An investigation of business mental toughness using personal construct psychology.

A thesis submitted to
The University of Manchester
for the degree of
Doctor in Business Administration
in the Faculty of Humanities.

2013

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Manchester Business School
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Word Count = 54,793 (excluding appendices and contents sheet)
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# Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIPD</td>
<td>Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health and Safety Executive</td>
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<td>NICE</td>
<td>National Institute of Clinical Excellence</td>
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<td>PCP</td>
<td>Personal Construct Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>RGT</td>
<td>Repertory Grid Technique</td>
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ABSTRACT

University: University of Manchester
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Thesis Title: An investigation of business mental toughness using personal construct psychology.
Date: January 30th 2014

The current economic climate has placed a tremendous amount of pressure on businesses and their staff to perform and as a consequence the number of lost workdays associated with workplace stress is becoming a significant burden upon the UK economy. In order to improve and reduce the cost burden of lost workdays many businesses, and more specifically their leadership teams, have now started to look at non-business related environments in their search for success and ways in which to combat workplace stress.

On such environment that business leaders have shown a growing interest in is that of sport and in particular the development and utilisation of mental toughness in order to achieve and sustain high performance. As a result there is a growing, if not an insatiable, desire to create mentally tough business professionals. However even though there are numerous books describing mental toughness to date no one has determine whether its ‘stress coping’ capability will actually benefit business professionals and whether the [sporting] definitions and frameworks are really appropriate for use in a business context.

Existing examinations of sporting mental toughness have successfully adopted a qualitative approach in order to examine mental toughness. Similarly this research thesis adopted a qualitative approach using both Personal Construct Psychology and Appreciative Inquiry in order to capture business professional’s individual views, experiences, meanings, and perceptions of theirs or other people’s responses to events and situations in order to describe and characterise business mental toughness. Twelve business professionals participated in the study from which a definition of business mental toughness was developed and the attributes of the ideal mentally tough business person documented. The findings suggest that business mental toughness does exist but is different to that observed in sport and draws on our own values, beliefs, motivations and emotional intelligence and a set of coping mechanisms that enable business professional to cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment whilst maintaining emotional control and delivering on their objectives.

This thesis provides the basis for further empirical research into business mental toughness, as well as providing guidance as to some of the conceptual and practical implications for the use of mental toughness techniques within a business environment. Given that £25.9 billion is lost due to work place stress in the UK alone, there is sufficient demand and reason to further the research into the stress coping capabilities of mental toughness and ensure that the correct type of mental toughness is developed within business.
DECLARATION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to my supervisors Dr. Mark Batey and Dr. Maria Stafylarakis for pushing me forward over the last four years. Special thanks also to Professor Sheldon Hanton for the inspiration to study business mental toughness and for your direction, support and encouragement over the last four years. I would also like to thank all of my friends and study participants who supported me in completing this thesis and allowing me to test my theories out on them.

Finally a special thanks to my family and the support you have provided me over the last seven years. I would like to express appreciation to my wife Zoe and daughters Nyah and Tia who have put up with an absent father from time to time as I’ve written up this thesis.
1 INTRODUCTION

The current economic climate has placed a tremendous amount of pressure on businesses and their staff to perform (Hutton, 2008) and as a consequence of this pressure the number of lost workdays associated with workplace stress is becoming a significant burden upon the UK economy. Indeed the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) estimates that psychological illness within the working age population costs UK employers £25.9 billion per year (at 2009 pay levels) due to sickness absence (£8.4 billion); reduced workplace productivity (£15.1 billion); and lost turnover (£2.4 billion).¹

1.1 What is workplace stress?

Stress at work has been defined as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work".² The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has identified the top five sources of workplace stress as workload/volume, management styles, non-work factors (relationships/family), relationships at work and change.³ It is also widely acknowledged that workplace stress can have an adverse impact on employees, affecting their well-being, both physical and psychological, as well as their relationships to their jobs, work colleagues, and life outside work.

Employee stress also has serious implications for organisational performance as it can result in long-term absence from work (and a common cause of short-term absence), reduced employee productivity at work, increase staff turnover and potentially cause accidents and errors, which can lead to industrial disputes and damage company reputations. As a result of the desire to improve and the need to reduce the cost burden of lost workdays many businesses, and more specifically their leadership teams, have now started to look at non-business related areas in their search for success and ways in which to combat workplace stress.

1.2 **Searching for business solutions in sport**

One area that has seen a growing interest from business leaders is sport, and more specifically what they can learn from sport, sports performers, sports coaches and sports scientists (see Loehr and Schwartz, 2001; Lombardi Jr., 2002). Elite sport can be characterized by a demand to excel at optimum levels while performing under conditions that are considered to be extremely demanding, however this statement could also be true for business. Consequently, there is now a growing body of literature, often anecdotal, promoting the transfer of elite performance principles developed from within the sporting domain to business. One such example would be Bolchover's series of five articles in the Sunday Times (see Bolchover, 2005a, b, c, d, e) centred on what business can learn from sport. In these articles a number of elite coaches provided their insights and experiences of world class coaching and how this related to business; however no empirical evidence was provided to suggest that these approaches actually work consistently or that they had been empirically tested other than through the experiences of the coaches themselves.

In addition to this proliferation of literature an increasing number of sportsmen and women, and in particular their coaches and psychologists are crossing the sport-business divide in order to offer insights and advice direct to organisations and those who lead them (see Bull, 2006; Gordon, 2007; Jones et al, 2002; Jones 2004; Jones et al, 2008). Sports coaches have grabbed the interest of business leaders as this, often overshadowed, group of highly successful individuals are widely recognised as experts in strategy development, innovation, team-building, and developing and mentoring personnel (Smith and Westerbeek, 2005).

1.3 **Similarities between business and sport**

It should not be surprising that linkages have been made between sport and business. There are clearly a number of common themes which have been identified, these include management of organisational issues, dealing with the stress and pressure of performance, leadership, development and management of high performance teams and the demands of coaching individuals (Jones, 2002, 2008). Indeed both environments can be highly competitive, where success depends on a performer’s ability to continuously outperform an opponent or opponents. However, while it is understandable that business leaders should want to rub
shoulders with their sporting heroes, to date there is very little empirical evidence to suggest that sporting approaches to leadership and sports management which are attributed to sporting success can also bring business success (Burnes and O’Donnell, 2011).

1.4 **Differences between business and sport**

Upon closer inspection the similarities between sport and business suggested in the ‘popular’ literature are rather superficial and it is only by examining the two contexts more closely that we are able to clearly describe these differences and therefore question whether the application of, and development of, an approach developed in sport is easily transferable to business. There are clear differences between a sporting context and a business context, these include *the gender of participants* - sport is invariably gender specific where as business is on the whole gender neutral; *performance measures* – these are generally objective and simplistic within sport, whereas they are often subjective and complex within business; and *social impact* - business tends to encompass a broader social impact for the performer as well as a longer and generally more mature element of our lifespan. The sporting and working environment also differ in size, task type and personalities of individuals in teams and leaders, and as such the transfer of approaches to improve performance may be more likely or greatest in some situations than in others (Weinberg and McDermott, 2002). As such we should be mindful when applying sports-developed psychological frameworks within business that they may be impractical, unfounded and/or counterproductive.

1.5 **Utilisation of cognitive resources**

One aspect of business and sport that is considered similar is that they both result in varying levels of performance related anxiety, confidence and motivation (Bull *et al.*, 2005). It has been suggested that the pressures felt by athletes and business professionals are associated with a lack of something, for instance, resources, communication, time, finance or delegation (Jones, 2002), however these are tangible factors that are often easily addressed. What are less tangible are cognitive resources such that the individual must utilise in order to cope with the stress and pressure. The identification and management of these is more complex, often the individual themselves may not know that there is a problem. As a result the successful use of psychologists within sport has flourished with not just top-level sportsmen and women now using the services of sports psychologists successfully.
Despite the evident confidence of Bull (2006), Jones and Moorhouse (2007) and Murphy (1996) in being able to adapt mind/body skills used in sport to suit business settings, there appear to be no studies that have directly compared sport psychology interventions with an industrial and organisational (I-O) psychology consultation (Gordon, 2007). In addition, in business settings there are only a few studies that have empirically tested the efficacy of interventions and techniques that sport psychology researchers’ use regularly with both teams and individuals to enhance performance.

1.6 The appeal of mental toughness

One of the principles that have transcended the sport business barrier is mental toughness and it has been suggested that this phenomenon has significant transfer potential to business (Gordon, 2007). Until recently, researched entirely within an elite sporting performance context, mental toughness has grown in popularity as a result of the sports science and coaching communities widely acknowledging mental toughness as being one of the most important, if not the most important, attribute in determining performance excellence within sport (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005; Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002, 2007; Middleton, Marsh, Martin, Richards, & Perry, 2004). In addition the frequent use of mental toughness by commentators, media correspondents, coaches, and performers themselves to characterise consistent high performances has popularised the phrase. As a result there is a growing if not an insatiable desire to create mentally tough business professionals. However even though there are numerous books describing mental toughness and how it can be developed in business (see Bull, 2006; Jones and Moorhouse, 2008), to date no one has determine whether the ‘stress coping’ capability of mental toughness will actually benefit business professionals and whether the [sporting] definitions and frameworks which explain and develop mental toughness are really appropriate for a business context. As such the development of a sound empirical understanding of business mental toughness would have implications for business leaders, business professionals, business coaches, and contribute to increasing the knowledge base with regard to its potential to improve work place performance.

Although business mental toughness research is still in its infancy, this thesis contributes to the current conceptualisations of mental toughness within a business context.
Findings suggest that mental toughness: is multifaceted; is made up of key components broadly classified as attitudes, cognitions, emotions, values, and behaviours (see Gucciardi et al., 2008); consists of a core constellation of key characteristics that would not vary significantly across business situations (e.g., self belief, handling and coping with pressure, focus and commitment, motivation, control of emotions and the wider environment, business knowledge, tough attitude, resilience, personal values, work ethic and emotional intelligence); and encompasses dealing with and thriving through both negatively (e.g., dismissals and redundancy) and positively construed (e.g., promotion, contract awards) situations or critical incidents (Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock, 2009a).

1.7 Introduction to mental toughness research

Mental toughness has fascinated sports coaches and performers since the 1950’s, with investigators citing mental toughness as a personality trait (Kroll, 1967; Werner & Gottheil, 1966), a defence mechanism against adversity (Woods, Hocton, & Desmond, 1995), a critical asset for athletes to endure the long hours of strenuous training associated with top level performance (Bull, Shambrook, & Albinson, 1996; Goldberg, 1998), and a decisive factor in distinguishing successful and unsuccessful performances (Loehr, 1982, 1986, 1995; Pankey, 1993). However, this vast volume of literature was based on experiential and anecdotal evidence rather than empirical scientific research, with many studies actually investigating mental skills rather than mental toughness (for reviews, see Connaughton, Hanton, Jones, & Wadey, 2008; Connaughton & Hanton, 2009; Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmick, 2009a). This lack of empirical research exacerbated misinterpretation and caused confusion as to what mental toughness actually was, as such it is one of the most cited but often misunderstood terms used in applied sports psychology research (Jones et al., 2002; Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009). At a very simple level the term describes a phenomenon, observed in sports men and women that turns ‘good athletes’ into ‘great athletes’ (Gucciardi et al., 2008). Over the last few years researchers appear to have agreed that, more specifically, mental toughness reflects an innate ability to cope with the stress and the anxiety associated with the pressure of [competitive] performance and training better than others [competitors] (Jones et al., 2002; Bull et al., 2005, Thelwell et al., 2005) which results in consistently higher performances. It is this ability that is so attractive to business leaders.
1.7.1 What is sporting mental toughness?

