Charging the Psychological Battery of High-Intensity Knowledge Workers: Sustained Effort During Adversity

Alfato Yusnar Kharismasyah[1], Ali Akbar Anggara[2]

aliakbarang@ump.ac.id

Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia[1,2]

Abstract. High-intensity knowledge workers, such as lecturers, are expected to maintain a fully charged psychological battery to sustain effort in challenging circumstances. Various concepts explain how individuals sustain effort under such conditions, often focusing on grit, hardiness, self-control, and resilience to understand performance during adversity. Previous research has identified key points that can generate empirically sound propositions, but overlapping attributes among these concepts make them difficult to differentiate. This often leads to confusion and debate over how these factors collectively contribute to success, especially when practitioners try to apply these ideas in real-life settings. This study employs a peer-to-peer research method to resolve existing confusion and debate. It proposes a model of psychological endurance, a unified theory that explores how multiple concepts contribute to sustained goal-directed behaviours and individual success. Central to this model is the metaphor of a psychological battery, which powers and sustains optimal performance despite adversity. We found that grit and hardiness are linked to the maximum charge of the psychological battery, indicating how long an individual can sustain effort. Self-control regulates energy management, increasing the effort required to maintain endurance, while resilience reflects the ability to recharge. These factors are influenced by both psychological and physiological stressors in the environment that deplete the psychological battery. These concepts create an innovative framework for exploring related psychological theories and, ideally, for improving interventions aimed at enhancing psychological endurance.

Keywords: Psychological endurance, psychological battery, grit, hardiness, self-control, resilience

1 Introduction

In intense situations, individuals often face significant psychological and physical stress, making it difficult to maintain mental health and stay motivated. Concepts like grit, hardiness, resilience, and toughness are often mentioned as predictors of success in these scenarios, but they can easily become muddled and confusing. This lack of clarity can not only complicate theoretical discussions but also limit the practical use of these ideas to help people manage stress effectively. Resilience, for instance, is commonly defined as the ability to adapt

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positively after adversity [1][2] and is often described with phrases like "recharge" or "bounce back." However, this general definition leaves room for various interpretations. Studies on resilience might explore its link with vulnerability [3], the impact of team dynamics [4][5], or how age influences resilience [6][7]. Some research even looks at how resilience and hardiness together help individuals cope with stress in challenging situations [8]. Each approach slightly shifts the way we understand resilience.

This discussion introduces a model of psychological endurance that clearly distinguishes between grit, hardiness, self-control, and resilience to explain how these factors relate to motivation and sustained goal-oriented behavior. Each concept plays a unique role in this model, showing how psychological protective factors and clear boundaries help individuals manage significant stress or trauma. These protective factors are key to the model, as they provide a buffer between stress and the ability to stay motivated and focused on goals. The model also differentiates between psychological and physical stress, noting that physical challenges like lack of sleep and exhaustion can weaken psychological endurance. Additionally, the model considers team dynamics, recognizing that social interactions can greatly influence individual behavior in long-term, goal-driven efforts. In essence, psychological endurance provides a framework for understanding how different factors impact sustained effort and peak performance.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Central Battery: A Framework for Sustaining Psychological Endurance

Central to this model is a conceptual "battery" that sustains the relationship between goal-directed behavior and optimal human performance. This model parallels other psychological capacity frameworks used to examine attention [1][2][3] or the interaction of emotions and health outcomes [4], yet it differs in its focus on specific psychological constructs and the process of recharging. The model employs a capacity metaphor to illustrate how sustained motivation supports the achievement of long-term goals and endurance in high-stress situations. It effectively integrates often conflated concepts such as grit and resilience into a cohesive st\ructure. Unlike traditional capacity models that emphasize performance deterioration when limits are exceeded [5][6], this framework includes a recharging mechanism. The battery metaphor thus contrasts maximum endurance with current levels of motivation, highlighting the necessity of restorative processes for maintaining sustained effort.

The metaphorical battery is composed of four key components: grit, hardiness, self-control, and resilience. Each element uniquely contributes to the maintenance of psychological endurance. Grit and hardiness are trait-based factors that determine the "capacity" of the battery. Grit refers to the ability to persevere through challenges while maintaining interest in the task, whereas hardiness enhances attributes that support success despite adversity [7]. Self-control and resilience function as energy management strategies within the model. While trait-based characteristics determine the battery's overall capacity, effective strategies for energy management influence both expenditure and recharging. Self-control encompasses mental strategies that regulate impulses, allowing for more efficient energy use and potentially enhancing endurance by making demanding tasks less depleting [8]. Resilience, on the other hand, represents the ability to recover from adversity, reflecting how quickly and fully the battery can be recharged. Strong resilience suggests rapid and complete recovery, while weaker resilience indicates a slower and less efficient recharging process. Collectively, these four factors form a comprehensive model for understanding and sustaining psychological endurance.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Methods

The concepts in the psychological endurance model were selected due to their frequent use in military training programs aimed at enhancing performance. For example, the U.S. Navy has implemented various peer-to-peer training initiatives designed to prepare personnel for service. These programs emphasize two main points: clarity in conveying concepts from one level to another and the integration of both physical and psychological elements, using terms like toughness, grit, and resilience. While this comprehensive approach supports performance improvement, it also risks confusion, particularly if distinct concepts like grit and resilience are conflated.

