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Quarterly Newsletter

THE CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING IN RISK

Theme - Social Resilience

Each quarter I send out a Newsletter on a theme and discussion of various issues associated with the Social Psychology of Risk (SPoR). I trust you enjoy this edition.

Rob

The Social Ecology of Resilience



One of the profound omissions in the discourse and literature on resilience is *Socialitie*. *Socialitie* is the name given to social mindfulness enacted in social space. *Socialitie* is a lens through which one understands the world and views 'being' as relational, experiential and connected to persons. *Socialitie* understands social-psychological being as an ecologically determined symbiosis. The i-thou of Buber best captures this triarchic dialectic between us.

The notion of Mind-fulness has also been captured by the dominant discourse in society namely behaviorism, individualism and empiricism. Mind-fulness is often interpreted as brain-fulness and posits the idea that one reprograms one's own brain in some kind of inward exercise that purges oneself of problematic thoughts. This is where the brain-as-computer metaphor and personhood as self-hood come undone. Such metaphors for living are completely unhelpful, neither are they supported by research.

The best place to start research in resilience is:

- Reich, J., Zautra, A., and Hall, J., (2010) *Handbook of Adult Resilience*. The Guilford Press. New York.
- Ungat, M., (ed.) (2012) *The Social Ecology of Resilience, A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. Springer. New York. (<http://kmu.ac.ir/Images/UserFiles/891/file/The%20Social%20Ecology%20of%20Resilience.pdf>)

There are three majors factors in the current discourse on resilience that are harmful:

- The focus on objects/systems
- Individualism and,
- Behaviourism.

All three combine and dominate the risk and safety space. If one wants to understand the nature of resilience the last place to go reading or researching is a safety text. So, how then should resilience be defined, understood and enacted? Let's start with an exploration of language.

There some word combinations we ought to be suspicious of, here are some:

- Fast Food
- Reckless Safety
- Machine Learning
- Human Factors
- Resilience Engineering

Our language gives away our semiosis (construction of meaning) and in such word blends we see some phenomenal contradictions. Each one of these metaphors is contradicted by the adjective that describes it. If we are going to discuss resilience we need to be using metaphors and language of **social ecology**, **culture** and **organics**.

Social ecology is about relationships. The idea of resilience is best served by the metaphor of an ecology or rhizome. A human social ecology is about a complex 'matting' of human inter-relationships. I discussed this metaphor here <https://safetyrisk.net/like-a-rhizome-cowboy/> to help understand the hyper-complexity (wickedity) of human relationships and risk. The language of 'systems' and 'factors' doesn't capture the messy nature of human relationships. The rhizome is hidden and messy, random and interconnected, this is how life really emerges.

The social ecology of resilience stands in contradistinction to the reductionist and positivist notion of 'resilience engineering'. The idea of 'resilience engineering' and its mechanistic discourse is not the way to understand resilience or indeed where to focus one's attention. Focusing on systems and their efficiency is a recipe for disaster in resilience. Nothing is more destructive to human resilience than *Technique* (Ellul -https://monoskop.org/images/5/55/Ellul_Jacques_The_Technological_Society.pdf). You can read further about a human and social ecology of resilience Here:

Bateson, G., (1970) *Mind and Nature, A Necessary Unity*
 Bateson, G., (1987) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*

Unfortunately, you won't see these readings on a risk and safety reading list, Safety doesn't know

how to look outside of its restricted and narrow behaviourist paradigm. To look outside a systems/engineering paradigm would require a transdisciplinary approach to learning and that isn't about to happen soon in safety (<https://safetyrisk.net/the-value-of-transdisciplinary-inquiry-in-a-crisis/>; <https://safetyrisk.net/transdisciplinary-safety/>; <https://safetyrisk.net/transdisciplinary-thinking-in-risk-and-safety/>).

Bateson understands human relationships cybernetically and particularly, the constraints that systems and technology-focused thinking places upon humans in relationships. Bateson explains the cybernetic method of negative explanation and raises the question: Is there a difference between "being right" and "not being wrong"? Should we say of the rat in a maze that it has "learned the right path" or should we say only that it has learned "to avoid the wrong paths"? This is the challenge of a social ecological understanding of resilience. Bateson proposes that in the face of exposure to a toxic environment humans often seek to return to a state of homeostasis.

A social ecology of resilience doesn't understand resilience as 'bounce back' but understands that humans 'emerge' and 'become' learning persons through a dialectic with suffering.

