classroom therefore provides an excellent opportunity to enhance students' psychosocial well-being through resilience training. Emotional management and intelligence are closely related concepts to perceived stress and ability to recover from adversity (Thomas & Zolkoski, 2020). Research indicates that resilience training significantly improves emotional intelligence and fortitude among college students (Jimenez-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2022; Versel *et al.*, 2023), suggesting its use as a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support for trauma-informed education (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019).

As part of a Gender and Leadership course, we developed a three-session experiential-learning based resilience training, emphasizing self-awareness, positive psychology, and personalized action plans. The training highlights identity-related factors that influence leader emergence, most notably gender, and how to bolster resilience resources for inevitable career and leadership challenges. A wide body of research documents the challenges women have as leaders stemming from the mismatch of feminine gender role norms and leadership stereotypes (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). The academic literature has recently begun to address these challenges by theorizing the role that resilience plays for women enduring and being successful in such roles (Bodalina & Mestry, 2022; Duchek, Foerster, & Scheuch, 2022; Pillay-Naidoo & Nel, 2022). Ours is the first educational intervention that we know which addresses the development of necessary resilience skills for women in college populations.

Research suggests that resilience is vital in leadership contexts, as it enhances work performance, job engagement, well-being, and leadership skills (Baker, Baker, & Burrell, 2021). Leaders can bolster their resilience and adapt to adversities by acquiring coping skills and fostering a resilient, paradoxical perspective towards challenges (Yu, Wen, Smith, & Stokes, 2022). Resilient leaders possess the ability to bounce back from obstacles, learn from them, and move forward. Building resilience not only improves students' outcomes, but also fosters a positive and adaptable work environment for those they may lead.

Resilience, part of the construct of psychological capital (PsyCap) which includes the constructs of hope, optimism, efficacy and resilience (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014), is a core component of growing research in organizational behavior and human resource development (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). And although resilience has traditionally been portrayed as trait-like and fixed, there is increasing evidence that it is developable (Bonanno, 2004; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Masten & Reed, 2002). Just as organizations might channel their efforts to identify and develop resilient leaders and employees through their human resource development of PsyCap, educational institutions can tap into the academic and intellectual development of students to train future leaders who are ready to face uncertainty and steer workplaces characterized by rapid change (Goertzen & Whitaker, 2015).

Renowned organizational leadership scholar, Warren Bennis emphasizes resilience as the bedrock of successful leadership. Bennis (2007) argues that "adaptive capacity or resilience" is the single most crucial quality for leaders. Seligman has taken the lead on creating training interventions to prepare soldiers to buffer against the expected stress of their work (Cornum,

Matthews, & Seligman, 2011; Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011; Seligman & Fowler, 2011), and discussed how positive psychology can be applied in classrooms to support students (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Universities can hone this essential trait by integrating resilience-building strategies into their curriculum. Leupold, Lopina, and Skloot (2020) suggest that experiential leadership development increases resilience and leadership efficacy more so than purely academic learning. Embedding the training in college courses ensures that students who may not engage in extracurricular experiences have access to experiential leadership development within their coursework. Through a combination of engaging with guest speakers and self-reflection invoked through targeted readings, discussions, group work, and writing, students gain valuable tools to navigate life's inevitable challenges.

Overview

The sessions and experiential activities outlined are grounded in growing scholarship around resilience as a crucial competency in leadership and management. These sessions and exercises connect loosely to Kolb's theory of experiential learning, which emphasizes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The first session consists of an introduction to the foundations of resilience and its relationship to leadership. The second session is an introduction to the U.S. Army's Master Resilience Training (MRT) (Reivich *et al.*, 2011), which is based on positive psychology theories and the Penn Resilience Program (PRP). The third and final session centers on students' personalized resilience exercises and plan.

Learning objectives

After completing this resilience training (Table 1), students will be able to:

- (1) Understand resilience concepts and the interrelatedness with leadership,
- (2) Recognize how identity influences resilience and leadership,
- (3) Identify and engage in activities that build resilience,
- (4) Create personalized resilience plans and apply concepts to real-world scenarios.

Logistics and instructions

Each session was designed to build on the previous session (Table 2). The first session focuses on the fundamental concepts of resilience, including its components, and importance in personal and professional contexts. The session also explores how gender and various aspects of personal identity influence resilience and potentially shape pathways to leadership. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own predispositions by completing the Resilience Plan Worksheet (Appendix A), which is an input in their individualized resilience plan.