Given that these programs often involve personnel without advanced psychological training teaching these concepts to others, there is a potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding. The psychological endurance model was developed to serve as an educational tool that clearly integrates these concepts for use in peer-to-peer programs. The model also aims to strengthen the connection to the psychological literature, ensuring that the definitions and applications align with empirical evidence rather than anecdotal usage. Consequently, when inconsistencies in definitions arose (e.g., resilience being used where grit was more appropriate), the model relied on the psychological literature as the authoritative source. Four key concepts—grit, hardiness, self-control, and resilience—were identified as critical to the training programs and serve as the foundation of the psychological endurance model.

3.2 Concept and Measurement

Grit

Grit is defined as the sustained effort and interest in long-term goals [8][9]. It consists of two facets: effort and interest. The first facet, effort, refers to the willingness to exert high levels of effort over extended periods to achieve a specific goal. This trait is closely related to conscientiousness [10][11], although there is some debate about this relationship [12]. The second facet, interest, pertains to the consistent and enduring interest in pursuing a particular goal, which is influenced by motivational factors such as pleasure, meaning, and engagement [13]. These factors contribute to an individual's sustained passion and perseverance, although there is ongoing debate about how these elements combine within the broader construct of grit [14]. Grit has been shown to predict success and retention in demanding contexts such as education [15][16], athletics [17][18], and military service [19][20]. It reflects how much adversity an individual can endure to achieve long-term goals, with effort translating into actions necessary for success in challenging environments. However, grit is primarily a personality trait, and sustained effort is driven by underlying interests—preferences ingrained within the

individual. Aligning these interests with organizational demands can enhance grit, making it a long-term investment in personal development [21]. The Short Grit Scale (GRIT-S; [22]) is the most common tool for measuring grit. Well-validated in numerous studies [23][24], GRIT-S is available in two versions: an 8-item scale and a 12-item scale. The 12-item version includes additional questions that capture elements of sustained interest crucial for long-term goals. For example, questions like "I become interested in new pursuits every few months" emphasize the role of consistent interest in goal achievement. The GRIT-S is efficient and easy to administer, making it ideal for large-scale assessments of psychological endurance.

Hardiness

Hardiness is a personality trait first defined in 1979 that helps protect against stress [8][9][10][11]. It consists of three main components: commitment, which involves active engagement with people, tasks, or ideas; control, the tendency to influence outcomes rather than succumb to passivity; and challenge, which involves learning from adversity instead of avoiding it. These elements form the core of hardiness, though additional factors like connection and culture have also been suggested [12][13]. Hardiness is closely linked to high performance in stressful situations. Research has shown that it predicts success in challenging training environments [14][15][16], student achievement [17][18][19], and resilience against post-traumatic stress [20][21][22]. It also supports adaptability in emerging leaders [23][24][25]. Hardiness is primarily a trait-level characteristic, making it difficult to develop without long-term effort [26]. Hardiness is usually measured through self-report surveys, with various scales tailored to specific populations, such as caregivers [27], athletes [28], employees [29], and military personnel [30]. A widely used tool is the 15-item short hardiness scale [31][32][33]. When measuring hardiness, it is essential to choose a scale that aligns with the context and focuses on the relevant dimensions—commitment, control, challenge, communication, or culture.

Self-control

Self-control refers to an individual's ability to manage impulses, especially when faced with immediate gratification or temptation [34][35][36]. While concepts like willpower and ego depletion are related, self-control is more focused on regulating conflicting impulses [37]. It involves not only restraining negative impulses but also strengthening positive ones, thereby contributing to long-term success [38][39]. This is particularly critical in high-performance settings, such as elite sports or military operations, where self-control can maximize performance outputs when necessary. A practical framework for self-control is the 4-stage cycle of situation-attention-appraisal-response, which allows for intervention at various stages to regulate impulses [40]. For example, in a situation where individuals might overindulge in alcohol, self-control strategies can shift their behavior from impulsive overconsumption to moderated enjoyment, reducing the risk of negative outcomes [41][42].
Self-control is often confused with self-regulation, though some differentiate between the two: self-control involves volitional actions toward goals, while self-regulation involves maintaining behavior aligned with emotions [43][44]. Both, however, are limited by their susceptibility to exhaustion, akin to a muscle [45][46]. Self-control can be measured through various methods, including objective behavioral tasks like the go/no-go paradigm or Stroop tasks, which assess

inhibitory control, a key predictor in high-risk situations [47][48]. Subjective measures include scales like the 33-item Self-Control Rating Scale or the Brief Self-Control Scale [49][50]. These tools capture different aspects of self-control depending on their operationalization, with psychological endurance applications focusing on mental strategies to improve self-control and enhance performance.