The beginning place for understanding the social ecology of resilience is fallibility. (<https://www.humandymensions.com/product/fallibility-risk-living-uncertainty/>) The notion of a fall from perfection is a false narrative and symbol. There is no original sin, there is no 'drift into failure', there was no perfection and fall, humans were and always have been fallible. The mythology of Adam and Eve simply establishes the always vulnerable status of humans as fragile. The idea of falling from perfection or drifting into failure makes the notion of fallibility a deficit of human 'being'. Fallibility is not an impediment but a necessity for learning, risk and maturation.

The notion of Resilience needs to be framed differently, fallibility needs to be understood as a positive reality of human being and becoming. Fallibility is not a human deficit but rather a description of human 'being'. It is only through fallibility that we learn, love and live. In fallibility we must always and continually be resilient and so we turn to a social ecology of resilience to understand living in the world.

Unfortunately most models about tackling risk indeed, Risk Management in general, are understood as a mechanical reductionist problem. Just review the work of Risk Management Australia (<http://www.rmaustralia.org/>) and you find very little about people and culture. Everything is viewed through the lens of systems. It's the same old mechanistic/engineering focus like Safety - compliance and control, objects and governance. There is no Hope offered in models that propose humans as a factor in a system' as objects in Paley's clock.

Unfortunately, risk and safety understand risk from a notion of complexity rather than as a 'wicked problem'. Unless we see risk and fallibility as an unsolvable problem, a 'messy' problem or an intractable problem, we will continually apply the discourse of 'solutions', 'mechanics' and 'controls' to it as if one day infallibility will be achieved. The truth is the goal of perfection for humans offers no hope but despair. In such an approach, in hindsight bias, all accidents and incidents are preventable.

Risk is not a mathematical problem and neither is human resilience an engineering problem. The idea that one can 'engineer resilience' is a nonsense. Such language is absurd if one understands risk as a: social ecology, social-psychological, socio-political and wicked problem. Some of the best systems in the world harm fallible people by their archetypical quests for *Technique* (Ellul), that driving force for efficiency.

Resilience as not 'optimistic belief' neither is it a mechanism for pulling one out of depression or whatever 'hole' one finds oneself in. Uncertainty, randomness, suffering and fallibility are what turn risk into learning. There is no learning without *Socialitie* or movement. Fallible people in a random world need risk in order to live and learn. If humans were omniscient then there would be no risk in the world and we would no longer be human nor would there be any motivation to learn.

So what are some of the key points in a Social Ecology of Resilience?

- The first thing to understand about a social ecology of resilience is that individualist and systemic models of resilience don't make sense. Unless one understands resilience as socially and culturally situated, it will always be the message of 'bounce back', 'better systems' or 'pull your self up by your boot laces'. Without a social, communal and cultural understanding of resilience we become trapped in individualist and systemic strategies in resilience that always avoid the elephant in the room – people and personhood.
- A social ecological understanding of resilience doesn't understand resilience as some capability to 'bounce back'. There is no 'bouncing back' rather; there is only change, learning, emergence and maturation. Resilience develops through an existential dialectical (Ellul), or as some philosophers describe it, as a process of 'non-return'. Experience and 'becoming' are never about a return but rather about learning, maturation and growth into wisdom. In all dialectic the negative (cybernetic) is understood as contributing to the shaping and movement towards something new. In a social ecology of resilience the idea of 'failure' from a position of having 'arrived', doesn't make sense. In a social ecology there is no 'drift' from perfection only continual emergence (see Letiche and Lissack, (2011) *Coherence in the Midst of Complexity, Advances in Social Complexity Theory*).
- **Resilience is developed 'through' adversity and 'in' adversity not prior to adversity.** The adversity doesn't 'prove' resilience but rather the event is most often the 'making' of resilience. This is why resilience can't be engineered and why such a metaphor as 'engineering' is a strange metaphor to use in understanding human resilience. (see further Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* or Lakoff and Johnson *Metaphors We Live By*).
- The dynamics for a social ecology of resilience are opposed to *Technique* (see Ellul). Technique is the archetypical quest for efficiency in systems and the quest for optimizing in all its forms. Being present with people in adversity isn't about 'controlling' or 'resourcing' but rather about 'presence', 'being', 'becoming' and 'emergence'. A readiness for resilience is discovered in Poetics not engineering. **In Poetics we discover the importance of the community and 'communality'**. Resilience develops best when one understands maturity/wisdom as an emergent quality that is socially and ecologically situated.
- We know that tightly coupled systems constrain the development of resilience (Weick) and make organizing more fragile. How does a tightly coupled metaphor with a reductive focus (engineering) foster thinking about adaptability through loosely coupled systems to evolve in anti-fragility (Taleb)?
- An ecological understanding of resilience resists the deterministic assumptions of positivism most common in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) knowledge. If Safety continues to look for strategies for resilience in STEM knowledge, nothing will change, just more of the same with better spin.

There is much more that could be discussed in the notion of a social ecology of resilience but I might leave that for another discussion.