The first universally accepted definition was only developed by Jones et al. (2002) in the early 2000’s and as such the phenomenon can still be considered relatively new; but with a growing number of researchers focused on developing a more detailed understanding of mental toughness within sport and other areas including business. Jones et al. (2002) provided a scientific clarification of mental toughness through a qualitative study of mental toughness using Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955). They described the mentally tough performer as having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables them to:

1. **Generally, cope better than opponents with the many demands (competition, training, and lifestyle) that sport places on the performer.**

2. **Specifically, be more consistent and better than opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure.**

More recent researchers have used the Jones et al. (2002) definition and approach, i.e. Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Psychology, to identify a number of common characteristics that make up mental toughness which include: self belief, concentration and focus, motivation, thriving on competition, resilience, handling pressure, positive attitude, quality preparation, goal setting, determination and perseverance, and commitment (see Gucciardi et al., 2009). In addition to these common characteristics a number of studies have also been shown to be either sport or sporting context specific, these include religion, team unity, ethics and sporting intelligence (Gucciardi et al., 2009).

As a broad approach to the development of a ‘competitive edge’ sporting mental toughness has also been shown to be sport specific (Gucciardi et al., 2008) with research into cricket (Bull et al., 2005), football (Thelwell et al., 2005) and Australian football (Gucciardi et al., 2008) amongst the many studies that have now applied the mental toughness lens to their sport. The findings from these studies suggest a common set of key attributes in addition to sports specific attributes and context specific attributes and as such the way in which mental toughness is utilised by participants may well be different depending upon the individual, the
sport or and the context, e.g. pre-, post and during competition (Jones et al., 2007; Connaughton et al., 2008).

1.7.2 Should sporting mental toughness be used in business?

The presence of sport- and context-specific characteristics (Gucciardi et al., 2008) suggests that even applying a ‘sporting’ framework within sport may not be appropriate and such the application of a ‘sporting’ mental toughness framework within a business environment would appear inappropriate. Indeed psychological variables should to be assessed within specific contexts and not generalised (Mandler & Sarason, 1952); as such a clearly defined ‘business’ description of mental toughness is required in order to either develop a business specific framework for mental toughness or as a minimum validate the use of sporting frameworks within business environments.

1.8 Purpose of the Thesis

This thesis reflects a program of research completed over a three-year period centred on a detailed examination of mental toughness within a business context. The goals of the thesis were to: (a) understand whether mental toughness was recognised within a business context, (b) determine whether the existing definitions of [sporting] mental toughness also described business mental toughness or whether a revised definition was required, (c) identify the essential characteristics which underpin the mentally tough performer within a business environment, (d) assess these characteristics against a representative sporting framework of mental toughness devised by sports coaches to determine similarities and differences in the characteristics (see Gucciardi et al., 2008), (e) identify any underlying mechanisms that contribute to the development and maintenance of business mental toughness and (f) determine whether the adoption of a sporting mental toughness approach is suitable within a business environment either directly or in an amended form.

This thesis represents one of, if not the first empirical study into what is business mental toughness, rather than the application of a sporting framework to assess mental toughness within a business context. As this is a DBA study, the central tenet of the research approach is to test existing theory rather than to develop new. As such the output from the research program will contribute to the body of knowledge by validating the use of mental toughness
within a business context, support the development of further research into the ‘stress coping’ capabilities of mental toughness within business and help business consultants, leaders and performers understand the characteristics of a mentally tough business performer, their behaviours and the situations that require business mental toughness.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six main chapters and contains three empirical studies. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 provides a review of the current mental toughness literature from its origins in sporting psychology research through to its application within business and the development of a broader understanding across multiple sports and competitor types. Chapter 2 also provides the basis for the rationale to investigate business mental toughness and its attributes in a qualitative way using aspects of Appreciative Inquiry (AI, Gordon, 2008) and Personal Construct Psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1955) through a series of focus groups and semi structured interviews with highly experienced business professionals.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodological approach taken to complete the four stages of this study program. Existing examinations of sporting mental toughness have successfully adopted a qualitative approach in order to utilise theoretically driven frameworks through which researchers have examined mental toughness (see Connaughton et al, 2007; Gordon, 2008a; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2002, 2007). Similarly this research thesis has adopted a similar qualitative approach using both Kelly’s (1955) PCP and Cooperrider and Srivasta’s, (1987) AI, in order to capture business professional’s individual views, experiences, meanings, and perceptions of theirs or other people’s responses to events and situations in order to examine business mental toughness. This involved focus groups and semi-structured interviews with highly experienced business professionals, as well as business coaches and business consultants who have worked across a broad range of business sectors, operational functions and company types. Participants were asked to make sense of the world around them by using their existing knowledge of mental toughness and “constructing” personal theories (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009) centred on their experiences and their experiences of others within the work place centred on those who are able to sustain high performance when under extreme pressure.
Chapter 4 reports the findings from the four part study and addressed (a) whether mental toughness is actually recognised within a business context, (b) whether the existing definitions of mental toughness describe business mental toughness or whether a new definition is required, (c) the essential characteristics which underpin the mentally tough business person, (d) whether these characteristics are similar or different to the characteristics identified in sport, (e) what the underlying mechanisms are that contribute to the development and maintenance of business mental toughness and (f) whether the adoption of a mental toughness approach is suitable within a business environment.

Study 1 examines the existence of mental toughness within a business context and whether the existing sporting definitions of mental toughness are sufficient to define mental toughness within business. Highly experienced business professionals were interviewed regarding their perceptions of mental toughness, and the characteristics of the mentally tough person. The definition and attributes which emerged (n=7) from the findings emphasised a lack of conceptual clarity and more complex set of scenarios and contexts from which mental toughness characteristics can be described. Whilst all agreed that mental toughness was a positive capability within business there were clearly differences in context and characteristics that warranted a broader examination of the phenomenon.

Study 2 further examines the attributes of mental toughness and elicits 21 characteristics that the mentally tough business person may posses. The study also identified a number of significant differences between the characteristics of a mentally tough sports person and a mentally tough business person as well as the contextual complexity of business.

Study 3 represents a three-part investigation to determine whether a sporting framework for mental toughness is identifiable within business. The approach adopts a series of interviews to capture individual's views on what mental toughness is to them and whether the underlying characteristics of a mentally tough person are. Once complete the characteristics were combined with those collected in Study 1 and Study 2 and through a series of coding exercises a set of business mental toughness constructs were identified. These were then compared with a set of mental toughness characteristics identified by Australian football coaches (see Gucciardi et al, 2008) to identify overlap and misalignment. Respondents also rated their
performance against this set of constructs and whether they thought each construct was always required for mental toughness, required some of the time or not required at all. Eleven higher order characteristics and fifty five subordinate characteristics and assessed against Gucciardi et al.’s (2008) 33 characteristics.

Chapter 5 discusses the overall findings of the research program and the conceptual issues derived. It presents a view on defining business mental toughness and provides an extensive set of major and subordinate characteristics, captured as constructs with polar opposites. The chapter also considers the practical implications emanating from the findings, and discusses the strengths and limitations of the research. Finally, areas for future research including measurement and the design of specific intervention strategies are discussed.

Chapter 6 provides an overall conclusion and answers the key research questions a) is mental toughness recognised within a business context, b) do existing definitions of [sporting] mental toughness described business mental toughness, c) what are the essential characteristics which underpin the mentally tough performer within a business environment, (d) do business and sport share the same mental toughness attributes, c) what are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the development and maintenance of business mental toughness and f) is the adoption of a sporting mental toughness approach suitable within a business environment?

1.10 Summary

This thesis presents a detailed examination of mental toughness in a business context. The rationale for conducting such a study is based upon the lack of empirical research in the extant literature and the use of sporting frameworks to develop mental toughness within business that is in all likeliness inappropriate. The development of knowledge surround the phenomenon of mental toughness has grown pace within sports psychology over the last ten years, however very little is known about the phenomenon within business. In order to address the central aims of the program repeated qualitative interviews and focus groups have been employed with highly experienced business professionals, business coaches and management consultants. To the author’s knowledge this is the first qualitative thesis dedicated solely to the study of mental toughness within the business psychology literature.
2  **Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a review, critique and summary of mental toughness research to date. While athletes, coaches, sport administrators, and the media widely acknowledge the importance of mental toughness as a key component of highly successful athletes, it is important to actually understand what mental toughness is and perhaps even more importantly what it is not (Gucciardi *et al.*, 2008). In this chapter, we attempt to clarify this issue and, after reviewing recent developments both in research and theory, we critically discuss approaches and questionnaires designed to measure mental toughness and their applicability to business mental toughness, we will then look at ways in which mental toughness can be developed and how this is aiding research. To conclude, we look at the current research into business mental toughness and what other elements of sport are teaching business and how this relates to mental toughness.

The last ten years has seen considerable growth in the volume of research into mental toughness and significant refinement in terms of its definition, underlying characteristics and how it is developed and maintained. Mental toughness has historically been used to describe why certain individuals have become, “the best in the world” in their respective sports (Loehr, 1986; Williams, 1988). Athletes, coaches, members of the press, and sports commentators have cited mental toughness as core to the successful performer (Gould *et al.*, 1987), while certain psychologists working in the field of sport suggest mental toughness as key to the advancement of knowledge regarding successful athletes (e.g., Bull, 2006; Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Loehr, 1986). Indeed the concept of psychological characteristics benefiting sporting performance have for some time been widely accepted and particular references have been made to the benefits of motivation, self-confidence, and the ability to cope with and interpret anxiety-related symptoms when operating under extreme pressure (cf. Hardy, Jones, & Gould, 1996; Mellalieu, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2006).

The study of mental toughness has been one of the fundamental goals of sports psychologists for a number of years (Bull *et al.*, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 2002; Thelwell *et al.*, 2005). However, until recently the literature on mental toughness had lacked a clear definition; being one of the most cited but often misunderstood terms in applied sports psychology (Jones *et al.*, 2008).
2002; Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009). Whilst used extensively as an umbrella term to describe a phenomenon that turns ‘good’ athletes into ‘great’ athletes (Gucciardi et al., 2008, Loehr, 1986), researchers appear to agree that mental toughness reflects an ability to cope with stress and the resultant anxiety associated with the pressure of [competitive] performance and training better than others [competitors] (Jones et al., 2002; Bull et al., 2005, Thelwell et al., 2005).

The following sections will describe how up until the early 2000’s mental toughness research could be defined as comprehensive but anecdotal rather than focused on specific investigations into defining and understanding mental toughness. In 2002 this changed with the development of empirically based research into sports-general and sports-specific definitions and measurement tools.

2.1 The rise of mental toughness as a research topic

A large number of research papers and books have been written to date that only provide anecdotal evidence of mental toughness expressed in terms of an individual author’s, or a group of author’s, experiences of working with elite athletes or observing world class performers. Additionally there is also a body of research that has associated mental techniques and skills with mental toughness, without the provision of any underlying rationale or supporting data.