Resilience

Resilience is widely measured in human performance studies and is commonly defined as the ability to recover after adversity [51][52]. It has been studied in various contexts, including among Olympic athletes [53], healthcare professionals [54][55], and law enforcement [56][57]. High-stress situations often present unique resilience challenges, but debates persist on whether resilience is state-based or trait-based [58][59] and how it varies across cultures [60][61]. A recent perspective suggests resilience may involve "bouncing forward," incorporating lessons from adversity rather than just returning to the prior state [62]. This progressive view of resilience suggests it can make individuals stronger after setbacks.

In military settings, resilience is a key predictor of success in training [63][64]. A holistic approach, incorporating both psychological and physiological aspects, can enhance resilience, especially in high-risk scenarios [65]. Within the context of psychological endurance, resilience is akin to the ability to "recharge." Effective resilience enables quick recovery after adversity, maintaining goal-directed behavior and motivation. Conversely, poor resilience suggests a prolonged and possibly ineffective recovery, potentially hindering progress beyond the prior state. The "bounce forward" concept implies that resilience can sometimes increase one's capacity, though such changes are gradual and require deliberate effort. Resilience is often measured using various scales. The 33-item Resilience Scale for Adults has been validated in multiple languages [66]. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale includes a 25-item version and a shorter 10-item version [67][68]. The Brief Resilience Scale, a 6-item measure, is particularly useful in high-performance contexts due to its brevity [69]. The Response to Stressful Events Scale, originally 22 items, can also be condensed to 4 items for easier administration [70]. These tools provide effective ways to assess resilience.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Factors Draining Psychological Endurance

Psychological endurance relies on maintaining goal-directed behavior, but this is influenced by both psychological and physiological stressors beyond an individual's control. External demands, particularly in group settings, can challenge one’s ability to persevere. These stressors, whether psychological or physiological, are interconnected. For instance, psychological stress can affect physical factors like sleep and diet [20][21], while physiological stressors such as hunger or sleep deprivation can impair cognitive performance [22][23]. Thus, stress in one area often impacts the other, making it crucial to understand these factors in sustaining psychological endurance. In the psychological endurance model, both psychological and physiological stressors are considered critical to the link between motivation and goal-directed behavior. Psychological stressors are often amplified by group dynamics, while physiological stressors are shaped by environmental conditions. For example, the stressors faced by collegiate athletes differ from those of sailors on deployment, reflecting their distinct

environments [24][25]. Although mental and physical stressors may overlap, the unique conditions of each setting determine the specific challenges faced.

3.2 Psychological Factors That Drain the Battery

Psychological endurance is significantly impacted by various stressors encountered in high-intensity situations. Social environments can either alleviate or exacerbate these stressors, depending on the context. Psychological factors external to the individual must be considered when evaluating endurance. For instance, common psychological stressors vary by context, such as fear of failure in athletes [26] or post-traumatic stress in military personnel [27]. Other stressors, including boredom and pressure to perform, can also deplete psychological resources without direct combat involvement [28]. Moral injury is a particularly critical psychological stressor. It occurs when individuals face situations that violate their personal moral or ethical codes, leading to severe psychological consequences such as PTSD, depression, or suicidal thoughts [29]. This type of injury is prevalent in high-stakes environments like the military, where individuals might experience moral conflicts related to combat or failure to prevent harm. However, moral injury can also affect athletes and medical professionals in different contexts. Accurately measuring psychological stress is challenging due to the variety of stressors and individual differences. Tools like the Perceived Stress Scale [30] and the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Checklist [31] provide valuable insights but may not fully capture the nuanced experiences of stress. Effective measurement should be tailored to specific scenarios and stressors to ensure accurate representation of psychological endurance challenges.

3.3 Enhancing Psychological Endurance: Applying the Central Battery Model

The concept of the psychological battery serves as both a framework and a metaphor for understanding and improving psychological endurance (Figure 1).