I would like to finish with a few quotes from Ungar with a much better definition of the nature of resilience through personhood than through systems.

P1.

'That work has shown that the resilience of individuals growing up in challenging contexts or facing significant personal adversity is dependent on the quality of the social and physical ecologies that surround them as much, and likely far more, than personality traits, cognitions or talents ... The problem has been partially the result of a dominant view of resilience as something individuals have, rather than as a process that families, schools, communities and governments facilitate ... This understanding of resilience extends the discourse concerning positive human development under adversity, suggesting that social ecological factors such as family, school, neighbourhood, community services, and cultural practices are as influential as psychological aspects of positive development when individuals are under stress.'

An abundance of research in the field of genetics, cognition, human development, family processes, community responses to disaster and trauma studies (reviewed in the chapters that follow) provide a solid basis for a definition of resilience that explicitly accounts for the disequilibrium between vulnerable individuals who lack opportunities for growth and the influence of environments that

facilitate or inhibit resilience-promoting processes.

P.21

'Behaviors we associate with resilience (like staying in school, or associating with non-delinquent peers) are a function of the person and his or her strengths and challenges expressed within a complex ecology. The emphasis on both strengths and challenges makes explicit findings from studies of resilience that show it is a combination of personal advantages and disadvantages that influence life trajectories ... By theorizing resilience as a social ecological construct, this same post-positivism and subjectivity can be accounted for.

Thinking ecologically, researchers studying resilience acknowledge variability in the definition of what constitutes the person and community environment (does the researcher include measures of family functioning, school engagement, community cohesion, neighborhood stability, or political empowerment?). The individual's strengths and challenges are also understood as contextually dependent for their definition as they are expressions of culturally embedded values that influence the co-construction of what is meant by successful coping and risk'.

We see in the social ecology of resilience such a different form of language, discourse and thinking about resilience than the model proposed by the engineering worldview. Perhaps one day Safety might discover the value of making systems serve people rather than people serve systems.

Take the 2 Minute Anonymous Zero Survey



So far the survey is going well with some surprising results. So far we have 350 respondents to the survey but would love more. There are only 10 quick and easy statements that require a click to answer.

Just two results are worth noting:

- We see that only 3% deny the statement 'Human are fallible, Mortal and the world is

random'

- And 94% of respondents affirmed that 'zero causes dishonesty in managing safety'

You can take the survey here: <https://spor.com.au/zero-vision-survey/>

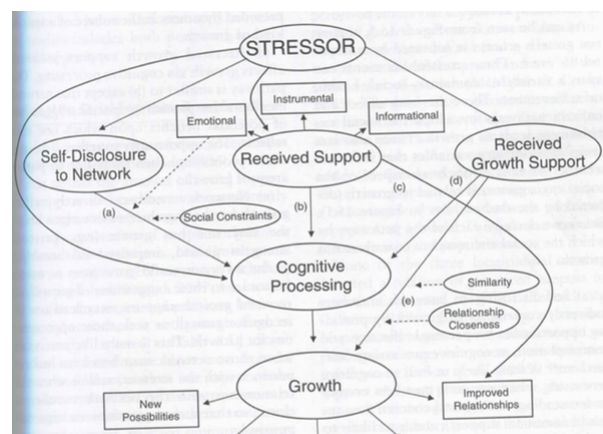
The Arrow Illusion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yVKgjNUmQ&feature=youtu.be>

Resilience Theory and Stress

The quest for perfection is the delusion of zero. As much as we would like to wish away fallibility the more such a process makes us fragile. Randomness, fallibility and misfortune cannot be wished away. What we need is a realistic notion of Hope not a naïve wish in wishing. Robustness is created ecologically through relationships and communality that supports people as persons.

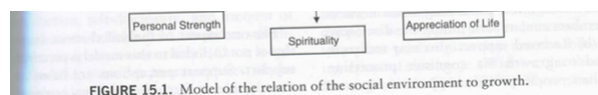
In the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* we read about



'Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives'

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4185134/>).

This work shows that resilience is enhanced by holistic and ecological approaches to resilience.



The paper starts:

'For decades, the fields of neuroscience, mental health, medicine, psychology, and sociology have been collectively focused on the short-term and long-term consequences of stress, and more recently, extreme stress. Stress is a reality of our daily lives.'

'In defining resilience, it is important to specify whether resilience is being viewed as a trait, a process, or an outcome, and it is often tempting to take a binary approach in considering whether resilience is present or absent. However, in reality, resilience more likely exists on a continuum that may be present to differing degrees across multiple domains of life'

Fostering Social Resilience



The July/August 2020 edition of *Scientific American Mind* explores the theme of Fostering Resilience. It is unfortunate that the metaphor of brain-as-mind and materialist interpretations of persons as the sum of behaviours dominates the biases of this journal. Unfortunately, the most approaches to neuroscience tend to mask behaviourist and individualist agenda and are unhelpful in guiding a real response to trauma, suffering

and managing harm.

