

1 Introduction: Emotional intelligence & resilience in journalism

'Frustration would come about often in the early stages. So, a story breaks and you can't find the right person to interview, or you can't get to where you need to be quickly enough, so there can be a lot of, kind of, frustration in the early stages.

And then maybe as the story develops, the day develops, you might have a bit of excitement, you get something really great, you get the interviewee you've been striving for. Or, equally, anxiety begins to set in, maybe about the deadline looming and you haven't got what you need, and you start worrying, or something's gone wrong.

And then there's normally kind of the nervousness of the last half an hour because you're rushing to get the report out where you're going live. And then often after the program there's like elation, there's like kind of like the adrenaline rush and the endorphins of having hopefully had a successful day.'

Mid-career broadcast editor

Journalism textbooks often describe journalism as 'exciting.' There are occasionally other references to journalists' emotions too – mainly about the thrill of chasing a story or making a discovery, and sometimes about the nervousness and anxiety of working with sources and doing interviews. However, it is uncommon to see detailed accounts of emotions that the broadcast editor, quoted above, speaks of, or how to manage these while doing the job. This may not be surprising given that the acknowledgment and discussions of emotions in journalists' practice have been seen at odds with the ideas, or indeed ideals, of journalists' rationality, objectivity and detachment (Kotisova, 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2021). And yet, my own experience of working in journalism, and working with journalism trainees, tells a somewhat different story about journalists' work. I found it to be quite an emotional experience, with emotions making themselves known in most parts of the process, very much in line with how the broadcast editor describes it above. The emotional journey that is journalism seems also quite evident to my journalism students, who often reference their emotions in producing journalistic work, say in their reflective essays. They speak of being frustrated with finding stories, nervous about approaching sources, anxious ahead of interviews, and worried whether their copy will meet the standards of journalism. Add in a microphone or a camera, as well as quick turnaround and short deadlines that they work to on Newsdays, in which we simulate daily news programming, and the fear and anxiety often translate to strong physical reactions. These sometimes include 'freeze,' meaning they have trouble completing the work, and sometimes 'flight,' which in a training environment usually means not showing up for class due to being terrified of everything that needs to be done. The conventional wisdom in the industry, perpetuated even by some textbooks, is that is you can't 'handle it', you should reconsider your career choice. I disagree. Yes, journalism may not be for everyone, but if journalists are not trained in how to 'handle it', then why do we expect them to? In other words, while there are set procedures and routines in journalism that journalists are inducted into to become members of the profession, then why don't we also

train them in how to manage the various emotions that arise in the process, given they can have significant impact on their well-being and the quality of work they produce? This book is aimed at precisely that – raising awareness of different emotional situations that practitioners are likely to encounter on the job, and offering guidance on emotion management strategies they can use in order to be able to do quality work while also feeling good about themselves and their work. As such, it does not substitute journalism textbooks that outline key skills, routines and expectations of the profession - it complements them by focusing on the skill that has been mainly overlooked in journalism education and training – emotion management.

Emotional labour¹

The skill of emotion management is increasingly being recognised in journalism as research in the past decade repeatedly found it to be a high emotional labour job – that in which practitioners face a range of stressors in everyday work and have to manage the emotions that arise in the process in order to be able to continue doing their jobs (Gascón et al., 2021; Pearson & Seglins, 2022; Thomson, 2021). The stressors and emotional situations range from reporting about trauma and conflict, over anxiety about approaching sources and presenting live broadcasts, to worry about posting content on social media due to perceived hostility of these spaces (Šimunjak & Menke, 2022). The persistent stressors in everyday work of journalists arguably contribute to a range of ill-effects of work, impacting journalists' well-being, job satisfaction and commitment, and consequently also the quality of work they produce (Monteiro et al., 2016; Thomson, 2021). It, hence, does not surprise that many studies looking at journalists' labour and its effects find concerning levels of stress, anxiety and burnout among this group of professionals (Gascón et al., 2021; Posetti et al., 2021; Pantoja Lima et al., 2022; Pearson and Seglins, 2022). Yet, in an industry that has long perpetuated the myth of its labourers 'handling it' by having 'thick skin' (Chen et al., 2020; McCaffrey, 2019; Posetti et al., 2021), the recognition of the need to develop support systems for journalists' well-being has only recently started gaining ground.

