

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL SKILLS – FOUNDATIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND CHANGE

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how emotional resilience and social competencies function as interrelated foundations of adult well-being in times of uncertainty and change.

Approach: The text draws on both current psychological theories and practical experience working with adults in educational, therapeutic, and professional contexts. It presents definitions and mechanisms for building resilience, highlights the importance of interpersonal skills, and offers strategies for supporting the development of these competencies in everyday life.

Findings: The article shows that emotional resilience and social competencies are key resources that determine an individual's ability to cope with contemporary challenges without losing mental health, life meaning, or self-worth. The ability to regulate emotions, cognitive flexibility, empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution all contribute to individual well-being and enhance society's capacity to recover from crises and act collectively.

Research implications: Empirical studies conducted over the past decade clearly indicate that emotional resilience and social skills are significant predictors of psychological well-being and an individual's ability to adapt in conditions of stress and uncertainty. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of developing these competencies across different age and social groups.

Social implications: Strengthening collective resilience and social competencies is a strategic necessity for societies that must deal with crises such as pandemics, migration challenges, or climate change. Communities that are able to collaborate, share resources, and communicate constructively are more likely to restore balance and take coordinated action.

Originality/value: The article offers a new perspective on the significance of emotional resilience and social competencies as interrelated psychological resources. It is intended for psychologists, therapists, educators, and organizational leaders who aim to foster the development of these competencies within their communities.

Keywords: emotional resilience, social competencies, well-being, adult education.

Category of the paper: Viewpoint, general review.

1. Introduction

The dynamics of change in the contemporary world affect all aspects of societal functioning — professional, health-related, and emotional. Human existence is now closely tied to experiencing global crises that destabilize not only the socio-political landscape but also profoundly impact the human psyche. The rise in feelings of threat, uncertainty, and loss of control is influenced by wars, migration crises, pandemics, as well as the ongoing digitization and automation of everyday life (World Mental Health Report, 2022, pp. 248-249). In the face of these challenges, more and more individuals experience chronic stress, burnout, difficulties in maintaining interpersonal relationships, and problems with emotional regulation. Mental disorders contribute to a reduced quality of life and the inability to work. Currently, one in eight people worldwide lives with a mental health condition (World Mental Health Report, 2022, p. 15), which makes the ability to adapt, manage stress, and build supportive relationships a necessity in today's world.

Emotional resilience and social skills — often unfairly underestimated as "soft skills" — are proving to be essential psychological resources. These are the abilities that determine whether an individual can cope with contemporary challenges without losing their mental health, sense of purpose, and self-worth. The capacity for emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution are competencies that not only enhance individual well-being but also foster a society's ability to recover from crises and act collectively.

Investing in the development of emotional resilience and social skills contributes to greater psychological stability, better relationships, higher motivation, and a longer capacity for work and personal growth (Gross, 2014; Southwick et al., 2014). These competencies also significantly impact professional life, where they are strong predictors of team effectiveness, leadership, and innovation (Goleman, 2012, p. 365). Furthermore, they are skills that — although to varying degrees — can be developed by every adult, regardless of past experiences or current life circumstances.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate how emotional resilience and social competencies function as interrelated foundations of adult well-being in an era of uncertainty and change. The text is based on both current psychological theories and practical experiences in working with adults in educational, therapeutic, and professional contexts. It will present definitions and mechanisms for building resilience, the significance of interpersonal skills, as well as strategies to support the development of these competencies in everyday life. In times when change becomes the only constant, it is worth viewing mental health not as the absence of problems, but as an actively shaped process of resilience, grounded in a conscious approach to emotions and relationships with others.

2. Emotional Resilience – Theoretical Perspective

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, psychological resilience is the ability to adapt effectively to challenging life circumstances through flexible thinking, emotional regulation, and the capacity to adjust to both external and internal demands. How well someone copes with adversity depends on several factors, including:

- how the person perceives and reacts to reality,
- the social support they can rely on (e.g., relationships with family and friends),
- the coping strategies they use during difficult times.

Psychology shows that resilience is not an innate trait, but a skill that can be developed and strengthened through practice and experience (Resilience, 2018).

Emotional resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt to challenging situations, cope with crises, and return to emotional balance effectively. Key components of resilience include the capacity for emotional regulation, a sense of purpose, self-awareness, flexible thinking, and optimism (Southwick et al., 2014, p. 5). Resilience does not mean the absence of stress or suffering, but rather the ability to move through difficulties without losing functionality. In the context of positive psychology, the concept of post-traumatic growth is often discussed — the possibility of personal development despite negative experiences (Calhoun, Tedeschi, 2012, p. 2).