Mental illness is not a brain problem but rather a socialpsychological problem. The idea that mental illness can be found in some locus in the brain simply assumes a dis-connected sense of self and personhood. Unfortunately one won't find any discussion of personhood in risk and safety industries, in either their bodies of knowledge or curricula. You can obtain my discussion of personhood in Chapter Two of the SPoR Handbook, free download here: <https://safetyrisk.net/free-two-chapter-download-and-book-competition/>

If one wants to foster resilience it can only be found in community and *Communalitie*. *Communalitie* is the social ecology of making community. Unless one works hard in maintaining an ecological focus on persons and nourishing human-focused organising then all the resilience programs and workshops focussing on the individual effort won't amount to much. If one hasn't already set in place a social ecology of resilience and *Communalitie* in your organisation it is too late when the dis-stress comes and trauma is actualised. Band-aid wellness workshops can only be successful if situated in an already established culture of fostering social ecological resilience.

So, what should does a social ecological approach to resilience look like? This was discussed well by Gabriel Carlton here: <https://safetyrisk.net/whats-your-resilience-profile/> and by Rob Sams who describes it well here: <https://safetyrisk.net/social-resiliencing/>; <https://safetyrisk.net/resiliencing-and-other-such-ings/>

Practical social ecological resilience is known as 'Resiliencing', a continual continuous focus on cultivating community, *Socialitie* and an ecological approach to organising (<https://safetyrisk.net>

/ecological-resiliencing/).

Free Module - Introduction to The Social Psychology of Risk



Since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis CLLR have been offering a free module on The Social Psychology of Risk. So far over 120 people from Australia, Austria, Spain, USA, UK, Italy, India, Canada, Ireland, Brazil, South Africa, Argentina, UAE, New Zealand and Oman have participated. You can read recommendations by participants here: <https://safetyrisk.net/online-studies-with-cllr/>

The module is undertaken by Zoom, watching a video series, keeping a journal and some homework exercises. The program extended for 8 session and requires a significant commitment. You can find out more about this free offer here: <https://safetyrisk.net/introduction-to-the-social-psychology-of-risk/>

You can register here: <https://cllr.com.au/product/an-introduction-to-the-social-psychology-of-risk-unit-1-free-online-module/>

If you do register the next group starts in early November and continue to late December. You will be notified close to the first Zoom session about logistics, links and preparedness.

An overview of all online modules offered by CLLR can be viewed here: <https://cllr.com.au/register-to-study/>

The workshops are conducted by Dr Long.

Useful links on Resilience

<https://resilienceresearch.org/>

<https://socialsciences.viu.ca/sites/default/files/social-ecology-of-resilience.pdf>

<http://kmu.ac.ir/Images/UserFiles/891/file/The%20Social%20Ecology%20of%20Resilience.pdf>

<https://s31207.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Definitions-of-community-resilience.pdf>

Book Competition



Well, last newsletter perception challenge proved to be quite a tough one with only 3 books being dispatched to the lucky competitors.

Here's another chance to land a free copy of *The Social Psychology of Risk Handbook*, *i-thou*

Can you spot the snake? Please send entries to rob@cllr.com.au and include postal address. First 6 correct entries will win a complementary copy of the book.

Improve Your Inductions with InVision Pictures



InVision Pictures supports all the multimedia work of CLLR, SPoR and Human Dymensions. InVision Pictures is Directed by Rick Long who produces professional videos and multimedia for r clients such as Tomingley Gold Mine, Lend Lease and Harris Farms Market. Rick understands the needs of industry professionals and The Social Psychology of Risk and helps organizations produce interactive videos for use in Inductions, Training and Workplace

Education. Some of his videos also help organisations with:

- On-Site Training
- Documentary Videos
- High Risk Introductions
- Targeted Online Training resources
- Conversation Skills
- Risk and safety Videos
- Education and Learning Seminars/Workshops
- Promotional Media

Rick holds a Bachelor Degree in Multimedia Production from Canberra University with a Diploma in Audio Production from the Canberra Institute of Technology. He provides the complete package.

Examples of his work are here:

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High Risk Videos <https://vimeo.com/album/4702061>

Videos for the Centre for Leadership and Learning in Risk <https://vimeo.com/cllr>

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Contact Rick here: ricklong@mac.com

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including the highly acclaimed series *Risky Conversations*, *The Law Social Psychology and Risk* with Greg Smith both as podcast and video series: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/3938199>

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