The social and organisational behaviour literature argues that a worker's well-being can be supported through three key systems: workers' personal resources, social support from peers and supervisors, and organisational support, based on employers implementing fair and transparent systems, offering developmental training, and so on (Aldamman et al., 2019; Roodbari et al., 2021; Shanock et al., 2019). The focus of this book is on the first pillar, i.e., the personal resources that labourers can employ in managing emotional challenges and stressors in order for these not to have a negative impact on their well-being and work. Specifically, the book deals with the issue of developing one of the key personal resources in labour – resilience (Luthans et al., 2006).

Consequently, the book introduces a tailored approach to enhancing resilience among practicing journalists, as well as emerging professionals, such as journalism students, which can assist them in dealing with emotional situations and stressors they are likely to experience on the job.

Resilience

Resilience is considered to be the ability to cope with a difficulty and bounce back from it (Rajan-Rankin, 2014; Tucker, 2021). The body of work on ‘psychological capital’ (PsyCap) provides a useful framework for understanding its importance in labour. PsyCap is defined as ‘an individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by the following:

- (a) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks;
- (b) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future;
- (c) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and
- (d) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success’ (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio, 2007).

Hence, resilience is understood as one of workers’ personal resources – alongside efficacy, optimism, and hope – that enables them to feel and perform well in work life (Youssef-Morgan & Dahms, 2017). Importantly, there is evidence to suggest that each of these characteristics are developable and measurable (Luthans et al., 2008; Youssef-Morgan & Dahms, 2017), and that increase in this psychological capital can contribute to lower stress levels, increased job satisfaction and work commitment (Avey et al., 2009, 2011; Paek et al., 2015), and improved job performance (Luthans et al., 2010; Paterson et al., 2014).

There has been much scholarly attention devoted to the study of resilience in the workplace setting in the past decade (Robertson et al., 2015; King, Newman and Luthans, 2016; Hartmann et al., 2020). The research has been focused on the analysis of resilience among professionals in occupations characterised with high levels of stress and burnout (Vanhove et al., 2016), giving evidence about, for example, resilience among Australian nurses (Delgado et al., 2021), Chinese bankers (Cooke et al., 2019), and American police officers (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012). However, there are warnings that resilience also matters in work settings where there may not be severe and intense stressors, yet there are everyday stressors whose effects accrue (Vanhove et al., 2016).

Journalists as labourers are at risk of both types of these work experiences that require resilience. On the one hand, journalists covering trauma and conflict are regularly faced with acute stressors while performing work (Barnes, 2016; Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Feinstein et al., 2002). On the other hand, the workings of the industry, which involve, but are not limited to, long and irregular working hours, requirement of constant availability, multiplatform production in limited timeframes, social media abuse and precarious working conditions, can be seen as everyday stressors which can over time lead to chronic stress and burnout (Miret, 2021; Pearson & Seglins, 2022). And while research into resilience in journalism is underdeveloped, existing rare studies provide some insight into this personal resource in the industry. With regards to trauma reporting, the report from Dart Centre based on a survey of

journalists across the world found that the majority of trauma and conflict reporters undergo safety training, with rare useful training offered in building resilience and self-care (Slaughter et al., 2017). Consequently, (Murphy, Deeny and Taylor, 2020) trialled a more holistic training that heavily focused on the development of resilience alongside safety skills and found evidence of its effectiveness in preparing journalists for trauma reporting. Similarly, it has been suggested that induction into and regular practice of ‘mindfulness-based meditation’ could help trauma and conflict journalists build resilience for coping with the demands of their beats (Pearson et al., 2021), as can regular debriefs with peers and colleagues which allow emotional release and support (Barnes, 2016). An interesting perspective on journalists’ resilience is also that from neuroscience as reported in (Swart, 2017) study which examined journalists’ lifestyle, health and behaviour, as well as blood and heart rate. She found that journalists’ resilience was impacted by poor sleep which contributes to stress and impedes stress recovery, suggesting this could be partly mitigated with better hydration, and reduction in intake of alcohol and caffeine. What this short overview illustrates is that the importance of resilience as a personal resource in journalists’ work is gaining recognition, yet there is limited insight into its levels and development, particularly beyond trauma reporting.

In sum, resilience is considered as one of the key personal resources that workers need to effectively cope with difficulties they face in work, and there is increasing recognition of its importance in journalism. Yet, little attention has been paid to development of this resource among journalists who are not perceived to be regularly faced with acute stress deriving from coverage of trauma and conflict but can experience chronic stress and burnout.

