

FROM INDIVIDUALS TO TEAMS: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW ON ADAPTABILITY AND RESILIENCE IN A TACTICAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract— In dynamic and high-pressure tactical environments, such as those faced by military and security forces, adaptability and resilience are crucial for maintaining sustained operational effectiveness. While a substantial body of research has explored these constructs, there is limited integration across individual and team-level factors within such environments. The current study systematically reviewed and synthesised prior studies on the mental and social factors influencing adaptability and resilience in tactical environments. Employing the Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses (ROSES) methodology, articles were identified through two major academic databases: Scopus and Web of Science. The study was structured in three stages: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment, resulting in the selection of 12 relevant empirical studies published between 2002 and 2024. Duplicates were removed, and inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed studies involving military, paramilitary, or emergency personnel. The findings were analysed thematically and categorised into five core domains: (i) cognitive competence, (ii) emotional regulations, (iii) personality attributes, (iv) team dynamics, and (v) adaptive outcomes. Across the reviewed studies, factors such as self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility, boldness, mindfulness, cultural intelligence, and shared adversity were found to significantly influence adaptability and resilience at both the individual and team levels. The findings of this study revealed the significance of multilevel frameworks in the development of training programmes, leadership enhancement, and resilience-building strategies in tactical environments. The review also highlighted theoretical gaps and methodological limitations, providing directions for future research to strengthen performance and cohesion under stress.

Index Terms—Adaptive Performance, Team Resilience, Tactical Environment, Security Forces.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global landscape is characterised by increasing complexity, uncertainty, and rapid change that pose unprecedented challenges to individuals and teams operating in tactical environments [1]. These environments, ranging from military operations to emergency response scenarios, demand a high degree of adaptability and resilience to navigate unforeseen circumstances and achieve mission objectives effectively [2]. Adaptability, the capacity to adjust to new conditions, and resilience, the ability to recover quickly from difficulties, are not merely desirable traits but essential competencies for success in such dynamic and unpredictable environments [3], [4]. Crises originated from different situations, making the ability to effectively foresee, plan for, and respond to them through varied strategies important [5]. Understanding how individuals and teams develop and leverage these qualities is crucial for enhancing performance and ensuring mission success in the face of adversity. Moreover, the integration of individual and team-level adaptability and resilience is crucial, as the collective performance of a team often depends on the synergistic interplay of individual capabilities and the team's capacity to function cohesively under pressure.

Adapting to evolving situations and making crucial decisions with limited information are vital skills for leaders in such environments [6]. Therefore, this review aimed to synthesise existing literature on adaptability and resilience, focusing on their manifestation and interaction within tactical environments to gain insights into improving training, leadership, and team performance.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the researchers conducted a systematic article search to retrieve articles related to adaptive teams and team resilience in tactical environments, particularly among armed forces such as the military and police. The utilisation of the Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses (ROSES) protocol included reviewing sources (i.e., Scopus and Web of Science) using key terms, then filtering using eligibility criteria through the steps of the review process, as well as data abstraction and analysis.

The ROSES protocol was curated initially for environmental management. However, systematic literature reviews are suitable for social scientists for several reasons [7]. Firstly, this protocol focuses on evaluating the quality of the chosen articles. Furthermore, it facilitates the integration of various methods, ensuring a thorough and reliable analysis. Hence, the protocol comprises three key sub-measures: identification, screening, and eligibility.

This study utilised the PICO framework to extract the critical elements: P, “Population or Problem”, I, “Interest”, Co, “Context” [8]. The population consisted of all types of armed forces that work in the defence industry. The interest focuses on the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of adaptive teams in dynamic situations (context). Hence, the primary research question was, “What factors contribute to an adaptive team in dynamic situations?”

Resources. This systematic review utilised two key databases: Scopus and Web of Science. Scopus indexes more than 14,000 journals, with 2,850 social science publications from 4,000 publishers in collaboration with 21 research institutes and over 300 academics and librarians [9]. In comparison, Web of Science contains over 100 million records from 33,000 journals, including approximately 5,200 publications in the social sciences. Both databases offer large coverage for social science research [10].