The second session includes a speaker who completed the U.S. Army's MRT Course. The MRT program was designed to build mental and emotional strength in soldiers (Reivich *et al.*, 2011). It is a proactive approach to mental health, especially aimed at preventing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This session highlights six core competencies and 14 specific skills that foster resilience.

The last session focuses on self-care and recharging as essential aspects of resilience. The session delves into various methods of assessing resilience, as well as examining theories of Self-Leadership and Self-Action Leadership via case studies (Egan & Maykrantz, 2019; Jensen, 2017).

Concepts or topic	Objective	Activities
Conceptual foundation: resilience (learning objective 1)	Students will grasp the fundamental concepts of resilience, including its definition, components, and importance in personal and professional contexts	1. Read relevant articles on resilience 2. Participate in class discussions to explore different perspectives on resilience 3. Apply US Army’s Master Resilience Training principles to non-military leadership roles 4. Examine real-world examples of resilient leaders
Identity and resilience (learning objective 2)	Students will recognize how their personal identities, particularly gender, influence resilience and leadership	1. Discuss challenges related to resilience and explore related research on gender and other identity differences 2. Critically assess scholarship for insights on gender, leadership, and resilience 3. Reflect on how societal expectations impact resilience
Leadership and resilience (learning objective 3)	Students will comprehend and connect leadership skills with resilience concepts	1. Study leadership theories and their intersection with resilience 2. Analyze case studies of resilience as it applies to business, management, and leadership 3. Develop strategies for integrating resilience into leadership practices
Personalized resilience plan: reflection and application (learning objective 4)	Students will create personalized resilience plans and apply concepts to real-world scenarios	1. Develop and practice self-assessment techniques to identify personal strengths and areas for improvement in resilience 2. Complete a personal resilience plan worksheet. Set goals for enhancing resilience in their personal and professional lives 3. Write a reflection paper on their own strengths and areas for growth and how they can apply resilience strategies in their future careers

Table 1.
Learning objectives **Source(s):** Authors’ own work

The selected readings were primarily from the *Harvard Business Review* (Achor & Gielan, 2016; Coutu, 2002; Goleman, 2017; Seligman, 2011), as well as a reading related to the Army MRT program (Reivich *et al.*, 2011). Students had the option of analyzing one of two case studies referenced above, which provided opportunities to apply concepts theoretically. Some concepts from the course textbook were also integrated into parts of the training (DeFrank-Cole & Tan, 2022). Appendix B lists the readings.

Variations

Although we had access to an Army trained Master Resilience trainer, we recognize that securing guest speakers with relevant expertise may be challenging. Alternatively, instructors may become familiar with key concepts from the MRT program by reviewing

Session title	Major concepts	Student prep and readings	Experiential exercises
Resilience: conceptual foundations (75 minutes)	Definitions of resilience PsyCap and its connection to resilience Leadership resilience skills Identities, gender, and resilience	Harvard Business Review readings Articles on resilience and leadership Reflection Paper	Guest Speaker Resiliency Plan and Assignment (Appendix A) Group Exercise Full Class Exercise and Discussion
MRT course overview (75 minutes)	Adapted from the <i>U.S. Army Master Resilience Trainer (MRT) Course</i> that was created to foster resilience <i>6 core competencies</i> : self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, strengths of character, connection <i>14 specific skills</i> that foster resilience (each connects to a core competency) • Goal Setting • Hunt the Good Stuff • Activating Event, Thought, Consequence • Energy Management • Avoid Thinking Traps • Detect Icebergs • Problem Solving • Put It in Perspective • Mental Games • Real-Time Resilience • Identify Character Strengths in Self and Others • Challenges and LDRSHIP • Assertive Communication • Effective Praise and Active Constructive Reporting	MRT Course readings Reflection Paper	U.S. Army Master Resilience Trainer Guest Speaker Group Exercise Full Class Exercise and Discussion
Personalized resilience plan and reflections (75 minutes)	Time Off and Recharging: Foundational to Resilience Measuring Our Resilience Self-Leadership, Self-Action Leadership, and Resilience	<i>Harvard Business Review</i> readings Case Studies (<i>Women and Self-Leadership</i> and <i>Self-Action Leadership</i>) from Sage Business Cases Reflection Paper	Guest Speaker Group Exercise: Case Analyses Full Class Exercise and Discussion

Table 2.
Session framework
and plans

Source(s): Authors' own work

the relevant literature ([Reivich et al., 2011](#); [Scheuch et al., 2021](#)), or compiling relevant online resource such as YouTube or TedTalk videos.