Emotional intelligence: Stop, think, choose

Useful and transferable practices for enhancing resilience that is needed for managing everyday stressors could be adopted from related disciplines. Notably, studies from work sociology and psychology suggest that work-related stress can be mitigated with emotional intelligence, which enables workers to effectively manage their emotions, which in turn contributes to development of emotional resilience (Durán et al., 2004; Extremera et al., 2018; Sarrionandia et al., 2018). Emotional intelligence is, as resilience, considered a developable skill - one that enables a person to recognise, understand and manage own and others’ emotions in a way which leads to positive outcomes (e.g., relieves stress, enables effective communication etc.) (Pérez-González et al., 2020). The logic of the argument is that by developing emotional intelligence, that is, being able to recognise and effectively manage work-related emotions, labourers are better able to cope with emotional situations they face in the job and bounce back more easily after experiencing these challenges. Importantly, based on the suggestions for development of other elements of PsyCap (Luthans et al., 2007; Youssef-Morgan & Dahms, 2017), growth in emotional intelligence has also the potential to increase other factors of PsyCap.

A useful model of emotional intelligence is based on the ‘Stop, think, choose’ practice. As the name suggests, the model is based on a three-step process of emotion management: its recognition (stop), understanding (think), and management (choose) (Mapes, 2000). In other words, it suggests that a person in an emotional situation should stop and consider what they

are feeling and why they feel like this, and then think about options for going forward and choosing the one they feel most comfortable with. In this way, even if the outcome is not as positive as one would expect or hope for, there is evident agency over choices and emotions. Importantly, applying the ‘stop, think, choose’ model must be “active and experiential, not just verbal and cognitive” meaning that the process should be practiced over time in order for the skill to be developed and internalised (Matthews et al., 2012: 181).

The ‘stop’ step requires the recognition that one is in an emotion-inducing situation. One of the simplest ways to understand the rise of emotions is through the ABC model in which A stands for an activating event, B for the belief about what is happening, or what the outcomes might be, and C for consequences – emotions and behaviours – triggered by beliefs about the activating event. Sometimes these consequences, particularly emotions, are quite clear. If we perceive a threat, in any shape or form it might be, our bodies have a physical reaction to it that includes the release of adrenaline and cortisol, increased blood pressure and heart rate, tensing of muscles, and so on. So, if our bodies are telling us that we’re dealing with a high-pressure situation, through shaking hands, sweating, and pounding hearts, we are usually aware that we are in a situation of heightened emotions. Yet, we can be experiencing emotional situations even if we’re not fully aware of them. We can feel sad, angry, frustrated, or anxious, without being able to put our finger on it. This might be evident in feeling less motivated to do work, having less energy to complete tasks, getting easily annoyed, and/or lashing out at others, particularly if it’s out of character. Hence, recognising an emotional situation and being able to identify the emotions we are feeling in that moment is a process that is not always easy nor straightforward. It requires practice and skill. So, the first step is to ‘stop’ to acknowledge and recognise the emotions that are being experienced.

The next step is ‘think’ which enables us to understand why we are feeling what we’re feeling. A long time ago, Greek philosopher Epictetus has been noted as saying that people are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them. And this is at the heart of the ‘think’ stage – identifying what it is that is driving emotions in regard to the activating event. In line with Epictetus’ observation, research from psychology is telling us that it is usually our beliefs, values, expectations, and experiences that are influencing our perceptions of the activating event and driving the emotions associated with it. It is important here to distinguish between beliefs and values. In simple terms, beliefs are the assumptions we are making about the world around us and the events we expect or live through. So, belief is what we think/believe is happening and what the potential outcomes might be in any given situation. Importantly, these views on an event can be reframed and changed. Values are the standards on which we evaluate the world, its objects, subjects, and events. They are tied to the worth we assign to objects and behaviors. Values are also enduring, yet subject to change throughout different stages of life; hierarchical, meaning that some will be more important than others; and individualistic, as each person has their own set of values that drive their emotions and actions. Hence, if we experience a situation we believe will lead to good outcomes, or is in line with our values, we’re likely to experience positive emotions. Equally, if we think that an activating event is not in line with our values, and/or we believe that it poses a threat of a sort, negative emotions arise. As with the first step, identifying the drivers of our emotions is sometimes quite straightforward, while at other times there is a need to

think through the beliefs and values that one associates with an event in order to understand emotions that are being experienced. This can often be quite challenging, particularly in the early days of employing this practice, but it is a skill that can be trained and mastered.