Eligibility. A few inclusive criteria were identified to filter the study’s searched articles. First, journal articles must be empirical research. English was used as the medium of reporting, as all researchers are proficient in the language. The field selected was social sciences, which is suitable for the area of research. Finally, research from 2000 to 2024 reflected developments in the area of inquiry. Table 1 summarises the eligibility criteria for the study.

TABLE 1. Eligibility Criterion

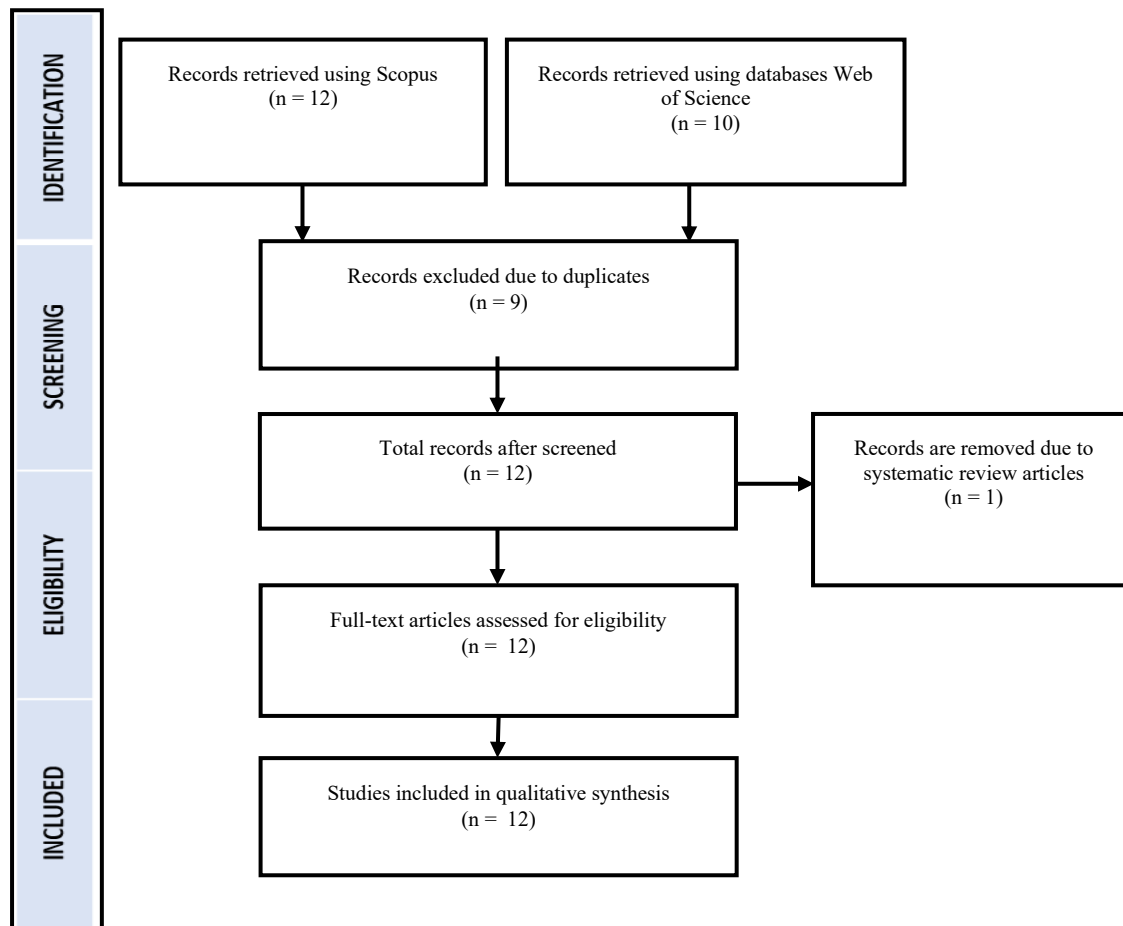
Criterion	Eligibility
Literature type	Journal articles
Language	English
Areas	Social Science
Timeline	Between 2000 and 2024