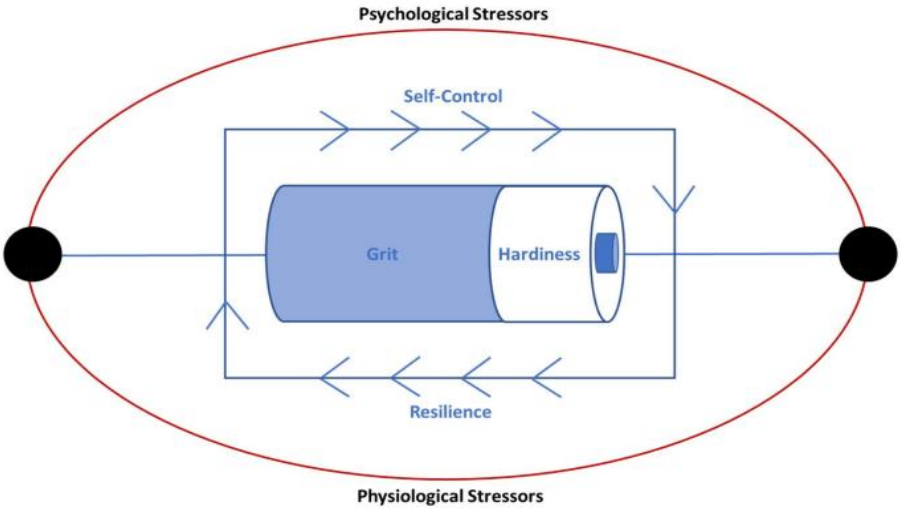

Figure 1. The psychological endurance models

Central to the psychological battery are core concepts essential for sustaining individual effort and achieving optimal performance. Grit and hardiness, positioned at the extremes of this metaphorical battery, influence its maximum capacity. Grit involves persevering through adversity, while hardiness includes protective factors that sustain engagement. Self-control and resilience, on the other hand, impact energy levels: self-control manages energy expenditure during performance, and resilience helps in recharging the battery. Physiological stressors, such as sleep and nutrition, establish the lower boundary of the battery, while psychological stressors, such as feelings of belonging and anxiety, set the upper boundary. Both types of stressors deplete the psychological battery and affect the duration of optimal performance.

By targeting specific elements within this model, interventions can be designed to effectively enhance performance and endurance. While personality traits such as grit and hardiness are crucial, they are less practical for short-term interventions due to their gradual nature. Instead, focusing on the cognitive component of "challenge" within hardiness offers a more immediate approach. This involves training individuals to perceive adversity as an opportunity for growth, which can foster resilience and improve endurance over time. Targeted mental strategies present a more immediate solution for enhancing psychological endurance. Techniques like cognitive restructuring, positive self-talk, and stress inoculation training have proven effective in managing stress and performance [66][67]. It is crucial to apply these techniques contextually—self-control strategies are optimal during active stressors, while resilience strategies are best utilized during recovery periods. For instance, a boxer might use self-control techniques during a match but should focus on resilience techniques between rounds to recharge.

Self-control strategies manage energy by regulating physiological and cognitive responses to stress. Techniques such as heart rate variability biofeedback, positive self-talk, and stress inoculation training help individuals maintain performance and manage stress in real-time [68][69]. These methods are designed to prevent the overexpenditure of psychological energy and can be tailored to specific performance needs.

Conversely, resilience strategies focus on recovery and replenishment of the psychological battery after stress has been encountered [70]. Techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation help individuals recover and rejuvenate in the absence of ongoing stress. The distinction between self-control and resilience strategies lies in their application timing. Self-control techniques support sustained performance under continuous stress, while resilience strategies facilitate recovery and energy replenishment after the stressor has passed. Effective intervention programs should incorporate both types of strategies, understanding that each serves a distinct purpose and should be applied according to the presence or absence of ongoing stressors. Organizations can also support resilience development, similar to how individuals apply these strategies. Programs like third location decompression used by military organizations exemplify how systemic approaches can enhance resilience [71]. Such organizational strategies provide valuable support but may involve significant costs, highlighting the need for a balanced approach between individual and organizational efforts in fostering psychological endurance.

4 Conclusion

Decades of research have deepened our understanding of the psychological battery metaphor, but this model offers a novel, intuitive framework for comparing key concepts. Its

simplicity makes it an effective teaching tool and aids in designing targeted interventions to enhance psychological endurance. This model integrates mental strategies and personality traits, emphasizing the importance of applying the right strategy at the right time. It helps practitioners develop optimal intervention programs by clearly distinguishing between mental techniques and personality traits.

While concepts like mental toughness have been useful in sports psychology, they lack the precision and integration offered by the psychological endurance model. This model explicitly addresses both psychological and physiological stressors, incorporating aspects such as chronic sleep deprivation that are often overlooked. It provides a comprehensive construct that clarifies how various factors interact to influence performance. Future applications of this model can improve training and intervention designs, demonstrating that psychological endurance can be developed with the right strategies.

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