Synchronous communications and blended pedagogies may be ideal delivery modes for resilience interventions ([Ang et al., 2022](#)). Although our training was in a classroom, the training can be adapted to an online or hybrid setting using videos and interactive sessions via learning management systems.

Universities can strengthen leadership and management programs by integrating resilience training with gender awareness. Such initiatives move beyond a one-size-fits-all

approach by providing practical experience and insights into real-world challenges. Many universities that already offer leadership and resilience programming may benefit by focusing on boosting students' resilience "muscles" in those populations who have been disadvantaged in obtaining leadership positions.

Assessment and outcomes

Resilience interventions in higher education seem to enhance social competency, relationship-building, and conflict resolution (Ang *et al.*, 2022; Jimenez-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2022; Versel *et al.*, 2023). Although the research consensus indicates that building resilience is essential – challenges exist in measuring the effectiveness of interventions. Instructors who wish to measure the impact of the interventions may administer a pre and post-training resiliency scale. After reviewing the published resiliency measures, we suggest considering an adaptation of the Employee Resilience Scale (Naswall, Malinen, Kuntz, & Hodliffe, 2019), which is only nine items. Students may complete the scale at the start, and again at the end, of the semester. Although it is unlikely that the measures would result in statistically significant changes, especially in small classes, the trends may be informative. Notably, we expect the largest increases to be among those who score relatively low on the measure at Time 1. Additionally, future research may develop targeted assessment tools, such as adapting Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) or related frameworks, for higher education interventions.

Conclusion

We present an experiential resilience training program designed to equip future leaders with the skills necessary to navigate challenges and setbacks. The program integrates positive psychology principles, the U.S. Army's Master Resilience Training (MRT) framework, and gender-focused discussions to foster self-awareness, emotional regulation, and effective leadership. This assignment positively impacts student growth and develops burgeoning leadership skills.

References

- Achor, S., & Gielan, M. (2016). Resilience is about how you recharge, not how you endure. In *Harvard Business Review, Resilience: HBR Emotional Intelligence Series* (pp. 109–121).
- Ang, W. H. D., Lau, S. T., Cheng, L. J., Chew, H. S. J., Tan, J. H., Shorey, S., & Lau, Y. (2022). Effectiveness of resilience interventions for higher education students: A meta-analysis and metaregression. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(7), 1670–1694. doi: [10.1037/edu0000719](https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000719).
- Baker, F. R. L., Baker, K. L., & Burrell, J. (2021). Introducing the skills-based model of personal resilience: Drawing on content and process factors to build resilience in the workplace. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 94(2), 458–481. doi: [10.1111/joop.12340](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12340).
- Bennis, W. (2007). The challenges of leadership in the modern world. *American Psychologist*, 62(1), 2–5. doi: [10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.2](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.2).
- Bodalina, K. N., & Mestry, R. (2022). A case study of the experiences of women leaders in senior leadership positions in the education district offices. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 50(3), 452–468. doi: [10.1177/1741143220940320](https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220940320).
- Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?. *American Psychologist*, 59(1), 20–28. doi: [10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20](https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20).