Systematic Review Process. The first phase of identification was to determine the keywords used as search strings for the database search. Multiple-term similarity was employed to capture more accurate data from the databases. In the realm of creating the search string, “adaptive team”, “team adaptable/adaptability”, “adaptive performance”, “team resilience”, and “team agility” were perceived as carrying the same meaning from the literature. Meanwhile, “factor”, “antecedent”, “predictor”, “determinant”, and “enabler” were perceived to be in the same category. Contextually, “Interpersonal” and “Functional” were also grouped in factors or predictors of adaptive teams. Finally, the population term was defined by “security force”, “police”, “military”, “armed force”, “enforcement”, and “soldier”.

The search yielded 12 records from Scopus and 10 from the Web of Science databases. The next step was to screen the data by removing duplicate entries. This was done using Microsoft Excel by sorting all the titles alphabetically. Through this exercise, nine records were identified as duplicates, and 13 others were passed on to the next step of analysis—eligibility.

In the eligibility stage, one article was removed since it was a conceptual paper. The remaining 12 papers were included and met the study’s inclusion criteria. The phase involved a comprehensive evaluation of the article’s relevancy as determined by the abstract. A total of twelve articles underwent additional assessment by two independent experts using three indicators: high, moderate, and low relevance. All articles passed the evaluation, receiving high and moderate ratings from the evaluators. Figure 1 demonstrates the process of article selection based on the ROSES protocol.

Figure 1. Selection of articles flow diagram



Each article was then analysed using a qualitative analysis to yield meaningful and valuable results [10]. More specifically, a thematic analysis was undertaken to examine the diverse perspectives in the literature, underscoring both the differences and similarities and welcoming unexpected results. [11] emphasises that the thematic analysis method helps in organising an extensive dataset as well as pushing researchers to employ a well-structured approach to produce an understandable and systematic report. Accordingly, the current study included six stages of thematic analysis [12], which included data familiarisation, code generation, code grouping, theme evaluation, theme definition and naming, and finally, report preparation.

FINDINGS

The study findings revealed five major categories from the analysis of the 12 articles, which were derived from the search criteria illustrated in Figure 2. To recap, the study aimed to answer the primary research question: “What factors contribute to an adaptive team in dynamic situations?” The results revealed that the factors were (i) personality attributes, (ii) cognitive competence, (iii) emotional traits, (iv) team dynamics, and (v) adaptive outcome and well-being.

Personality Attributes

Personality attributes emerged as pivotal determinants in shaping team adaptability, particularly within high-stakes environments such as security forces and military operations. A foundational understanding of these traits underscores their significance in enabling individuals and teams to respond effectively to volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) scenarios. [13] highlights the essential roles of openness to experience, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and proactive personality in enhancing team adaptability. These traits collectively support individuals in processing new information, maintaining discipline under pressure, and initiating goal-directed actions, all crucial behaviours in adaptive team performance.

Expanding on this view, [14] examined the influence of personality on cultural intelligence and found that competency was increasingly vital in multicultural operational contexts. They found that extraversion and openness to experience significantly contribute to different dimensions of cultural intelligence. Specifically, extraversion was linked to metacognitive and behavioural cultural intelligence, while openness supported motivational aspects. This suggests that such traits facilitate interpersonal engagement and drive internal motivation necessary to adapt across diverse cultural environments. [15] reinforces the relevance of emotional

stability and conscientiousness, identifying them as robust predictors of adaptive performance in dynamic work environments. Emotionally stable individuals demonstrate greater resilience under stress, while those high in conscientiousness exhibit strong attention to detail and persistence, which are vital traits for navigating shifting task demands.