This brings us to the last step – ‘choose’. Only when we’ve realized why we feel what we feel can we make a conscious decision of how to respond to the situation, rather than simply react to it. The ‘freeze, flight or fight’ reactions have been well documented and researched in psychology. The freeze meaning a person is unable to move or act, flight referring to running away from the perceived threat, and fight indicating a usually aggressive facing of the threat. These are considered to be subconscious reactions of human bodies to situations of perceived threats. The ‘stop, think and choose’ model of emotional intelligence enables us to consciously respond to the stressor, instead of engaging in these subconscious reactions. The response options will vary between situations and individual circumstances, as will the decisions of the best way forward in order to achieve the best possible outcome. Sometimes finding the best option to respond is a process of trial and error while the response that leads to preferred outcome is identified. Yet, by making a conscious choice about the way to manage a situation and our own behavior we are likely to feel better even if we did not fully achieve our desired outcome simply by taking control of the situation, and not feeling like things are happening to us without having a say in them.

Enhancing resilience in journalism

Based on interviews with more than 30 British journalists, and personal reflections on working as a reporter, presenter and editor, as well as teaching journalism, this book offers a practical guide to managing stressors and emotions in everyday journalism work. Specifically, the data about the common emotional situations in journalism, and the strategies that can be used to manage these, are derived from interviews with British journalists from 15 different organisations. Interviewed journalists vary in terms of gender, levels of seniority, years of experience in the industry and their medium’s geographical reach. Journalists’ responses to questions about emotional situations they face in everyday work and strategies they use to deal with them have been explored with thematic analysis following the procedure from (Ayres, 2008). The analysis revealed that emotional situations faced in daily work routines of reporters can be grouped under seven key themes:

- (1) **finding stories and pitching** – there can be excitement, as well as anxiety and the pressure of responsibility that can be induced by finding scoops or being assigned to cover a ‘big story’; anxiety, fear and/or worry in situations in which a journalist does not have a story; as well as emotions of hopefulness and often anxiety about pitch’s reception by editor; and frustration with a rejected pitch.
- (2) **working with sources and interviewing** – there can be nervousness of contacting sources; frustration with non-responsive sources or those who appear to be withholding information; feelings of responsibility toward telling their stories and protecting them from harm; excitement and satisfaction, as well as anxiety related to conducting interviews; worry about displaying inappropriate emotions (particularly in trauma-related interviews), and difficulties in dealing with vicarious emotions.

- (3) **research and writing** – there can be excitement with uncovering an important piece of information; frustration with time-consuming or challenging research; worry about story’s accuracy; and anxiety about writing in a detached and balanced manner.
- (4) **(live) broadcasting and presenting** – there can be fear and/or excitement that leads to adrenaline surge and cause some to thrive off this pressure and enter ‘tunnel vision’ and others to experience adrenaline anxiety; as well as nervousness related to performing; and fears about issues that might arise when reporting from environments that cannot be fully controlled or require many technical elements to operate as planned.
- (5) **reflection and feedback** – there can be feelings of pride and satisfaction when positively evaluating your work, as well as receiving positive feedback within and outside the newsroom; the anxiety and frustration that come with the lack of feedback from editors and/or audiences; and the anxiety, frustration, anger and sadness when the feedback is critical and/or negative.
- (6) **working with social media** – there can be frustration arising from the pressure to do work with social media; the anxiety and nervousness about posting content given the perceived negativity of social media spaces; and the frustration, sadness, anxiety and anger with received abuse and harassment on these platforms.
- (7) **speed of process & 24/7 journalism** – there can be anxiety related to meeting deadlines; exhaustion caused by the need to be ‘always on;’ and frustration with work-life conflict caused by overwork.

The analysis showed that journalists most commonly apply four key emotion management strategies to deal with these emotional situations:

- (1) **Verbal processing**, which entails speaking about their experiences with peers, personal networks, but also counselling in some cases.
- (2) **Internal processing**, that is, thinking about situations that trigger emotions and reframing the beliefs and expectations that are leading to upsetting emotions.
- (3) **Boundary setting**, often applied to the use of digital technologies, which refers to setting boundaries which can help prevent emotional labour or give space to process and manage emotions.
- (4) **Attentional deployment**, that is, refocusing attention, which comes in two key forms: focusing on professional routines (including breaking down a stress-inducing activity into manageable steps - ‘stepping’), and focusing attention to non-work related activities that induce happiness, to balance negative with positive emotions.