Whilst many of these papers and books have popularised mental toughness these authors are simply describing their view of mental toughness rather than investigating the construct (e.g., Bull et al., 1996; Gibson, 1998; Loehr, 1982, 1986, 1995; Williams, 1998). There is valuable insight to be gained from working with, and observing, such elite performers however this lack of rigorous empirical research is problematic. An example of this type of research would be Bull et al. (1996) who suggested six specific attributes of mental toughness: a strong desire to succeed, staying positive in the face of challenge and pressure, being able to control the ‘controllables’, demonstrating high commitment with a balanced attitude, having a high level of self-belief, and lastly, displaying positive body language. The author’s provided many useful practical examples to support these attributes, however they failed to provide a definition or any detail with regard to their program of research. Another example would be Jones and Moorhouse (2008) where the researchers applied a framework or mental toughness
developed by Jones et al. (2002) retrospectively to sporting experiences and then suggested that these experiences are transferable into a business context.

These two examples represent a common approach that researchers have employed when investigating mental toughness, and despite the value of working with such elite performers, and the intuitive appeal of the observations, the lack of empirical research is problematic. Early research into sporting performance addressed the concept of mental toughness from a possession perspective, i.e. either focusing on those who have it and their attributes or those that do not possess it and the corresponding attributes. This reflected an all or nothing view of mental toughness rather than the multifaceted view we have today.

2.2 Reporting the benefits of mental toughness

One of the first researchers to address the potential benefits of possessing mental toughness was Jim Loehr who suggested that the world's greatest athletes give testimony to the existence of mental toughness every time they perform (Loehr, 1982, 1986, 1995). Loehr suggests that mental toughness separates the few who make it from the thousands who are unsuccessful, proposing that mentally tough performers consistently responded to problems, pressure, making mistakes, and competition with the right attitude or approach. Similarly Goldberg (1992) suggested, through his work with coaches, that “the ability to handle competitive pressures was a cornerstone skill of mental toughness” (p. 60).

An alternative view of performance success was that a lack of mental toughness resulted in unsuccessful performances, and as such attributes were identified that contributed to this lack of mental toughness, namely fear and insecurity (Williams, 1988), a lack of control (Goldberg, 1992), an inability to cope with challenge and negatively affects a person's self-image (Pankey, 1993). It was thus suggested that individuals who were not mentally tough latched on to these reasons for losing. Additionally, a lack of mental toughness was also associated with a disorganized manner, ineffective coping, helplessness, and depression. As a result those that were mentally tough didn't experience these 'negative' characteristics or if they did they were able to counteract them.
One issue with these studies, as with other earlier work is that they are the results of personal beliefs and coaching experience rather than empirical research. Additionally, many studies did not set out to specifically investigate mental toughness, and as a result addressed other psychological factors related to successful and unsuccessful performances (e.g., coping skills) that were mistaken for or mislabelled mental toughness. As a result, no definition of mental toughness or explanation with regards to its make-up was provided.

This variability and ambiguity in the literature compounded the pre-existing confusion surrounding what mental toughness actually is and as a result this led researchers to try and understanding mental toughness from the perspective that, somehow, it provided protection from adversity.

Fourie and Potgieter (2001) provided one of the first accepted qualitative studies into mental toughness and identified a number of psychological attributes that participants in their study considered mental toughness. Their study involved written responses from 131 coaches and 160 elite athletes and identified 12 key components: motivational level; coping skills; confidence maintenance; cognitive skills; discipline and goal-directedness; competitiveness; possession of prerequisite physical and mental requirements; team unity; preparation skills; psychological hardiness; religious convictions; and ethics. This research was however limited to the analysis of written responses only and as such the specific comments provided could not be expanded or developed further there does appeared to be some confusion with the wording and meanings of the twelve components (Gucciardi et al., 2009). Also less than 25% of participants were considered elite and as such a number of researchers have questioned whether this is an expert sample as no definition of mental toughness was investigated or proposed.

It is a consistent theme within a number of early and more recent papers on mental toughness that the personal beliefs of researchers and psychologists are proposed rather than their research being grounded in tests of experimental theory. Many of the studies did not set out to investigate mental toughness but addressed other psychological factors related to successful and unsuccessful performances (see Goldberg, 1998; Pankey, 1993; Loehr, 1982, 1986, 1995).
The combined list of psychological skills and techniques proposed to develop mental toughness appears to be endless (e.g., Bull et al., 1996; Goldberg, 1998; Loehr, 1982, 1986, 1995, Watts, 1978), leading Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2002) to conclude that virtually every desirable positive psychological characteristic has been labelled as mental toughness at one time or another. This multitude of descriptions has created confusion and increased the bewilderment of performers, coaches and practitioners pursuing ways to develop mental toughness. However, while creating confusion the claims of these texts have provided a catalyst for empirical interest into the elusive concept ‘mental toughness’ both in sport and now business.

With several recent reviews of the sporting mental toughness literature emerging (see Connaughton & Hanton, 2009; Connaughton, Hanton, Jones, & Wadey, 2008; Crust, 2008; Gucciardi et al., 2009a) we will focus next on the three major streams of research that have emerged and are receiving the most attention, namely theoretical frameworks and models, measuring mental toughness, and developing mental toughness.

### 2.3 Theoretical Frameworks and Models for Mental Toughness

The turn of the new millennium saw the mental toughness construct emerge as an important agenda item for several research teams around the world with teams in the UK and Australia leading the development of mental toughness research. Initial attempts to empirically examine this construct focused on qualitative methodologies in which key sports participants (e.g., athletes, coaches, sport psychologists) perceptions of mental toughness were generated and explored using qualitative methods. In addition to these two research centres, two independent approaches have been taken to developing a more detailed understanding of mental toughness, the first centres on the use of qualitative methods to overcome the anecdotal view of mental toughness and apply scientific rigor to the research process (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005; Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock, 2008; Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002, 2007; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2005), the second has adopted theoretic models from health psychology (see Clough et al., 2002), specifically hardiness (see Kobasa, 1979; Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982) in order to propose a model based on hardiness and associated measure tools (Connaughton et al., 2011).
Table 1.1: Comparison of the characteristics of mental toughness developed within sport.

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<td>12 attributes identified in a broad mix of sports and gender</td>
<td>20 Major themes identified in English cricket (Male only)</td>
<td>10 attributes identified in Soccer (Male only)</td>
<td>30 attributes identified in a broad mix of sports and gender</td>
<td>32 characteristics identified in Australian-rules football (Male only)</td>
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**Belief**
- Self-belief
- Robust and resilient confidence
- Total self-belief
- Belief
- Self-belief

**Handling Pressure**
- Coping with competition-related pressure and anxiety
- Thriving on competition
- Cope with and enjoy pressure
- Handling pressure
- Handling pressure

**Focus / Commitment**
- Dedication and commitment
- Self-focus
- Remain focused
- Focus
- Concentration and focus

**Motivation**
- Desire and motivation
- Ability to set challenging targets.
- Motivation
- Motivation

**Control**
- Ability to keep perspective
- Control over emotions
- Control outside the performance environment
- Controlling thoughts and feelings
- Controlling the environment

**Sports Knowledge**
- Self-reflection,
  - Ability to exploit learning opportunities
  - Good decision making
- A sporting knowledge or intelligence
- Sport intelligence

**Tough Attitude**
- Dealing with hardship,
  - Dealing with physical and emotional pain
- A never give up determination and attitude
- Willing to take risks
- Ability to react to situations positively
- Superior self-presentation
- Handling failures and successes.
- Tough attitude

**Resilience**
- Resilience

**Personal Values**
- Ability to keep perspective and self-appraise
- Independence
- Competitiveness
- Personal values

**Work Ethic**
- Work ethic

**Physical Toughness**
- Regulating performance.
- Pushing yourself to the limit.
- Physical toughness.

**Emotional Intelligence**
- Emotional Intelligence
2.3.1 A qualitative approach to mental toughness

The qualitative approach to understanding mental toughness used personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) as a guiding framework to define and identify the characteristics of mental toughness. The objective of this approach was to focus on understanding mental toughness in relation to first defining what it is (and more importantly what it is not) and also identifying the key characteristics that encompass mental toughness. This was carried out across a number of sports and included the perspectives of athletes, coaches, parents, and sport psychologists (e.g., Bull et al., 2005; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2002, 2007; Thelwell et al., 2005). Two definitions of mental toughness have been suggested within these qualitative studies (see below) providing a basis for understanding what mental toughness is (see Jones et al., 2002) and the process by which it works through a set of characteristics that define the mentally tough sports person (see Gucciardi et al., 2008).

Each uses slightly different sampling methods and focuses on both sport specific and sport general approaches however they do present on the whole a consistent set of constructs which describe the protective and enabling factors that deliver mental toughness and consistent superior performances (cf. Thelwell et al., 2005).

2.3.1.1 Defining mental toughness

Jones et al. (2002) were the first to attempt to provide a scientific clarification of mental toughness through a qualitative study of mental toughness using Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955). They described the mentally tough performer as having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables them to:

1. Generally, cope better than opponents with the many demands (competition, training, and lifestyle) that sport places on the performer.
2. Specifically, be more consistent and better than opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure.

Their research focused on probing a small group of elite athletes using focus groups and individual interviews to develop a profile of ‘the mentally tough performer’. The research used an inductive thematic analysis of the transcribed content of interviews relating to the
definition and key attributes of mental toughness to elicit a definition of mental toughness that was agreed by all participants. Their approach was split into 3 stages. Stage 1 involved conducting a small focus group with 3 of the 10 international performers that participated in the study. The group was asked to define mental toughness and to identify key characteristics based on either themselves or someone they considered to be mentally tough. The resulting mental toughness definition was then discussed with the remaining 7 participants through 1-1 interviews, to determine whether they agreed with the definition and the attributes. Once a broader set of characteristics were identified and agreed, they were then ranked by the 10 participants, providing 12 key attributes (see Table 1.1). These were: unshakable self-belief in ability to achieve competitive goals; ability to bounce back from performance set-backs as a result of an increased determination to succeed; unshakeable self-belief that the individual has unique qualities and is better than competitors; insatiable desire and internalised motives to succeed; remaining focused in the face of competitive distractions; remaining in psychological control following unexpected and uncontrollable events; pushing back the boundaries of physical and emotional pain, whilst maintaining technique and effort whilst under pressure; recognising competitive anxiety is inevitable and knowing that it can be controlled; not affected by others good and bad performances; thriving on the pressure of competition; remaining focused in the face of personal life distractions; and switching sports focus on and off as required. The output from the research does however have its limitations due to a small sample size, limited number of sports covered and a lack of a control group. Some researchers have criticised this research for not drawing upon established theory (Gucciardi et al., 2009) however it is a-theoretical due to the emerging nature of the phenomenon. The study has also been criticised for focusing only on elite performers rather than outstanding performance irrespective of ability (Crust, 2008).

2.3.1.2 Investigating mental toughness in team sports

Bull et al. (2005) identified 20 major themes based on their sport-specific assessment of the mentally tough cricketer as well identifying factors aiding the development of mental toughness. Bull et al., (2005) conducted interviews with 10 crickets and form which they were able to identify five development themes identified: parental influence, childhood background, exposure to foreign cricket, opportunities to survive early setbacks and needing to earn success, and 15 major themes (see Table 1.1). The 20 themes were categorized under five
general dimensions, with Bull et al. (2005) suggesting that many of the themes were comparable to Jones et al.’s (2002) 12 attributes, including: personal responsibility (independence, self-reflection, competitiveness, ability to exploit learning opportunities and set challenging targets), dedication and commitment (survive setbacks, earn success, a never give up determination and attitude), belief (self-belief, self-focus, and robust and resilient confidence), and coping with pressure (thriving on competition, willing to take risks, good decision making, ability to keep perspective and self-appraise).