In more unpredictable and high-stress scenarios, such as military operations, [16] added the importance of psychological coping styles. Their findings indicated that low neuroticism, emotion-orientated coping, and a high mindfulness disposition significantly improved adaptive outcomes, increasing the likelihood of success by five to nine times. These insights emphasise the interplay between dispositional traits and coping mechanisms in fostering adaptability under extreme conditions. Complementing the focus on individual characteristics, [17] developed team resilience scale (TRS) to evaluate collective resilience within military teams. TRS encapsulates three dimensions, namely: physical, cognitive, and affective resilience, and has demonstrated construct validity. Its positive correlation with team performance and responses to stressors underscores its utility in assessing and cultivating team-level adaptability. Finally, [18] underscored the heightened adaptability demands of military roles, where personality attributes such as emotional stability, openness, and conscientiousness were again shown to be essential for effective performance. Their study reiterates that in dynamic operational contexts, these traits serve as stable psychological resources, enabling personnel to remain flexible, focused, and responsive.

Cognitive Competence

Cognitive competence supports critical thinking, problem-solving, and learning agility. The competence is crucial for career transitions and dynamic work roles. It enables proactive behaviours and complements emotional and behavioural adaptability, reinforcing long-term career success in uncertain environments [13]. Research by [19] adds a nuanced understanding of how personality traits interact with cognitive functioning under pressure. Boldness, characterised by fearlessness and social dominance, was found to buffer against the adverse effects of acute stress. Individuals high in boldness maintained or improved cognitive flexibility in the face of threat. In contrast, those lower in boldness show cognitive decline, highlighting boldness as a protective factor for executive functioning during high-pressure tasks.

[17] introduced TRS at the team level. TRS demonstrated strong construct validity and was positively associated with performance and stress-response behaviours in army teams, providing a reliable tool to evaluate and enhance resilience. [20] developed the REFRACTORS protocol, “STOP then Resource”, to improve team resilience through structured reflection. Its successful pilot suggests that targeted cognitive debriefing strengthens team adaptability by addressing stressors and resource gaps. Finally, [18] emphasises that military roles demand heightened cognitive competence compared to civilian occupations, particularly in processing information, decision-making under uncertainty, and adapting to new learning.

Emotional Traits

Emotional traits are foundational to building adaptive and resilient teams, particularly in high-stakes military environments. The shared values, expressions, and reinforcement of dominant emotions that influence group cohesion and performance contribute to a team’s emotional culture [21]. Within this culture, emotions such as optimism, joy, companionate love, and even anger play distinct roles. Optimism stabilises morale under pressure, fostering a solution-orientated mindset, while joy elevates motivation and strengthens collective efficacy during mission transitions.

Boldness, an emotional trait marked by low fear and high social confidence, has been identified as particularly protective in high-stress contexts. [19] and [22] found that individuals high in boldness maintained cognitive flexibility under acute threat, while those low in boldness exhibited performance declines. These findings highlight boldness as a key buffer that sustains executive functioning during stress, enhancing adaptive capacity. [16] extended this understanding by demonstrating that emotional resilience traits include low neuroticism, emotion-oriented coping, and high mindfulness. They significantly improved adaptive performance among Special Forces candidates, resulting in a five-to ninefold increase in success rates. These traits enable composure and adequate decision-making in unpredictable situations.

Emotional dynamics also play a collective role. [20] found that shared adversity and social bonding enhance team resilience by fostering mental models and coordination mechanisms. Combined with individual self-regulation and social support, these emotional assets strengthen team functioning under duress. Accordingly, TRS could measure such abilities [17]. It demonstrated strong validity and was positively correlated with team performance in military field studies, confirming its value in evaluating emotional resilience in teams. Finally, [18] noted that military personnel face heightened emotional adaptability demands compared to civilians. Core traits, such as stress tolerance, emotional regulation, and resilience, are critical for sustained decision-making, effective interpersonal coordination, and operational success in volatile environments.