Developing emotional resilience is a dynamic process involving both internal resources and environmental factors. Internal resources include the ability to realistically assess situations, make decisions under uncertainty, and skills related to emotional self-regulation. External factors include access to social support, a sense of belonging, and stable interpersonal relationships.

Differences in how people regulate their emotions influence their emotional tendencies — that is, how they typically respond emotionally in various situations. This means that distortions in information processing, such as biases in perceiving or interpreting emotional stimuli, may serve as emotion-regulating mechanisms (MacLeod, Grafton, 2014, p. 508). Many established psychological theories suggest that a tendency to focus attention on specific (e.g., negative) emotional stimuli may increase both chronic vulnerability to negative emotional states and the risk of developing emotional disorders, such as anxiety or depression.

Research shows that emotionally resilient individuals experience lower levels of depression and anxiety, cope better with stress, and are more likely to take action in uncertain situations (Kalisch et al., 2015). It is important to emphasize that resilience is not an innate trait — it can be cultivated through psychological practices, training, and conscious experiences. A supportive environment, constructive role models, and self-reflection are all factors that foster its development.

Neuroplasticity — the brain's ability to reorganize itself in response to experiences — enables the development of new coping strategies even after traumatic events (Ozbay et al., 2007, p. 37). This makes it possible for individuals who regularly practice stress management techniques — such as meditation, mindfulness, or self-reflection — to strengthen brain structures responsible for emotional balance.

From a therapeutic perspective, emotional resilience is also linked to an individual's narrative identity — how they tell the story of their life, how they assign meaning to their experiences, and how they interpret adversity. People who can constructively reinterpret past events tend to demonstrate greater optimism and openness toward the future, which supports their further emotional and social development.

3. The Importance of Social Skills in Adult Life

Social skills are a set of competencies that enable individuals to function effectively and appropriately in various social situations. They include both verbal communication (e.g., conversation, assertiveness) and non-verbal communication (e.g., eye contact, gestures), which together allow for the effective formation of relationships, conflict resolution, and understanding of others' emotions (Social Skills, 2018). Key among these are empathy, communication, assertiveness, conflict resolution, cooperation, and the ability to adapt socially. Individuals with well-developed social skills tend to manage better in both professional and personal relationships, are less likely to experience isolation, and exhibit higher levels of psychological well-being.

Empathy, understood as the ability to recognize and understand others' emotions, is the foundation for building trust and connection. Empathetic individuals are better at interpreting others' needs, which facilitates conflict resolution and the ability to engage in constructive dialogue (Decety, Cowell, 2015, p. 12). The ability to actively listen and express emotions clearly also helps to prevent misunderstandings and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Assertiveness — the ability to express one's needs and opinions while respecting the boundaries of others — is essential for maintaining emotional balance in relationships. Assertive individuals are less likely to experience frustration from suppressing emotions and are able to protect their boundaries without becoming aggressive. Conflict resolution, both in private and professional settings, requires a combination of rational analysis and emotional understanding of the other party. People with this skill not only function more effectively within groups but are also more likely to become leaders, capable of building trust and motivating others. Social skills are also closely linked to emotional intelligence — the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Daniel Goleman (2012) points

out that emotional competencies are as important as — and in some cases more important than — cognitive abilities when it comes to achieving professional and personal success.

In an era of globalization and digitalization, where communication increasingly takes place indirectly (e.g., online), social competencies have become even more crucial. The ability to build relationships, interpret non-verbal emotional cues, and respond constructively in social situations is now one of the most important pillars of mental health and professional effectiveness.

4. The Synergy of Emotional Resilience and Social Skills

Emotional resilience and social competencies are deeply interconnected, together forming a support system that enables individuals to cope with the challenges of everyday life. Emotionally resilient people are more likely to maintain healthy social relationships, express emotions constructively, and take initiative in difficult situations. At the same time, a solid level of social skills enhances one's sense of belonging and support, which in turn reinforces psychological resilience. Today, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate these two areas into educational, developmental, and professional practices. Schools and workplaces that promote open communication, empathy, cooperation, and emotional reflection not only improve the well-being of their members but also build resilient communities capable of responding effectively to crises. In therapeutic and developmental practice, training in interpersonal skills is increasingly combined with techniques for building emotional resilience. This integrated approach yields lasting outcomes, including better adaptation to change, lower levels of anxiety, and greater life satisfaction.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a clear example of a situation in which emotional resilience and social skills were put to the test. Research conducted during lockdowns showed that individuals with higher levels of emotional self-awareness and empathy experienced lower stress levels and functioned more effectively in family and professional relationships (Killgore et al., 2020). Similar findings have been observed in the context of migration, climate, and war-related crises. Communities capable of cooperation, resource-sharing, and constructive communication recover their balance more quickly and are more likely to engage in collective action (Masten, Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Thus, strengthening collective resilience and social competencies is not only an individual matter but also a strategic imperative. Public authorities, NGOs, and educational institutions should invest in preventive and educational programs that promote these skills across different age and social groups.