Thelwell et al. (2005) provided a third qualitative investigation into mental toughness within football. Thelwell proposed 10 mental toughness attributes that can be classified under eight general categories (see table 1.1): total self-belief, ability to react to situations positively, superior self-presentation, cope with and enjoy pressure, remain focused, a sporting knowledge or intelligence, control over emotions, and control outside the performance environment. Both Bull et al. (2005) and Thelwell et al. (2005) used the Jones et al. (2002) definition of mental toughness as the basis of their investigation. In addition both these studies are also open the same criticism as Jones et al. (2002) in that only elite athletes were used.

Jones et al., (2007) extended their original research by interviewing ‘super elite’ athletes and their support staff. These included eight Olympic or World Champions; three coaches and four psychologists. This allowed them to triangulate their initial research, producing the most scientifically rigorous investigations to date (Gucciardi et al., 2009a) and developed a theoretical framework of mental toughness. Their methodology involved a similar process to that used by Jones et al. (2002). On this occasion an inductive thematic analysis of the verbatim transcribed data revealed 30 key attributes. These 30 attributes, which were inclusive of the original 12 attributes (Jones et al., 2002) but also contained new attributes, were grouped into nine sub categories; belief (see Table 1.1); focus; using long term goals as motivation; controlling the environment; pushing yourself to the limit; regulating performance; handling pressure; awareness and control of thoughts and feelings; and handling failure and successes. These were then grouped into four central dimensions or contexts for mental toughness; attitudes and beliefs; training; competition; and post competition. The research whilst rigorous still used a small sample size and cross section of sports, and had limitations due to the fact that it does not
draw upon the links between the attributes and how they actually enable mental toughness. However this was not the central purpose of the study.

Gucciardi et al. (2008) expanded the use of personal construct theory (PCT) to assess mental toughness in Australian Football players. They described mental toughness as:

“...a collection of experimentally developed and inherent [sport-general and sport-specific] values, attitudes, cognitions, and emotions that influence the way in which an individual approaches, responds to, and appraises both negatively and positively construed pressures, challenges, and adversities to consistently achieve his or her goals.”

Their approach which adopted a more detailed application of PCT than Jones et al., (2002, 2007) focused on providing bipolar examples of mental toughness attributes, in accordance with the use of the performance profiling technique (Butler & Hardy, 1992). This technique is commonly used to capture an athlete’s perception of those qualities that contribute to elite performance (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009). In this case the researchers focused entirely on the construct of mental toughness. The approach taken to complete this research firstly involved the identification of individuals whom their coaches believed were mentally tough based upon Gucciardi et al.’s (2008) definition of mental toughness. Following general introductory procedures set down by Butler and Hardy (1992) the researchers elicited the qualities or characteristics that the participant considered constituted mental toughness within Australian Football.

To support the development of the characteristics the participant was ask to think of three players who demonstrated the qualities of mental toughness and three who did not. The resulting 10 qualities were then expanded by providing a short description of what the participant exactly meant so to ensure that other researchers would achieve the same level of understanding. Once this had been completed the exact contrast pole for each construct was identified and then each was assessed in terms of their importance to (a) Australian Football and (b) mental toughness. The outcome of this analysis showed that those constructs important for Australian Football were also important for the development of mental toughness. Next the constructs were assessed in terms of how the participant and his coach perceived the
footballer in terms of his current and ideal self. This provided a quantitative method of
determining the effect level of mental toughness at an individual level, using tools such as
cluster analysis or repertory grids to identify the structural properties of an individual’s construct
system (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009).

Gucciardi et al. (2008) provide a definition of mental toughness that encapsulates
several different human characteristics (i.e., values, attitudes, behaviours, and emotions).
Previous definitions offered (e.g. Clough et al., 2002; Gould et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2002;
Middleton et al., 2004) only note specific components of characteristics at the expense of
others, thus providing a potentially limited view of the potential characteristics. In contrast
Gucciardi et al. (2009) avoid this by attempting to capture the multi-dimensional nature of each
construct. In addition to this there are two additional finds that are important for this research
thesis, these are a) mental toughness is associated with both positive and negative life
experiences and b) that due to the nature of the sport-specific and sport-general constructs
mental toughness may not extend beyond the sporting context. However this doesn’t suggest
that mental toughness doesn’t exist in other contexts, more that their definition of sporting
mental toughness may not be applicable to other contexts without first redefining the underlying
characteristics.

The outputs from these five studies, Bull et al. (2005), Gucciardi et al. (2008), Jones et
al. (2002, 2007), and Thelwell et al. (2005) produced over 100 characteristics suggesting that
mental toughness is multidimensional and can be grouped into a number of different themes or
major characteristics. Connaughton, Thelwell and Hanton (2011) described the make-up of
mental toughness under nine major themes however this is a rather arbitrary exercise as clearly
some themes overlap or may sit in more than one area, e.g. Thelwell et al.’s control over
emotions is grouped under control where as this would be classified as emotional intelligence
had Connaughton et al. (2011) used emotional intelligence as a major characteristic rather than
grouping it with sports intelligence/knowledge which may suggest that emotional intelligence is
a sport specific phenomenon which it clearly is not.

While there is clearly some consensus regarding the key themes or features of mental
toughness, these five research papers do offer a scope for research into business mental
toughness. These papers have all been able to identify a set of key components of mental toughness in a broad range of sports and contexts (e.g., Jones et al., 2002, 2007) or within specific sports (Bull et al., 2005; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Thelwell et al., 2005). And whilst the understanding of mental toughness as Crust (2008) suggested, “is still evolving” (p. 578) it may simply be that the specific wording of attributes and characteristics is more crucial to the individual performer, i.e. there is a set of idiosyncratic characteristics, when understanding their state of mental toughness Connaughton and Hanton (2009). In addition it is the specific wording and the development of contrast characteristics that ultimately distinguishes the characteristics of mental toughness from other psychological constructs (see hardiness and resilience below). In addition there does appear to be a longevity associated with a number of the characteristics identified, Jones et al. (2002) purported an unshakable and insatiable belief and desire while Bull et al. (2005) identified a ‘resilient confidence’ suggesting that momentary confidence alone was not sufficient to ensure mental toughness.

Bull et al. (2005) also suggested that mental toughness may take different forms dependent upon the circumstances e.g. when individuals are under extreme pressure or in circumstances of extreme physical danger. In practical this suggests that not only is necessary to understand mental toughness in different contexts or sports but also in different circumstance, as Crust (2008) suggests the mental toughness requirement of a snooker player would not be the same as that of a rower, or a mountaineer. Therefore, it is correct to question whether mental toughness is the same across different sports, let alone when transcending the sport-business divide. Clearly there are broadly applicable characteristics such as self belief and handling pressure that have been identified in all five studies however a number appear to be study specific if not sport specific and the reasons for this are yet to be provided. What we can conclude is that the adoption of a framework from one sport into another is fraught with danger and ambiguity and therefore the utilisation of these frameworks within business without first identifying the underlying characteristics is misguided.

In addition to the potential for context specific mental toughness Gucciardi et al. (2009) also suggested that different events and situations require varying degrees of mental toughness, and as such mental toughness is not always required at a high level, whatever a high level may mean. The authors were not forthcoming with this measure, however what they
did identify was that only varying degrees of a sports persons mental toughness resources are actually required to successfully deal with what they call ‘critical incidents’. They suggest that the portfolio of values, attitudes, cognitions, and emotions that make up a performer’s mental toughness contains some strengths and weaknesses that influence the manner in which performer approaches, understands, and responds to different critical incidents which put pressure on or challenge the sports person to perform. They suggest that by enabling the performer to understand their behaviour in different situations that this will facilitate an understanding of how the potential effects of such instances can be used to develop mental toughness. As a result when addressing mental toughness in a new context or area, e.g. business, it is important to understand what these critical incidents are, how mentally tough people respond and how these responses are driven by their values, attitudes, cognitions and emotions.

2.3.2 Mental toughness and adversity

Early definitions of mental toughness focused not only a successful outcome (Jones et al, 2002) but also as a response to adversity, which has led some researchers to search for the meaning of mental toughness not in the understanding of elite performance like Jones et al. (2002 & 2007), Bull et al. (2005), Thelwell et al. (2005) and Gucciardi et al. (2008) but by understanding how mental toughness’s enables individuals to overcome adversities (e.g., Clough et al., 2002; Middleton et al., 2004), however this line of research has been criticised for focusing only on the negative (e.g., injury, de-selection, form slumps), rather than both the negative and positive aspects of performance (e.g. winning, gaining promotion or winning awards) (Jones et al, 2007).

Leveraging the noteworthy body of research examining the stress-illness relationship, Clough, Earle, and Sewell (2002) sought to define mental toughness as a ‘stress coping’ capability. The authors approached the conceptual challenge that has historically plagued mental toughness research by focusing on the emerging research on stress reactions in the health psychology literature. Their suggestion is that one specific construct, hardiness, conceptualised as a combination of three attitudes commitment, control, and challenge (3C” s) provides individuals with existential courage and motivation to overcome stressful situations (Maddi, 2002, 2004, 2006). Maddi (2002) describes hardy individuals as those who attempt to
identify solutions to life’s problems rather than avoiding them, and both offer and welcome opportunities of support and encouragement from their socialisation network instead of ignoring these opportunities. This link to society is an interesting element that is missed within the qualitative aspects of sporting mental toughness but may play a part in other contextual versions of mental toughness including business mental toughness.

Clough et al. (2002) believe that mental toughness closely resembles the three hardiness attitudes and expanded on the hardiness model by added a fourth dimension, confidence to engineer their versions of mental toughness. As a result they contest that mentally tough individuals (a) view negative experiences (e.g., anxiety and stress) as a challenge to overcome and a natural and essential catalyst for growth and development; (b) believe they can influence and control negative life experiences; (c) are deeply committed to what they are doing and the goals they have set; and (d) are confident in their ability to deal with and overcome any negative life experiences. As such they define mental toughness as:

*Mentally tough individuals tend to be sociable and outgoing; as they are able to remain calm and relaxed, they are competitive in many situations and have lower anxiety levels than others. With a high sense of self-belief and an unshakeable faith that they can control their own destiny, these individuals can remain relatively unaffected by competition or adversity (Clough et al., 2002, p. 38).*

Clough et al.’s (2002) engineered conceptualisation of mental toughness has been criticised however for lacking scientific rigor as no information was presented as to the data collection method they used and how the researchers analysed the views of practitioners, players, and coaches (Connaughton & Hanton, 2009; Connaughton, Hanton et al., 2008; Gucciardi et al., 2009a). Interestingly the framework was not developed in a sporting context and as such its suitability has been questioned by those who have developed sport specific frameworks (Gucciardi et al., 2009a). Despite these limitations however the subscales of the measurement tool developed to address and measure mental toughness, the MTQ48 (Clough et al., 2002) do resemble many of the attributes identified by the qualitative researchers particularly in relation to self-belief, pushing oneself to the limits, commitment to goals, and retaining emotional control (Crust, 2008).
2.3.3 Mental toughness and resilience

Unlike hardiness, which is rarely used to describe mental toughness, resilience is often used interchangeably within mental toughness research (cf. Connaughton & Hanton, 2009, Gucciardi et al., 2009a). This adds to the lack of conceptual clarity plaguing recent investigations and is often contributed to by mental toughness researchers themselves as their need to differentiate their descriptions and frameworks of mental toughness gathers pace.