Team Dynamics

Effective team dynamics are vital in security forces, where clear communication, synchronised behaviour, and rapid decision-making are essential in high-pressure, time-sensitive scenarios. These dynamics often emerge from a shared emotional culture, which shapes how teams interpret setbacks, sustain motivation, and coordinate action under stress [21]. [21] found that though with poor initial performance, teams characterised by optimism and joy,

which are elements of a strong emotional culture, exhibited higher resilience and final performance. In contrast, companionate love and anger showed minimal impact on resilient performance. This suggests that fostering an optimistic emotional tone can significantly enhance team dynamics and adaptability.

In multicultural environments, [14] demonstrated that cultural intelligence plays a key role in strengthening team dynamics. Military personnel with higher cultural intelligence exhibited greater collaboration, adaptability, and communication within diverse teams. This highlights the importance of cross-cultural awareness in promoting cohesion and effectiveness in diverse environments. [15] similarly identified interpersonal and cultural adaptability essential to team success. Teams that cultivated strong interpersonal relationships and cultural sensitivity were better equipped to solve problems, manage stress, and adapt to changing conditions—hallmarks of effective team dynamics in dynamic operational environments.

[20] emphasise that shared adversity and collective structures, such as common goals and mental models, are foundational to team resilience. These shared experiences reinforce social bonds and transform individual capabilities into coordinated group performance under stress. Building on this, [20] introduced the REFRACTORS protocol, a structured team debriefing tool designed to guide reflection on stressors, event dynamics, and resource needs. Army leaders found the tool both practical and meaningful, as it fostered collective understanding and resilience, although further refinement is needed for broader implementation. Finally, [23] showed that both subjective and objective after-action reviews (AARs) significantly improved team dynamics, enhancing communication, cohesion, efficacy, and performance. Notably, the type of AARs had no differential impact, affirming that the process itself, regardless of formality, contributes meaningfully to team learning and coordination.

Adaptive Outcomes and Well-being

Structured reflective practices such as AARs have proven effective in enhancing both adaptive performance and psychological well-being within military teams. [24] introduced the Resilience Enhanced After Action Reviews (REFRACTORS) protocol, a structured reflection framework centred on identifying stressors and resource needs. The study found that participation in REFRACTORS led to improved team resilience, heightened adaptive performance, and increased psychological well-being. These outcomes highlight the importance of incorporating structured reflection into team training to enhance both individual and collective capacities.

Similarly, [23] found that AARs, whether objective or subjective, significantly improved team performance, communication, cohesion, and efficacy. These enhancements contributed to better adaptive outcomes and individual well-being across teams. The consistent benefits, regardless of AAR type, highlight the critical role of reflective practices in fostering team dynamics and resilience in high-pressure environments.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The convergence of evidence suggests that adaptability and resilience in tactical environments are multifaceted constructs influenced by cognitive, emotional, dispositional, and team-related factors. The study synthesis found that individual traits and environmental factors cultivate resilience, making it a dynamic instead of a static process [25]. Moreover, the proactive deployment of both internal and external resources is crucial for managing adversity and maintaining a positive self-concept [26].

These findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive framework that integrates individual readiness with team-level processes. This approach is essential for designing interventions that enhance adaptive performance in high-stress environments. Addressing the construct of resilience effectively requires clear operational definitions and careful application of the term, focusing on competence despite adversity rather than merely ascribing 'resilient' labels to groups [27]. The existing literature highlighted ongoing debates about defining, conceptualising, and measuring resilience, with some models excessively emphasising individual change while overlooking context-related adversities [28].

Resilience differs from comparable concepts, such as recovery, because it is a dynamic process that facilitates positive adaptation in tough contexts. Resilience allows the search to manage disruptions and utilise resources to address significant sources of stress or trauma [29]. Interventions should focus on strengthening individual skills and promoting team cohesion through shared experiences and reflective practices. Ultimately, fostering resilience involves a holistic approach that integrates individual psychological strengths with supportive external resources, enabling individuals and teams to thrive in the face of ongoing challenges. Further research should prioritise longitudinal studies that capture the dynamic interplay between individual traits, team dynamics, and environmental factors, thereby advancing our understanding and application of resilience in tactical environments. The operationalisation of resilience often revolves around adversity and positive adaptation, highlighting its necessity across a spectrum of challenges, from daily stressors to significant life events [30]. Resilience is viewed both as a trait and a process, intricately connected with various psychological characteristics within the context of stress. Rather than an innate attribute, resilience, which includes traits like self-efficacy, hope, and coping mechanisms, can be nurtured through the combination of their environment and experience [31].

