

## Survival & Resilience – brief series 2

With wartime talk and measures to fight the virus, comes also the association of survival, for some physical, for others financial. Survival can seem daunting, yet a lot of wisdom has been accumulated by learning from acute survival situations like ship wreckages, being hostage or military conflict. A former British diplomat, G Leicester, has distilled a few lessons on overcoming survival situations. The beauty of human nature is we are ultimately free to decide how we want to respond to our environment, even when it is most traumatic.

G Leicester describes how all crisis situations start with a descent into chaos provoking shock and a natural reaction of denial which is when we hold on even more tightly to our core beliefs. Some of which might be limiting our ability to overcome the crisis. People then move to a stage of fear sometimes characterised by paralysis., hoping for outside help. For most experts, that is often fatal for the would-be survivors. Fear can generate panic, it is also what fuels the will to survive. For those fortunate to reach the last stage, comes action, to experiment the way out of the situation and gain new insight. Adaptation is important not the plan writes L Gonzalez, a survival investigator.

Reaction to and overcoming survival is deeply personal, calling upon inner resources and personal resilience. Martin Seligman, the originator of positive psychology, developed in the late 2000s a programme for the US army on resilience to help soldier be as fit mentally as physically. This programme has a particularly interesting module on post-traumatic growth and can serve as pointers to how to survive a major crisis. It is built around four axes:

- understanding our response to trauma and especially how it affects our self-image, that of others and of the future;
- reducing anxiety through techniques for controlling intrusive thoughts and images;
- engaging in constructive self-disclosure;
- learning to tolerate, even appreciate the paradoxes we face such as loss and gain, grief and gratitude, vulnerability and strength.

These four axes point to the fact that in a crisis, our reaction is of course influenced by the external events but even more so by our mental constructs. That adds to the burden but can also be seen as a relief because it is in our hands!

Here is a couple of reading that may inspire you to create your own way:

- Beyond Survival, Graham Leicester, (20 min read) <https://www.scribd.com/document/22256921/Beyond-Survival>
- Building resilience, Martin Seligman, Harvard Business Review article (20 min read) <https://go.aws/33xKQZq>
- For those who missed the first brief on “Adaptive leadership” (5 min.) ([link](#))