The research evidence to date does though suggest that resilience, hardiness and mental toughness are closely linked with resilience often cited as a key component of the mentally tough performer (e.g., Jones et al., 2002; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009b). Although used with a variety of definitions (e.g., Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), resilience generally refers to an individual’s ability to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning, or positive adaptations following exposure to a highly disruptive event such as the death of a loved one or serious injury (Luthar, 2006), however it doesn’t suggest growth and development as hardiness and mental toughness do.

Resilience should not be used to describe mental toughness for a number of reasons; a) mental toughness has been shown to have a low-to-moderate correlation with resilience (Gucciardi et al., 2009a, Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009) although they may share some conceptual space; b) mental toughness is required for both negative and positive life experiences that exert pressure, adversity, or challenge (e.g., Gucciardi et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2007); c) mental toughness facilitates optimal functioning when things are going well unlike resilience which is focused on events where things are not going well and d) mental toughness is centred on a performer consistently getting the most out of their ability rather than merely having the ability to do something (Jones et al., 2002, 2007, Gucciardi et al., 2008).

2.3.4 Mental toughness and personality

Mental toughness has been described as both a personality trait (Kroll, 1967) and also in terms of a cognitive state (Gibson, 1998). Mental toughness does have similarities with other personality traits such as hardiness (for an explanation of hardiness see Maddi, 2002 and 2004)
but is not the same (Marchant et al., 2008; Crust, 2008). Jones and his fellow researchers have also argued that mental toughness is more than hardiness as the impact of positive events and how the executive and the athlete handle success and celebration which is not an element of hardiness, or other psychological traits that deal primarily with negative events (Jones et al., 2007). A comparison of mental toughness against other personality frameworks, for example Costa & McCrea’s (1992) Five Factor Model, would be essential in ensuring any measure for mental toughness is identifying mental toughness and not simply replicating the measure of another personality trait. First however we need to determine how mental toughness is manifested within a business context.

2.4 Measurement of mental toughness

Quantitative empirical examinations of mental toughness within sport have increased recently with several inventories being proposed to measure mental toughness within different scenarios, e.g. the Cricket Mental Toughness Inventory (CMTI; Gucciardi & Gordon, 2009b) and Mental Toughness Questionnaire 48 (MTQ48, Clough et al, 2002) which relate to both sport specific and sport-general measures.

The first inventory developed to measure mental toughness was Loehr’s (1986) Psychological Performance Inventory (PPI) which measures, as Loehr postulates, the seven most essential ingredients of mental toughness: self-confidence; attention control; negative energy; motivation; attitude control; positive energy; and visual and imagery control. The inventory has been used for both applied and research settings (e.g., Golby & Sheard, 2004; Golby, Sheard, & Lavallee, 2003) however no psychometric support is offered to demonstrate the validity for its use. Indeed recent research has questioned the reliability and validity of the measure (Golby, Sheard, & Van Wersch, 2007; Middleton et al., 2004). As such there remains an underlying conceptual issue with the PPI’s ability to actually measure mental toughness whether in sport or not.

Clough et al.’s (2002) Mental Toughness Inventory-48 (MT48) has also faced similar challenges as to its ability to measure mental toughness within sport or any other context as it is suggested that all it measures is hardiness and confidence. No research to date has examined the associations between hardiness and mental toughness as measured by the MT48.
Therefore, as currently discussed above, it appears that the 4C’s model is conceptually grounded in hardiness theory, and not mental toughness and as such would not be suitable for an investigation into the characteristics of mental toughness with business but rather act as a measure of mental toughness with business. That is not to say that future research could not adopt this measurement tool however as Hanton and Gucciardi are at pains to point out, the underpinning of the conceptual link between hardiness and confidence to provide mental toughness does require an explanation. Additionally a number of researchers have concerns as to the validity of the MTQ48 as a measurement tool for mental toughness as Clough et al. (2004) have not presented a detailed overview of the psychometric processes employed to develop the instrument.

2.5 Development of mental toughness

Connaughton et al. (2007) revisited the research of Jones et al. (2002) and re-interviewed seven of the original ten participants (three were unable to participate due to time commitments) in an attempt to understand the mechanisms underlying the development of mental toughness and whether it required maintenance. The outcome of this research clearly showed that mental toughness is indeed developed throughout the lifetime of an individual, in this case the researchers used Bloom’s (1985) three career phases (early, middle and later). In addition to this the research also showed that many different mechanisms operated in combination rather than independently in facilitating mental toughness. These related to a motivating climate; encouragement from significant others; and critical incidents in the early years. These were again reported in the middle and later years, however these subsequent years also introduced other attributes. Middle and later years introduced more competition, a desire to succeed and gaining knowledge from more experienced individuals. Connaughton et al. (2007) also identified three mechanisms by which mental toughness was maintained; a burning desire to succeed; a strong support network; and the employment of basic and advanced mental skills. Again this research looked at a small sample size and analysed a small cross section of sports. However, it did provide an insight into the underlying mechanisms that drive both the development and maintenance of mental toughness and highlighted that mental toughness is developed and requires maintenance. The importance of these environmental features was also identified both by Thelwell et al. (2005) and Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks (2005) in their research into football and cricket, and highlight positive parental
influences and both childhood and transition experiences as key factors in the development of mental toughness.

Gucciardi, Gordon, Dimmock, and Mallett (2009) extended the work of Bull et al. (2005) and Connaughton et al. (2007) generating a coaches’ perspective on their role in developing mental toughness and provided an understanding of how coaches both facilitate and hinder the development of mental toughness. Facilitation of the development of mental toughness was classified under four dimensions: coach-athlete relationship (e.g., gaining the trust and respect of players, establishing and maintaining positive relationships), coaching philosophy (e.g., prioritising player development over coaching success, helping players acquire an understanding of the sport), training environment (e.g., continuously challenging players, exposing players to challenges and success), and specific strategies (e.g., developing game awareness, specific coaching behaviours). In contrast, a coach’s philosophy and behaviour were also cited as the major way in which they can hinder the development of mental toughness. In addition, and not the primary focus of this study, it was recognised parents play an important role in providing a foundation for some of the key mental toughness characteristics observed.

Clearly there are a number of different ways in which mental toughness can be developed, the quantitative approach suggested by Clough et al. (2002) provides a measure for mental toughness however this tool will not elicit any new characteristics nor will it help the researcher identify how mental toughness within business can be developed.

2.6 Investigating Mental Toughness

The vast majority of mental toughness research has used Kelly’s personal construct psychology as an approach to investigating mental toughness. However other approaches are now being adopted and this section will address both Personal Construct Psychology and Positive Psychology’s Appreciative Inquiry.

2.6.1 Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living (Peterson, 2009) and focuses on four broad categories of human experience: positive emotions,
positive character, positive relationships, and positive institutions (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Each of these can be aligned to the major characteristics of mental toughness and take an almost diametrically opposed approach to hardiness and resilience. It is focused on leveraging core strengths, rather than seeking to overcome or minimise weaknesses. Appreciative Inquiry Coaching (AIC) an evolution of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a positive philosophical approach to coaching towards organisational change and is focused on leveraging strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses. That has recently been employed within sport by Gordon (2008a, b) to develop mental toughness.

AIC is a significant departure from traditional approaches to mental skills training that might be used by performance psychologists; it builds on the natural mental toughness characteristics already present within the individual. At the onset of an intervention the first step is to understand what mental toughness means to a performer which is of significant interest in this study as that is one of the primary objectives of the focus groups, i.e. what does mental toughness mean to business professionals. As Gordon (2008b) suggests this is instrumental to developing knowledge of mental toughness as all performers must understand what mental toughness is and is not, when it is required and when it is not required, and how, in general, performers personally construe their realities in relation to mental toughness.

2.6.2 Personal Construct Psychology

Personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1955/1991) enables researchers to understanding the ways in which individuals perceive the world. Adoption of the approach when researching mental toughness allows researchers to overcome many of the conceptual ambiguities identified earlier in this literature review (cf. Jones et al., 2002, 2007). The PCP theoretical framework allows an individual’s views, experiences, meanings and perceptions to be expressed and understood. It also facilitates an understanding of the specific characteristics required for mental toughness, how they enable the mentally tough performer, and what overt behaviours mentally tough performers characteristically exhibit.

Gucciardi et al. (2008) designed and implemented a PCP interview protocol to investigate mental toughness within sports coaches. This PCP ‘theoretical lens’ enables the researcher to gain an understanding of what mental toughness is in the context of what it is not,
when mental toughness is and is not required, what mental toughness enables performers to actually do in such situations, and the behaviours characteristic of mentally tough people (Gucciardi & Gordon, 2008). When used with Australian football coaches Gucciardi and Gordon we able to inductively derived three themes of mental toughness from the interview data: characteristics of mental toughness, situations requiring mental toughness (general and specific), and mental toughness behaviours (general and specific).

2.7 Existing Mental Toughness research within Business

Recent comparisons of mental toughness within a business context have been limited, both in number and their empirical nature. However a small number of papers, as well as books have now been written suggesting that mental toughness is a key criterion in the successful progression of managers (Jones & Moorhouse, 2008; Jones, 2008; Marchant et al., 2009). Jones and Moorhouse (2008) and Bull (2006) provide extensive examples of how ‘elite’ or ‘competitive’ mental toughness can be used within a business context.

Marchant et al., (2008) provide one of the first quantitative empirical studies of mental toughness within a business context, when they questioned 522 managers using the 48-item Mental Toughness Questionnaire MTQ48. The MTQ48 is based upon a definition of mental toughness provided by Clough, Earle and Sewell (2002) which is centred on Kobasa’s (1979) hardiness framework. Kobasa (1979) suggested that an individual’s hardiness, i.e. their ability to deal with negative life events and the associated pressure, could be measured in terms of their emotional control; levels of commitment; and how they deal with challenges. Hardiness would therefore provide an individual with the ability to decrease stress related physical illness, mental illness and performance reductions in terms of the individuals conduct and morale (Golby & Sheard, 2004). Clough et al. (2002) extended Kobasa’s hardiness measure to include a fourth element, confidence, i.e. an individual’s level of self belief. In doing so they creating their 4C model of mental toughness centred on; control, commitment, challenge and confidence. The benefits of hardiness have previously been demonstrated in the business world (Maddi et al, 1998), the public sector (Rush, Schoel, & Barnard, 1995) and the military (Bartone, 1999), however in line with the model suggested by Clough et al. (2002), other researchers have argued that hardiness and mental toughness are different due to the management of positive life-effects which is not handled by hardiness (Jones et al, 2002, 2007).
and the lack of an empirically proven link between performance improvement [sporting achievement] and hardiness (Golby & Sheard, 2004).

Marchant et al. (2008) used the MTQ48 questionnaire to investigate whether employees of various levels of managerial positions exhibited different levels of mental toughness, and whether age had an impact on the development of mental toughness. The outcome from their questionnaire based study (n=522) demonstrated that both increases in age and managerial position provided higher levels of individual mental toughness. However this research was limited in design as it did not assess the development of mental toughness over time, but rather induced its development from a cross-sectional study. The study does demonstrate that those with higher management positions possess higher levels of mental toughness, however it does not demonstrate whether these positions were achieved due to mental toughness or the capability was acquired because of the positions. In addition there does not appear to be any reliable research to demonstrate that the MTQ48 is a psychometrically sound or valid instrument for indentifying mental toughness (Connaughton et al., 2008; Gucciardi et al., 2009a).

2.8 Business learnings from sport

There has been much interest from business leaders in what they can learn from their counterparts in the sporting field and an examination of the literature on business and sporting leadership clearly shows that there are areas of common interest.