Resilience is increasingly recognised for its potential to enhance coping mechanisms in various clinical environments [31]. The recognition of resilience has grown, underscoring its capacity to improve coping strategies across different clinical environments [32]. This highlights the influence of resilience in addressing and dealing

with challenges within healthcare environments. Resilience enables individuals to navigate challenges by utilising personal and contextual resources, fostering professional engagement, satisfaction, and overall well-being [33]. Moreover, resilience can be developed at any stage of life, underscoring its fluid nature rather than being a static personality characteristic [32]. Resilience has been identified as a crucial factor that contributes to overall success and well-being in both personal and professional spheres [34]. The application of resilience extends beyond individual capabilities to include how teams collectively manage stress and adversity.

From a personality perspective, resilience is seen as a positive trait that promotes adaptation, comprising individual attributes that facilitate coping with stressful life events [35]. Resilience, in general, is the ability to positively adapt to challenges, with individual resilience enhancing one's well-being as well as their psychological and physical health. When facing challenging events that are manageable and meaningful, individuals are more inclined to exhibit a resilient response. Resilience is then considered a tool developed over time or a personal trait, enabling individuals to rebound from adversity with increased strength and resourcefulness [30], [31], [36]. Resilience includes the ability to effectively manage stress, utilising it not as a fixed attribute but as a skill set that can be improved through consistent practice, ^[30] considered an inherent trait, where individuals either possess the psychological makeup to handle adversity or do not [38]. This perspective assessed resilience based on the presence or absence of psychopathology following adverse events. While this initial approach acknowledges the importance of internal cognitive resources in overcoming challenges, later views have evolved to recognise resilience as a dynamic process. It enhances social and emotional wellness, enabling individuals to cope with challenges, improve academic performance, and reduce social and psychological health issues [39]. Resilience in response to mental health disturbances includes adaptation, swift recovery, and post-traumatic psychological growth [40]. The modern view that resilience is influenced by individual traits, social support, coping strategies, and environmental factors departs from the binary view.

Research implications suggest that resilience can be nurtured rather than being an immutable characteristic, which has a profound impact on public health by identifying and translating effective methods for fostering resilience. Understanding resilience has shifted from viewing it as an inherent trait to recognising it as a dynamic process shaped by multiple factors. This adaptability underscores the importance of tailored interventions and support systems that can enhance resilience across various populations and. The development of resilience involves navigating stressful situations and adapting positively to challenges by absorbing disturbances and using available resources. In short, resilience is the capacity of an individual or an ecosystem to adapt and recover from challenges that disturb the way they function or develop [41].

Resilience is a complex construct that spans individual psychological traits and broader ecological dynamics, making it essential to consider both internal strengths and external resources when understanding and fostering resilience [42]. Thus, resilience is shaped by self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, and social support, whereas adaptive responses are shaped by supportive environments.

A social-ecological view of resilience emphasises the quality of interactions between individuals and their environment, as well as the resources available for psychological, social, and physical well-being [42]. From this view, the interaction between protective factors and risks can impact an individual's development or inhibition of mental and physical resilience.

Future research should focus on identifying the specific mechanisms through which resilience is built and maintained, especially in high-stress environments. The study of resilience helps clarify the potential for prevention and holds hope in clinical practice by highlighting the complexity of psychopathology. In addition, protective factors improve response to the dangerous outcomes of environmental threats.

It is also crucial to understand how different protective factors interact and how they can be leveraged to promote resilience at individual and collective levels. Moreover, translating research findings into practical applications requires collaborative efforts across various sectors, including healthcare, education, and community services, to create comprehensive resilience-building programmes.

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