The book is organised around the above outlined key themes of journalists’ work, describing in relation to each the key emotional situations journalists may face, followed by advice from practitioners suggesting strategies for effective management of these emotions. The potential emotional situations, and common strategies for managing emotions in these, are mapped against the ‘stop, think, choose’ model of emotional intelligence in each chapter. Specifically, the list of emotional situations speaks directly to the “stop” phase, as gaining awareness of them can increase journalists’ ability to recognize an emotional situation. The common emotion management strategies are related to the “choose” phase, given they represent assets from which to choose from to manage stressors.

It is important to emphasise here that, in line with the concept of emotional intelligence, interviews showed that emotions are subjective, meaning that different individuals may experience different emotions and choose different strategies for managing them, when faced with the same situation. For example, the prospect of being tasked with covering the story of the day may induce feelings of happiness in one person, and of fear in another. In the latter case, one journalist may wish to relieve that fear by consulting with peers or editor (verbal processing), while another may apply ‘stepping’ (attentional deployment) to make the task appear more manageable through the process of following procedures and routines.

Given this, it is important to recognise that the emotional situations and strategies discussed in the book are neither prescriptive nor comprehensive. Rather, the aim of the book is to raise awareness about potential emotional situations that might be expected in the job, so journalists are better prepared to face them; provide suggestions of practical emotion management strategies that can serve as assets in the process; and equip practitioners with the knowledge of a useful process of emotion management (i.e. ‘stop, think, choose’) that they can apply in critical reflection on their work, which can enhance their emotional intelligence and resilience and consequently, enable them to feel and perform better in the workplace.

It is worth mentioning also what the book does not do. The data is derived primarily from accounts of staff journalists, so it does not speak to some of the specific circumstances that may be emotion-inducing to freelancers in the industry, such as the issues of precarious labour. Also, while trauma reporting is mentioned in some chapters, the book focuses on journalists’ everyday work, rather than these specific contexts. In addition, the book deals with experiences of British journalists which may not be transferable to other contexts. That said, there is evidence to suggest that many of their experiences are common to those in some other journalistic cultures. Where this may be the case, there are references to evidence from these other contexts. Several journalists’ vignettes from other countries, including the US, Australia and Croatia, that can be found across the book, attest to it as well.

Finally, while the book is focused on journalists’ personal resource of resilience, it needs emphasising that it is not arguing that personal resources are the answer to all issues in journalists’ labour. Rather, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, they are one pillar of support for journalists’ well-being. As such, they are not a substitute for, but are complementary to, systems of social and organisational support that should also be in place to safeguard journalists’ well-being and the quality of journalism.

Exercises: Resilience level and values

As mentioned, emotions are often driven by values, and response to stressors will partly depend on individual’s resilience levels. Before learning more about potential stressors and emotional situations in different aspects of journalists’ everyday work, as well as possible responses to these, it might be useful to establish your starting points in terms of resilience levels and key values you hold that may impact on the way you perceive and interpret challenging situations. Hence, the following two practical exercises are aimed at raising self-awareness about personal values, as well as individual resilience levels.

Resilience level²

Step 1: This is Brief Resilience scale. Indicate to what degree you agree with each statement. For each statement, circle the corresponding number or make a note of it.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	5	4	3	2	1
It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	1	2	3	4	5
It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	5	4	3	2	1
I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	1	2	3	4	5
I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	5	4	3	2	1

Step 2: Add the numbers you've chosen for all statements and divide the sum by 6. This is your Brief resilience scale score.

BRS score	Interpretation
1.00-2.99	Low resilience
3.00-4.30	Normal resilience
4.31-5.00	High resilience

Values³

Step 1: From the list of universal human values, choose 5 that are most important to you. Then put them in a hierarchical order.

Ambition

Daring

Obedience

Authority	Friendship	Pleasure
Adventure	Freedom	Politeness
Broadminded	Health	Respect for tradition
Capable	Helpfulness	Self-discipline
Choosing own goals	Humble	Sense of belonging
Cleanliness	Independence	Social recognition
Creativity	Influence	Tolerance
Enjoying life	Loyal	Varied life
Equality	Moderate	Wealth

Step 2: Record the five values on the Values map. Is there a category that is most important to you?

Figure 1.1 Values map according to Schwartz et al. (2006)

<INSERT FIGURE 1.1 HERE>

¹ Some of the content presented in this chapter has been previously published in: Šimunjak, M. (2023). Teaching Emotional Intelligence for Enhancing Resilience in Journalism. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 78(2), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958231165103> (published by SAGE journals in April 2023)

² Brief resilience scale according to Smith et al. (2008)

³ Basic human values according to Schwartz et al. (2006)

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