Burnes and O'Donnell (2011) interviewed eight experienced coaches and found that the roles, skills and concerns of sports leaders were not too dissimilar to those of business leaders. Their research suggested that sports leaders were strong in interpersonal relationships and communication (Weinberg and McDermott, 2002), aligning their leadership style to those they were coaching (Chelladurai, 1990) and they too an holistic view of what it takes to achieve an ideal performance state (Loehr and Schwartz, 2001). All of which the authors suggests are areas where business leaders could learn from sport.

Research into the behaviours of sports coaches has shown similar behaviours to leaders in other fields (Laurent and Bradney, 2007). Whilst there may well be similarities there
are also differences as highlighted by Weinberg and McDermott (2002). They found that sport leaders advocated a need for strong interactions with others using positive reinforcement in their communication, business leaders tended to put more emphasis on being honest, and being reflective listeners. This they suggested was an area where business leaders could learn from their counterparts in sport. Similarly, Gordon (2007), a leading sports psychologist, has also noted differences between the two groups. The main difference between the two groups is that sport is much more focussed on getting people to perform to their maximum ability whether on an individual or team basis. Once again, this indicates areas where business may have much to learn from sport.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport leaders</th>
<th>Business leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage mostly in team coaching, and in team building only occasionally</td>
<td>Engage more often in team building. Team coaching is rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always try to pick the best people/players for teams</td>
<td>Perhaps for upper management roles but rarely at lower levels or with similar levels of intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, handle or manage people better. Sport cannot easily afford to sack dispensable talent</td>
<td>Rarely do a “skills audit” of staff on work teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weed out “energy sappers” (negative types) or at least try to keep them away from talent</td>
<td>Sack or fire at will usually through official (written) warnings and human resources procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasingly engage in activities that generate standards and expectations for behaviour based on values (“team rules”)</td>
<td>Not so easy to do this in business and rarely done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage regularly in both talent identification and talent development because genuine talent is so rare and yet so important for success</td>
<td>Rarely done despite increasing “encouragement” to do so from business consultants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Loehr and Schwartz (2001) have described business executives as “corporate athletes” and suggest that top performers reach an ideal performance state in terms of their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual capacity. They have worked with a significant number of executives and though the application of their Performance Pyramid Model which proposes congruence between a sportsperson and their coach. The model is centred on their belief that world-class performance requires extraordinary leadership which is fully aligned with an individual’s or a team’s fundamental values, beliefs and mission. However little is known about the fundamental research completed to devise their model.
Burns and O’Donnell (2011) surmised a) effective leadership is as crucial to success in sport as it is to business b) there appear to be areas where sports leaders appear to be in advance of their business counterparts, particularly in relation to developing the full potential of teams and individuals, c) sport appears to offer a holistic approach to leadership development, which goes beyond the approach of most management and leadership development programmes and d) there appears to be four common themes in the leadership literatures of sport and business. The four themes that Burns and O’Donnell refer to are; leadership characteristics – the personal traits necessary for successful leaders; leadership capabilities – developing the necessary skills; the leadership context – understanding the situation responding accordingly; and the challenges of leadership – especially the need for continuous improvement.

Weinberg and McDermott’s (2002) qualitative study on the perceptions of sport and business leaders identified three group dynamic factors; leadership, cohesion, and communication, that impacted on organisational effectiveness. Their interviews of 20 business and sports leaders identified similarities in the requirement to succeed and differences relating to business leaders putting more emphasis on being reflective listeners and being honest, while sport leaders highlighted the need for strong interactions with others and using positive reinforcement in their communication. While Weinberg and McDermott (2002) reported similarities between success in sport and business acknowledged that because team sports and work situations differ in size, task type and personalities of individuals in teams and leaders, transfer may be more likely or greatest in some situations than in others, clearly more empirical data are needed to substantiate the links.

2.9 Summary

In summary there are a number of mental toughness definitions that have been developed, each with a number of core characteristics centred on an individual’s ability to cope with the stressors of competitive sport and the self-belief that they are better performers than others (Jones et al. 2002, 2007; Bull et al. 2005; Thelwell et al. 2005; Connaughton et al. 2008; Gucciardi et al. 2008). Mental toughness has through more recent research been shown to be context specific (Bull et al., 2005; Connaughton et al., 2008), developed over time and through
experiences (Marchant et al., 2008) rather than being purely a genetic trait, although there may be some genetic predisposition to being mentally tough (Horsburgh et al., 2009); and a capability that requires maintenance or practice (Connaughton et al., 2008). However the existing research has a number of limitations, a) it assumes mental toughness is an elite performance capability rather than a performance enhancing capability; b) it has been conceptualised in absolute terms rather than relative terms; c) it has largely ignored contextual differences; and d) does not address whether mentally tough performers demonstrate mental toughness outside the sporting arena (Crust, 2008).

Crust (2008) also suggests that there may also be a negative impact of being mentally tough. Research has shown that athletes who are considered to be mentally tough push themselves further, experiencing higher levels of pain and potential injury than athletes who are less mentally tough (Levy et al., 2006). Whilst this may be the case, further research is required to determine whether this behaviour is solely the effect of mental toughness. In terms of this research study, we will not attempt to address this question, however it is expected that the outcomes of the focus groups and interviews may elicit whether mental toughness is considered a positive attribute of the business professional and whether there are indeed negative side-effects.

One important point to address regarding these criticisms is that whilst the majority of research has been completed within elite performers; mental toughness is not limited to these individuals. The reason for focusing on this group of individuals is that they provide an environment where physical ability is relatively uniform and as such the key characteristic or differentiator for successes is cognitive or psychological.

Therefore, after reviewing the literature, it was evident that: (a) a widely accepted definition of business mental toughness did not exist; (b) the component attributes, and methods for development, were not apparent, and included numerous positive psychological attributes and mental skills; and (c) although certain psychometric inventories were purported to be available for examining business mental toughness, these lacked sound psychometric properties and focused either on hardness and mental skills or the specific measurement of mental toughness within sport.
This aim of this thesis was, therefore, to address a number of the key issues which emanated from reviewing the available literature: defining business mental toughness and identifying its attribute make up; determining whether existing frameworks of sporting mental toughness apply; explaining the perceived mechanisms underlying the development of mental toughness and finally providing practitioners with a guide to best approach the development and assessment of mental toughness within business.
3 Methodology

Whilst the depth of scientific rigor applied to the current study of ‘sporting’ mental toughness has increased significantly over the last decade since Jones et al. (2002) completed their initial investigation into the phenomenon, there has been to date very little scientific rigor applied to addressing the underlying characteristics of ‘business’ mental toughness even though the frameworks and measurement tools developed within sport are being widely used within a business context. As a result, whilst the conceptual clarity surrounding sporting mental toughness continues to be developed, there is a clear requirement to ensure conceptual clarity around what ‘business’ mental toughness is, what it is not, and whether the use of sporting frameworks is really appropriate.

Consistent with a number of key sports psychology studies that have successfully enhanced our knowledge of sporting mental toughness through the use of qualitative research methods (see Bull et al., 2005; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2002, 2007; Thelwell et al., 2005) this study has also adopted a qualitative approach to data gathering and analysis. Given the relatively limited number of business mental toughness research papers and the lack of an accepted ‘business’ mental toughness measure a qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate method by which to understand the phenomenon of business mental toughness. Specifically the use of methods aligned to Kelly’s (1955) personal construct psychology have already proven to be successful within sports psychology in eliciting the underlying characteristics of mental toughness and it is widely accepted that this type of approach provides researchers with the opportunity to probe peoples’ responses and establish detailed information about difficult to elicit phenomenon (e.g., Gould, Eklund, & Jackson, 1993; Hanton & Connaughton, 2002; Patton, 2002).

3.1 Qualitative methods

In order to ensure that the researcher is able to elicit the necessary information to determine the characteristics of the mentally tough business person two qualitative methods were used. At the onset of the focus groups and the interviews Appreciative Inquiry methods were adopted (see Gordon 2008b) in order to allow the participant to gain sufficient understanding of what mental toughness is but also what it is not. Upon completion of the ‘what
is mental toughness stage’ the second phase of the enquiry into mental toughness adopts a Kellian approach to construct development including both constructs and their polar opposites (Gucciardi et al., 2008).

3.1.1 Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

AI is a significant departure from traditional approaches to mental toughness research. This theory building process or philosophy offers an almost revolutionary way in which the researcher can build on the natural mental toughness characteristics already present within the individual. The first step in understanding what mental toughness is must be to understand what it actually means to the individual. As Gordon (2008b) suggests this is instrumental to developing knowledge of mental toughness as all performers must understand what mental toughness is and is not, when it is required and when it is not required, and how, in general, performers personally construe their realities in relation to mental toughness. As a result the opening questions of the focus groups and the individual interviews focuses on this positive psychology approach and centres the question of what is mental toughness and how does it benefit business.

3.1.2 Personal Construct Psychology

One of the main advantages of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to gain an in depth understanding of the participants’ personal constructs and experiences (Jones et al., 2007). The objective within this research study, as with that of Jones et al. (2002, 2007), was to first identify both the macro- and micro-components of business mental toughness, focusing on not just the macro characteristics such as confidence and coping with adversity, but underpinning these constructs with a detailed understanding of the micro-components, or subordinate constructs of business mental toughness.

Personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), the general framework on which the elicitation and documentation of mental toughness characteristics is based in this study, emphasizes the way in which a person construes or interprets ‘their world’; it focuses on both the uniqueness of the individual and the processes common to all people. The fundamental premise of personal construct theory is that individuals strive to make sense of the world and themselves by constructing personal theories. This leads them to anticipate what will happen in given
situations, and subsequently their theories are either validated or revised in light of how well these theories enable and guide them to see into the immediate and long-term future (Fransella et al., 2004).

The process of using personal construct psychology involves eliciting what the business professional considers to be, in the case of this study, the qualities of the ideal mentally tough business professional or performer. The approach has been applied effectively to both individual and team based sports extremely effectively including archery, field hockey, athletics, gymnastics, ice skating, weight-lifting, squash, swimming, speed skating, cycling, association football, judo, rowing, and modern pentathlon (see Butler, 1989, 1991; Butler & Hardy, 1992, Butler, Smith, & Irwin, 1993; Dale & Wrisberg, 1996; Jones, 1993).

In studies 1 and 2 a focus group is used in support of the PCP approach. Focus groups aid the development of thinking, especially when the subject matter is rather new to the participants (Jones et al., 2002). Focus groups have been used in previous research where the participants have brought to the focus groups their own personal constructs (e.g., Butler, Smith, & Irwin, 1993). The personal constructs were revealed to the researchers and then discussed within the group. Study 1 focused on examining whether a ‘business’ definition of mental toughness was worthwhile and what the underlying characteristics of the ideal mentally tough business performer may be (a broad set of constructs were suggested but given the limited time available and the time taken to elicit the definition only seven constructs were documented). The findings and observations from this initial focus group were used to develop the focus group protocol for the second set of focus groups completed as part of study 2.

Study 2 focused on developing a broader understanding of business mental toughness and rather than focus on developing a ‘new’ mental toughness definition the objective of the sessions was to specifically identify the sources of similarity and difference between sporting and business mental toughness as the observations from Study 1 clearly showed that there were a number of similarities and differences that warranted further investigation.

The final study, Study 3 the researcher was focused on understanding the underlying component of business mental toughness through the completion of a series of individual
interviews with business professionals during which the researcher probed their personal constructs in order to characterize the mentally tough business professional.