- Cornum, R., Matthews, M. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Comprehensive soldier fitness: Building resilience in a challenging institutional context. *American Psychologist*, 66(1), 4–9. doi: [10.1037/a0021420](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021420).
- Coutu, D. L. (2002). How resilience works. In *Harvard Business Review, Resilience: HBR Emotional Intelligence Series* (pp. 3–30).
- DeFrank-Cole, L., & Tan, S. (2022). *Women and leadership: Journey toward equity*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Duchek, S., Foerster, C., & Scheuch, I. (2022). Bouncing up: The development of women leaders' resilience. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 38(4), 101234. doi: [10.1016/j.scaman.2022.101234](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2022.101234).
- Dweck, C. S., Chiu, C. Y., & Hong, Y. Y. (1995). Implicit theories – elaboration and extension of the model. *Psychological Inquiry*, 6(4), 322–333. doi: [10.1207/s15327965pli0604_12](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0604_12).
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(6), 807–834. doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.09.004).
- Egan, C., & Maykrantz, S. A. (2019). Women and self-leadership: Necessary and successful. *Sage Business Cases*. doi: [10.4135/9781526487728](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526487728).
- Goertzen, B. J., & Whitaker, B. L. (2015). Development of psychological capital in an academic-based leadership education program. *The Journal of Management Development*, 34(7), 773–786. doi: [10.1108/JMD-07-2013-0100](https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-07-2013-0100).
- Goleman, D. (2017). Resilience for the rest of us. *Harvard Business Review, Resilience: HBR Emotional Intelligence Series*, 31–38.
- Jensen, J. (2017). *Self-action leadership: Leading yourself to solve personal and professional problems*. London: SAGE Publications. doi: [10.4135/9781526411198](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526411198).
- Jimenez-Rodriguez, D., Molero Jurado, M. D. M., Pérez-Fuentes, M. D. C., Arrogante, O., Oropesa-Ruiz, N. F., & Gázquez-Linares, J. J. (2022). The effects of a non-technical skills training program on emotional intelligence and resilience in undergraduate nursing students. *Healthcare*, 10(5), 866. doi: [10.3390/healthcare10050866](https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10050866).
- Kirkpatrick, D., & Kirkpatrick, J. (2006). *Evaluating training programs: The four levels*. London: Berrett-Koehler.
- Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *The Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4(2), 193–212. doi: [10.5465/amle.2005.17268566](https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2005.17268566).
- Leupold, C., Lopina, E., & Skloot, E. (2020). An examination of leadership development and other experiential activities on student resilience and leadership efficacy. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 19(1), 53–68. doi: [10.12806/v19/i1/r1](https://doi.org/10.12806/v19/i1/r1).
- Luthans, F., Vogelgesang, G. R., & Lester, P. B. (2006). Developing the psychological capital of resiliency. *Human Resource Development Review*, 5(1), 25–44. doi: [10.1177/1534484305285335](https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484305285335).
- Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. -G. J. (2002). Resilience in development. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 74, 88.
- Naswall, K., Malinen, S., Kuntz, J., & Hodliffe, M. (2019). Employee resilience: Development and validation of a measure. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34(5), 353–367. doi: [10.1108/jmp-02-2018-0102](https://doi.org/10.1108/jmp-02-2018-0102).
- Newman, A., Ucbasaran, D., Zhu, F. E. I., & Hirst, G. (2014). Psychological capital: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(S1), S120–S138. doi: [10.1002/job.1916](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1916).
- Pillay-Naidoo, D., & Nel, P. (2022). Testing a model of resilience for women leaders: A strengths based approach. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 74(1), 2138542. doi: [10.1080/00049530.2022.2138542](https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2022.2138542).
- Reivich, K. J., Seligman, M. E. P., & McBride, S. (2011). Master resilience training in the U.S. Army. *American Psychologist*, 66(1), 25–34. doi: [10.1037/a0021897](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021897).

- Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, S. (2012). Status incongruity and backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice against female leaders. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(1), 165–179. doi: [10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.008).
- Scheuch, I., Peters, N., Lohner, M. S., Muss, C., Aprea, C., & Fürstenau, B. (2021). Resilience training programs in organizational contexts: A scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 733036. doi: [10.3389/fpsyg.2021.733036](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.733036).
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Building resilience. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(4), 100–106.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Fowler, R. D. (2011). Comprehensive soldier fitness and the future of psychology. *American Psychologist*, 66(1), 82–86. doi: [10.1037/a0021898](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021898).
- Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(3), 293–311. doi: [10.1080/03054980902934563](https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980902934563).
- Thomas, C., & Zolkoski, S. (2020). Preventing stress among undergraduate learners: The importance of emotional intelligence, resilience, and emotion regulation. *Frontiers in education (Lausanne)*, 5. doi: [10.3389/feduc.2020.00094](https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00094).
- Thomas, M. S., Crosby, S., & Vanderhaar, J. (2019). Trauma-informed practices in schools across two decades: An interdisciplinary review of research. *Review of Research in Education*, 43(1), 422–452. doi: [10.3102/0091732x18821123](https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x18821123).
- Versel, J. L., Plezia, A., Jennings, L., Sontag-Milobsky, I., Adams, W., & Shahid, R. (2023). Emotional intelligence and resilience “PROGRAM” improves wellbeing and stress management skills in preclinical medical students. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*, 14, 1309–1316. doi: [10.2147/AMEP.S437053](https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S437053).
- Yu, M., Wen, J., Smith, S. M., & Stokes, P. (2022). Building-up resilience and being effective leaders in the workplace: A systematic review and synthesis model. *The Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 43(7), 1098–1117. doi: [10.1108/lodj-09-2021-0437](https://doi.org/10.1108/lodj-09-2021-0437).

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

Corresponding author

Amy L. Jansen can be contacted at: jansena2@southernct.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com