5. Developing Resilience and Social Competence in Adults

The process of developing emotional resilience and social skills in adults is not only possible but also crucial in light of the challenges posed by modern life. Psychological maturity does not automatically equip individuals with these resources — in fact, adulthood often reveals deficiencies in emotional regulation or effective communication. However, with well-designed interventions, adults can systematically develop these competencies and integrate them into their lifestyle and identity. The development of emotional resilience is based on several key pillars:

- Emotion regulation training, such as emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2011) or mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2021), helps individuals recognize, accept, and transform difficult emotions without suppressing them. Regular mindfulness exercises lead to reduced cortisol levels, improved concentration, and a greater sense of agency.
- Building personal narrative and a sense of meaning draws from narrative therapy and logotherapy techniques. Activities such as writing letters to one's future self, reconstructing life stories, or exploring core values help individuals shift perspective and give meaning to life experiences, thus enhancing psychological resilience and reducing existential anxiety.
- Strengthening self-awareness and reflectiveness, or the ability to observe one's reactions and emotional states from a meta-level, is a key component of internal stability. As Gross (2014) notes, reflective individuals tend to be more emotionally flexible and less impulsive when facing strong affective states.
- Neuroplasticity-based exercises utilize the brain's capacity to form new neural connections in response to experience. Programs such as Cognitive Flexibility Training or Positive Affect Journaling help create adaptive cognitive patterns, improving the individual's ability to cope with change and uncertainty (Davidson, McEwen, 2012).

Social competencies, though often mistaken for politeness or sociability, are in fact a set of deep and complex cognitive-emotional skills. Their development can take place through:

- Interpersonal communication workshops, which teach precise expression of thoughts, emotions, and needs, as well as active and empathetic listening. Models like Nonviolent Communication (NVC) are often used to reduce conversational tension (Rosenberg, 2016).
- Empathy and assertiveness training, which are crucial for building respectful and trusting relationships. Empathy involves not just emotional but also cognitive understanding of others' perspectives (theory of mind). Assertiveness allows one to set boundaries without violating those of others.

- Learning conflict resolution through the win-win model, which focuses on finding solutions that meet the needs of all parties, rather than fighting for being right. Rogers and Farson (2015) emphasize the importance of active listening and emotional validation as core elements of effective mediation.
- Social scenario simulations and teamwork exercises (e.g., case studies, role-playing, drama-based learning) offer participants controlled environments to practice social behaviors. This enhances adaptability, fosters flexible reactions, and supports learning through experience.

For actions aimed at developing resilience and social competencies to be effective, several key conditions must be met:

- Facilitation by experienced professionals with psychological, pedagogical, and instructional expertise. Trainers should foster a safe environment and support group dynamics.
- Cyclical and systematic structure — while one-time workshops offer limited benefits, extended programs allow for deep integration of skills and their application in daily life.
- High level of practicality — sessions should employ active methods that engage participants in reflection and action. The more grounded in real-life contexts the exercises are, the more lasting their effects.
- Feedback and individualization — learning must include constructive feedback and be adapted to the participant's individual resources, learning style, and needs.
- Space for experimentation and mistakes — development requires room for trial and error. Only in a non-judgmental, supportive environment can authentic change take place.
- Link to personal and professional goals — motivation increases when participants understand how new skills impact their quality of life, relationships, work, and long-term aspirations.

The development of emotional resilience and social competence should not be seen as a short-term “fix,” but as a lifelong developmental process. In societies based on collaboration, diversity, and rapid change, these skills form the foundation not only of individual well-being but also of social cohesion. In everyday adult life, it's worthwhile to adopt practices that strengthen both resilience and relationships. Examples of such techniques include: keeping an emotion journal, practicing gratitude and positive reflection, engaging in active listening and paraphrasing in conversations, using emotional pause techniques in conflict situations, performing regular self-analysis and evaluation of social behavior, participating in support groups and learning communities, incorporating daily self-empowerment rituals (e.g., affirmations, meditation, movement).