Following the analysis of the constructs developed in Part 2 of Study 3 required the participants of the individual interviews to rank the list of the major mental toughness constructs (n=11), review all 66 constructs in order to suggest their contrast poles and indicate whether the construct is present all of the time, some of the time or not at all when business people are observed as mentally tough. Interview techniques were considered an appropriate method of enquiry because they provided the opportunity to accumulate as much quality detailed information and ensure that mental toughness was explored both fully and accurately (cf. Hanton & Jones, 1999; Mason, 1997).

3.2 Ethical approval

The university’s human ethics committee prior to commencing the study granted approval for this project. Each participant was contacted by the author and was informed of the mental toughness research being conducted. Once each participant agreed to participate in this study they were sent (via e-mail) a copy of the interview/focus group schedule at least three days prior to the focus group/interview, and they were requested to read the questions and consider them over the days preceding the focus group/interview. Focus groups lasted between 150 and 190 minutes and individual interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. All were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Informed consent was obtained prior to the start of each interview and focus group.

3.3 Study 1

Following procedures successfully adapted by Butler et al. (1993) and Dale and Wrisberg (1996), Study 1 required three participants within a focus group environment to brainstorm and discuss (a) a definition of business mental toughness, and (b) to provide an exhaustive list of the fundamental prerequisite qualities and attributes of the ideal mentally tough business performer. Specifically, the participants were encouraged to engage with one another and verbally formulate their ideas regarding what business mental toughness meant to them and what the elements of our personality or character they believed symbolized mentally tough performers (Kitzinger, 1994). They were first asked to consider mental toughness as a
group before individually formulating a definition of what business mental toughness meant to them. These definitions were then reviewed as a group in order to develop a consensus and a group definition of business mental toughness that they were happy with. Following this, they were asked to identify and discuss all attributes that the ideal mentally tough business performer possessed until saturation was deemed to have occurred (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each attribute was examined and probed in detail and business scenarios and real life examples provided where possible to support the suggested attributes contribution towards mental toughness. Clarification and elaboration probes were used to ensure an accurate and in-depth understanding of what each participant was describing, and to create a consistent level of depth across the interviews (cf. Patton, 1990). Finally, participants were given the opportunity to revisit the original definition they generated in light of the process of identifying and discussing the individual attributes of business mental toughness in order to make and further changes they may wish to add.

3.3.1 Participants

Consistent with qualitative methodologies purposive sampling was used to select study participants and three business professionals, 1 women and 2 men (M Age = 48.0 years, SD = 5.0) agreed to participate in this initial study based on the participant meeting two of the following four conditions. All participants met criteria 1, 2 and 3:

1. Have worked in a business environment for over 10 years.
2. Have reached Director Level within a business of over 50 employees.
3. Have managed teams with over 20 people.
4. Have been identified by someone who considers them to be mentally tough.

The above criteria was set in order to ensure that the individual chosen had risen to a level of seniority where they could observe other performing and in organisations of a sufficient size.

3.3.2 Procedure

Standard introductory comments were provided to all participants explaining the rationale for the study, how data would be collected and used, issues over confidentiality and anonymity, the participants’ rights, and the reasons for audio-taping the focus groups and
interviews. Participants were also introduced to the performance enhancing capability of mental toughness and its origins within sport, however no formal sporting definitions were provided.

### 3.3.2.1 Definition development

Participants were initially asked to discuss the term ‘business mental toughness’ as a group to ensure that there was a general understanding of what business mental toughness could be. Following the initial discussion participants were then asked to spend 15 minutes developing their own personal definition of business mental toughness. Once completed each participant shared their definition with the group and the group were instructed to discuss the three definitions and if possible develop a single definition that each participant agreed was an acceptable ‘working’ definition of business mental toughness.

### 3.3.2.2 Characteristics & Construct Development

Participants were next asked to describe what they believed were the characteristics or qualities of the “Ideal Mentally Tough Business Professional. They were encouraged to base this analysis on either themselves or any individual they believed to be mentally tough, or even a combination of several individuals whom you feel held certain characteristics (but possibly not all) of mentally toughness. They were encouraged to draw on their many varied experiences and if they experienced problems finding the right words to describe certain qualities or characteristics, they should give examples and describe the whole situation or process to portray what you mean.

Once an exhaustive list of characteristics had been developed each was probed to determine a broader explanation of the characteristic with examples and where possible the polar opposite of each characteristic. In line with personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), participants were asked to identify, describe, and explain with examples what the attributes meant to them. Confidentiality was assured throughout, and participants were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers, to take their time responding to questions, and to tell the interviewer if they could not remember something rather than guess. The focus group lasted two hours thirty minutes, was audiotape-recorded in its entirety and transcribed verbatim yielding 43 single-spaced typed pages.
3.3.3 Analysis

Transcripts were reviewed following a five step approach with (a) each focus group transcript first studied in detail by the researcher to ensure content familiarity, secondly the researcher reviewing the proposed similarities, differences and attributes and deductively categorized them into a number of dimensions which an external researcher, knowledgeable in qualitative-research analysis and very familiar with the subject matter, in order to confirm that the attributes were classified under the most appropriate dimensions and subcomponents. Finally participant feedback verified the construction of the framework. Trustworthiness characteristics, as recommended by Hardy et al. (1996) and Sparkes, were met throughout via thick description, recording and transcribing all interviews, peer debriefing, and member checking. The characteristics identified in study 2 were also grouped with those from Study 1 and Study 3 Stage 1 in order to create a ‘master’ list of characteristics. The characteristics identified in study 1 were grouped with those from Study 2 and Study 3 Part 1 in order to create a broader set of comments and characteristics.

3.4 Study 2

The purpose of this study was to assess the similarities and differences between a sporting view of mental toughness and a business view. As there is no universally recognized measure of business mental toughness, the study employed qualitative methods to define mental toughness and develop a framework of mental toughness by identifying the key underpinning attributes in a broad range of business scenarios and roles. The sample consisted of business professionals who have considerable experience of workplace performance and as a result would be expected to have observed individuals displaying mental toughness in the workplace.

3.4.1 Participants

Consistent with qualitative methodologies (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002) and following the procedures adopted by Jones et al. (2002) in their study of sporting mental toughness purposive sampling was used to select study participants. The samples were selected by canvassing various business professionals the author knew and considered to be mentally tough. These individuals were identified as mentally tough by the researcher through
personal experience of working with and alongside the individuals or through other contacts from within Manchester Business School. Six business professionals were chosen from a broad range of disciplines and sector backgrounds in order to gain a diverse representation (M Age = 51.5 years, SD = 10.4). In particular, emphasis was placed on selecting participants from business areas with varying task demands (i.e. team versus individual activities, public and private sector experience) who, once contacted, volunteered their consent. In addition and to ensure that the study used ‘data-rich’ individuals (Bull et al., 2005; Jones et al.; Thelwell et al., 2005), each participant was required to have operated at board level within a business for over three years or worked with board members in a consultative role, they had over 15 years working experience and that they had worked in companies with more than 50 employees. All of the participants met these criteria with the average work experience over 29.3 years (DS = 9.9).

3.4.2 Procedure

As with study 1 standard introductory comments were provided to all participants explaining the rationale for the study, how data would be collected and used, issues over confidentiality and anonymity, the participants’ rights, and the reasons for audio-taping the focus groups and interviews. Participants were also introduced to the performance enhancing capability of mental toughness and its origins within sport, however no formal sporting definitions were provided.

Each focus group involved three business people engaging with one another and verbally formulating their ideas regarding business mental toughness (Kitzinger, 1994). Participants were asked to define mental toughness in their own words, what it meant to them, what it didn’t and how it can help them operate better within the workplace. Once this had been discussed they were then asked to list all the fundamental prerequisite qualities and attributes that the ideal mentally tough performer possessed until saturation was deemed to have occurred (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each attribute was then examined and probed in detail with sporting examples provided before proceeding to the next attribute (cf. Patton, 2002). The researcher was particularly interested in understanding what the performance element of mental toughness related to within business and what the underlying differences and similarities of business mental toughness are when related to sporting mental toughness.
3.4.3 Analysis

Following the approach taken by Jones et al. (2002) and in line with Sparkes (1998), it was determined that data should be displayed in a way that was easy to interpret and meaningful to the reader. As a result the chosen method of analysis for this study was to present the similarities, differences and attributes identified by each participant as direct textual quotations taken directly from the transcripts (full verbatim transcripts can be found in the appendices. This approach enables the reader to fully appreciate the issues involved as the quotations chosen will “speak for themselves” (cf. Woodman & Hardy, 2001).

Transcripts were reviewed following a five step approach with (a) each focus group transcript first studied in detail by the researcher to ensure content familiarity, secondly the researcher reviewing the proposed similarities, differences and attributes and deductively categorized them into a number of dimensions which an external researcher, knowledgeable in qualitative-research analysis and very familiar with the subject matter, in order to confirm that the attributes were classified under the most appropriate dimensions and subcomponents. Finally participant feedback verified the construction of the framework. Trustworthiness characteristics, as recommended by Hardy et al. (1996) and Sparkes, were met throughout via thick description, recording and transcribing all interviews, peer debriefing, and member checking. The characteristics identified in study 2 were also grouped with those from Study 1 and Study 3 Stage 1 in order to create a ‘master’ list of characteristics.

3.5 Study 3

The procedure for this study was divided into three parts (Part 1: individual interview; Part 2: construct development: Part 3 individual ranking of mental toughness attributes). Following Part 1 the researcher compared the comments and constructs identified in all three studies in order to develop a holistic list of business mental toughness constructs. Once complete these were compared against the major and subordinate constructs identified by Gucciardi et al. (2008). This set of major characteristics were chosen for two reasons a) they were the most up to date and expansive set of characteristics identified to date and b) they were elicited from coaches rather than elite athletes and as such were based on their observations of others, which was the basis for this study.
All participants were provided with standardized introductory comments concerning the rationale for the study, the use of data, issues regarding confidentiality and the participants’ rights, and the reasons for audio-taping the focus group and interviews. We used a convenience sample of 5 respondents, split across a number of business sectors and experience. All respondents were residents in the UK where interviews were conducted. Respondents were recruited from the authors base of business experts and through Manchester Business School’s alumni association although not all of the respondents were alumni or graduates of Manchester Business School the Alumni Association enabled the author to gain access to experienced business professionals. Interviews, which were conducted face-to-face, ranged from 50-120 minutes each, totalling approximately 9 hours of material. Two participants, Mike and Cris completed both the interviews and the focus groups but were not in the same focus group.

3.5.1 Participants

Five business professionals (M age = 48.4, SD = 10.9) were recruited from Study 2 and from other sources. All participants had considerable professional and management experience (Average Experience = 29.3 years, SD 9.9). Participant recruitment ceased when new data only added to the density of the coded data but little to the emerging model, which is known as theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.5.2 Interview Schedule (Part 1)

As per the approach taken by Bull et al., (2005) a focused interview style (Robson, 1993) was considered appropriate, as this would allow for flexibility between and within interviews, whilst maintaining a consistent background framework, and also allowing the interviewer to exploit his existing relationship with some of the interviewees by adopting an “informal” approach. Prior to each interview the participant was sent a copy of the interview questionnaire and asked to familiarise themselves with the questions in order to maximise the time available during the interview to probe the characteristics of mental toughness.