By integrating simple practices into daily routines, individuals can gradually cultivate resilient and prosocial attitudes, leading to better well-being, health, and quality of personal and professional life.

6. Analysis of Empirical Research on Emotional Resilience and Social Skills

Empirical studies conducted over the past decade clearly indicate that emotional resilience and social competence are significant predictors of psychological well-being and an individual's ability to adapt under stress and uncertainty. This chapter discusses selected studies analyzing these relationships both at the individual and social levels. Studies have been presented that allow for an in-depth analysis of emotional resilience and social skills.

In a study by Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) involving over 500 adults, it was shown that individuals with higher emotional resilience exhibited greater positive affect, fewer depressive symptoms, and better social functioning. Moreover, resilience served as a buffer against chronic stress — participants coped more effectively in demanding professional and family situations requiring high emotional flexibility. Similarly, Kalisch et al. (2015) found that resilient individuals not only recover more quickly from crises but also experience post-traumatic growth more frequently.

In an experiment conducted with students and young adults in the U.S., Seppälä et al. (2020) demonstrated that interventions aimed at developing social skills — including empathy, mindfulness, and interpersonal communication — significantly reduced stress symptoms and improved psychological well-being. Participants in the eight-week training program reported greater sense of agency and better interpersonal relationships. In another study involving emergency service workers and healthcare personnel, it was found that high levels of interpersonal competence and availability of social support significantly reduced the risk of developing PTSD and occupational burnout (Ozbay et al., 2007). Importantly, the job performance of these individuals remained high even under prolonged stress conditions.

A meta-analysis of 29 intervention studies assessed the effectiveness of emotional resilience programs among adults. The results showed that both short-term (4-6 weeks) and long-term interventions led to significant improvements in emotion regulation, self-awareness, and reduced levels of anxiety and depression (Joyce et al., 2018). In another study, Kotsou et al. (2019) examined the impact of a workplace program aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence and social competencies. Participants reported improved ability to understand others' emotions, better conflict management, and increased job satisfaction. These effects were still present six months after the training had ended.

The cultural context in which resilience and social skills are developed also plays a crucial role. Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) emphasized that communities with high levels of social capital (trust, cooperation, communication) recovered more quickly from crises such as the pandemic or migration crises, and provided better support to their members. For example, local communities in Greece and Italy that implemented educational programs focused on soft skills demonstrated greater cohesion and collective resilience.

7. Conclusion

In an era of change, crises, and instability, emotional resilience and social skills have become key components of proper human functioning. They are fundamental resources that determine the quality of life, relationships, health, and productivity. This is why adult education should prioritize the development of these competencies—not only in times of crisis but as a permanent element in building resilient and supportive communities.

In the face of dynamic changes and global crises, emotional resilience and social competencies are becoming indispensable resources that influence quality of life, mental health, and professional effectiveness. Contemporary challenges, such as pandemics, migration crises, and climate change, highlight the importance of developing these skills on both individual and societal levels. Emotional resilience—understood as the ability to adapt and cope with adversity—and social competencies—including communication skills, empathy, and cooperation—are crucial for building healthy relationships and supportive communities.

This article demonstrates that investing in the development of these competencies yields tangible benefits in both personal and professional life. Individuals with high emotional resilience and well-developed social skills are better at managing stress, more flexible in the face of change, and more effective in interpersonal communication. Educational and preventive programs that support the development of these skills can significantly improve individual well-being and organizational effectiveness.

Individuals with high emotional resilience are able to regulate their own emotions (e.g., anxiety, frustration), and thanks to their social skills, they can communicate clearly and support others. At the group level, these same individuals become 'stabilizers' within the team – their attitude reduces tension and fosters constructive problem-solving. This builds collective resilience, as the group as a whole is less prone to panic, can adapt more quickly to change, and seek solutions together. In the social context, strengthening collective resilience and social competencies is a strategic imperative for societies that must cope with crises. Communities capable of collaboration, resource sharing, and constructive communication recover balance more quickly and are better equipped to take joint action. Public authorities, non-governmental

organizations, and educational institutions should invest in programs that foster these skills across various age and social groups.

To conclude, emotional resilience and social competencies are not only key resources but also the foundation of healthy and effective communities. In the face of contemporary challenges, the development of these skills has become a necessity—bringing benefits to both individuals and society at large. Therefore, investing in adult education is essential to build resilient and supportive communities capable of effectively responding to crises and working together.

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