Whilst this was a PCP-based interview schedule and included the following open-ended questions which were adapted from Gucciardi et al., (2008) the approach also mirrored that of Appreciative Inquiry as it build on the natural mental toughness characteristics already present
within the individual. At the onset of the interview the first step it to understand what mental toughness means to the participant which is of significant interest in this study as that is one of the primary objectives of the interviews i.e. what does mental toughness mean to business professionals. As Gordon (2008b) suggests this is instrumental to developing knowledge of mental toughness as all performers must understand what mental toughness is and is not, when it is required and when it is not required, and how, in general, performers personally construe their realities in relation to mental toughness. By getting the participant to focus on both their view and the views of others this ensures that the research satisfies the PCP corollaries as outlined by Kelly (1955).

In order to ensure a richness of feedback the following set of open questions included both clarification (“What do you mean by . . . ?”) and elaboration probes (“Can you give me an example of . . . ?”) used throughout each interview to both prompt interviewees and encourage clarity and richness of data:

1. What does “mental toughness” mean to you in terms of performance in the work place? Can you offer a definition, phrase or quote to describe it?
2. Which situations in business do you believe require mental toughness and which may not?
3. Which business professionals have you worked with or had significant exposure to that you would consider mentally tough or mentally weak, i.e. they lack mental toughness? What do you think are the distinguishing characteristics and attributes between these two types of individual? What is they do, how do they look, behave, react?
4. Think of someone you know well, whom you would consider to be mentally tough. What do you think he or she would consider the characteristics and attributes of mental toughness would be? In your opinion, what do you consider to be the role(s)/purpose(s) of each of these characteristics?
5. Do you feel that there are mental toughness attributes that you consider unique to specific business roles or situations?
6. Do you believe mental toughness has a positive or a negative impact on work performance? Which characteristics could have a negative impact?
3.5.3 Data analysis (Part 2)

The chosen method of analysis for this study was to aggregate the characteristics collected in study 1 and study 2 to create a master set of characteristics and present the attributes identified by each participant as direct textual quotations taken directly from the transcripts (full verbatim transcripts can be found in the Appendices). Attributes were coded in order to identify raw data themes, and the subsequent groupings of these raw data themes into groupings with similar meanings (emerging themes; e.g., “able to switch off,” “don’t get bogged down in work” “always takes responsibility”). This approach enables the reader to fully appreciate the issues involved as the quotations chosen do “speak for themselves” (cf. Woodman & Hardy, 2001). The initial analysis of each interview and focus group identified over 120 phrases or statements which reflected either a business mental toughness characteristic or its polar opposite. Throughout the process of data collection and investigation the researcher maintained contact with both his supervisor and an additional expert on mental toughness from the sports psychology field.

3.5.4 Contrast development & characteristic ranking (Part 3)

Once all interviews had been conducted each interviewee was sent (via e-mail) a handout detailing the full list of business mental toughness characteristics identified through the interviews. Each participant was requested to (a) describe what they considered to be the contrasting pole for each characteristic, (b) rank the characteristics in order from most important to least important for business mental toughness, and (c) describe whether they believed that the characteristic was always needed to be mentally tough or whether it was scenario or context specific or indeed if the characteristic was not part of mental toughness.

3.5.4.1 Overview of Data Analysis Procedures

Data analytical procedures followed those suggested by Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) version of grounded theory methodology. These techniques encourage analysis that moves from a basic description, through conceptual categorizing, to relationship building and theorizing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). At this stage the researcher however didn’t develop at his own theories of mental toughness but compared the major categories against those generated by
Bull et al. (2005), Gucciardi et al., (2008), Jones et al. (2002, 2007) and Thelwell et al. (2005) in order to determine whether the same major themes were emerging from the research.

In line with grounded theory procedures, data collection proceeded concurrently with analysis and ended when theoretical saturation was achieved (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Constant comparison between and within the codes revealed in open coding occurred throughout data collection and analysis. This enables the analyst to define the basic properties and dimensions of a category or construct, its causal conditions, context, and outcomes, and the relationships and patterns between categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Essentially, each concept was compared with other concepts and categories, and each category was compared with other categories so that similarities and variations between and within the properties and dimensions of categories could be identified. This ongoing process of confirmation and modification is essential to ensure that the emerging framework is grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.5.4.2 Open coding

Open coding is the stage in data analysis where analysts endeavour to reveal, specify, and label concepts that resemble the data in an attempt to discriminate and differentiate between concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Initially, the interview transcript data were opened up by dismantling them into discrete, analytic segments, and analysed line-by-line so that similarities and differences could be examined and compared (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, raw data extracts relating to “work ethic” were compared and contrasted to identify similarities and inconsistencies between different descriptions of “work ethic.” Conceptual labels were allocated to each concept to assist in the process of classifying and grouping similar types of data under a common heading, but also for developing new concepts.

3.5.4.3 Axial coding

Axial coding is an intermediate process in which analysts attempt to (re)assemble the codes developed through open coding in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, similarities and differences in the codes were examined and clustered to create categories and subcategories, which were then compared and contrasted to develop more inclusive categories.
and to reveal links between them based on their properties and dimensions. Aspects relating to a category’s causal condition, context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies, and consequences were employed to facilitate this process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.5.4.4 Trustworthiness

It may be interesting to note that the experiences of the researcher when capturing data though the individual interviews mirrored those of Bull et al., (2005). The relationship between the interviewer and three of the participants (Shane, Nick and Cris) was instrumental in the richness of the data generated, and as with the focus groups a level of professional respect was maintained throughout the interview process. In addition the researcher was also careful in the preceding months leading up to the interviews to not discuss mental toughness with any of the participants and once contacted they were dissuaded from researching mental toughness prior to interview. Only one trustworthy technique was employed to demonstrate that the data reflected the reports of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of the five interviewees was provided with a detailed overview of the results of the analysis and was asked to reflect on and verify the accuracy of the analysts’ interpretations.

3.6 Observations and changes to the methodology

At the onset of the study one of the objectives was to determine a definition for business mental toughness, however given the sample size and the time constraints of the focus groups and the general lack of knowledge of some participants on mental toughness it was decided following Study 1 that all subsequent participants in the study would not be asked to develop a formal definition of mental toughness. Instead the methodology was adapted to include Appreciative Inquire questions builds on the natural mental toughness characteristics already present within the individual and as such rather than define a specific definition each was asked “what mental toughness meant to a performer and to them, which is of significant interest in this study as that is one of the primary objectives of the focus groups, i.e. what does mental toughness mean to business professionals. As Gordon (2008b) suggests this is instrumental to developing knowledge of mental toughness as all performers must understand what mental toughness is and is not, when it is required and when it is not required, and how, in general, performers personally construe their realities in relation to mental toughness.
4 FINDINGS

As highlighted by the extent of the literature review there is a general lack of conceptual clarity and consensus as to what the characteristics of mental toughness are within a business context and whether mental toughness can have the same positive impact in business as it has been reported in sport (see Gould, 1987; Loehr 1982, 1986). This thesis reflects a program of research completed over a three year period centred on examining mental toughness within a business context. The goals of the thesis were to (a) understand whether mental toughness was recognised within a business context, (b) determine whether the existing definitions of [sporting] mental toughness are appropriate for describing business mental toughness or whether a revised definition is required, (c) identify the essential characteristics which underpin the mentally tough person within a business environment, (d) assess these characteristics against a representative sporting framework of mental toughness, devised by sports coaches, to determine similarities and differences in the characteristics, (e) examine the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the development and maintenance of business mental toughness and (f) determine whether the adoption of a sporting mental toughness approach is suitable within a business environment either directly or in an amended form.

Table 4.1. Participant involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 2</th>
<th>Focus Group 3</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graeham</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total twelve business professionals participated in the three parts to this research program and as a group they had 335 years of business experience. Participants were either interviewed as part of a focus group (n=3) of which there were three, one as part of Study 1 and
two as part of Study 2, or as part of an individual semi-structure interview, of which there were five. Two participants completed both a focus group and an individual interview (Mike and Cris). The outcomes from which enabled the researcher to answer the fundamental questions highlighted above.

Study 1 examined the existence of mental toughness within a business context and whether the existing sporting definitions of mental toughness are sufficient to define mental toughness within business. Highly experienced business professionals were interviewed regarding their perceptions of mental toughness, and the characteristics of the mentally tough performer within a business context. The definition and attributes which emerged (n=7) from the findings emphasised a lack of conceptual clarity of mental toughness and a more complex set of characteristics that were not all aligned to a sporting view of mental toughness. Whilst all agreed that mental toughness was a positive capability within business there were clearly differences in context and characteristics that warranted a broader examination of the phenomenon.

Study 2 further examined the attributes of mental toughness and elicited 21 characteristics of the mentally tough performer within a business context. The study also identified a number of significant differences between the characteristics of a mentally tough sports person and a mentally tough business person as well as identifying the contextual complexity of business over sport.

Study 3 represents a three-part investigation to determine whether a sporting framework for mental toughness is identifiable within business by determining whether the characteristics identified by Australian Football coaches (see Gucciardi et al, 2008) are also identified by business professionals when describing mental toughness within a business context. The first part of Study 3 followed an individual interview based methodology focused on identifying the underlying characteristics of business mental toughness and how these specifically related to the sustained performance of individuals within the workplace. The second part of the study elicited 11 higher order characteristics and 55 subordinate characteristics which were then compared to the characteristics identified by Gucciardi et al. (2008) – 11 higher order characteristics and 22 subordinate characteristics. These two sets of characteristics had
significant overlap with 10 shared higher level characteristics then conflated to produce 11 higher order characteristics (physical toughness was dropped from the sporting set and leadership was added from the business set). The 55 subordinate business characteristics identified all the previous characteristics identified by Gucciardi et al., (2208) and as such this set was used in total for the third part to this study.

Due to the expected complex nature of business mental toughness and following the approach taken within sports psychology research e.g. Connaughton et al. (2007) the findings from each of the studies will be grouped and reported separately in terms of the development of a definition of business mental toughness, business mental toughness attributes and general observations separately. In the following sections we will address whether mental toughness was recognised within the study sample, how they shoes to define mental toughness, what the underlying characteristics are of a mentally tough business professional, how mental toughness may be developed in business and any learnings we can take from this exercise in utilising mental toughness moving forward.

4.1 Is mental toughness recognised within business?

All participants in this program acknowledged that mental toughness played or could play a positive role within business and that business people do, and could, benefit from being mentally tough. As such the characteristics and the purpose of business mental toughness was further explored. Had the audience not recognised the benefits or the presence of mental toughness within a business context then the program of study would have ceased.

4.2 Defining Business Mental Toughness

The following definitions (see Table 4.2) were proposed by the participants in Study 1. Each participant was asked, in their own words, to define business mental toughness and what it meant to them. They were provided with the definition developed by Jones et al. (2002) verbally as an explanation of sporting mental toughness following which they were asked to generate their own definition of business mental toughness. Jones et al. (2002) were the first to attempt to provide a scientific clarification of mental toughness through a qualitative study using Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955). They described the mentally tough performer as:
“...having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables them to:

1. Generally, cope better than opponents with the many demands (competition, training, and lifestyle) that sport places on the performer.
2. Specifically, be more consistent and better than opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure.” (Jones et al. 2008)

Participants in Focus Group 1 found the development of a definition quite difficult, in particular separating out the benefit or outcome sought from the approach and the underlying characteristics or constituent parts.

Table 4.2.: Individual and Group definitions of Business Mental Toughness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Business mental toughness is believing that you can make the impossible possible when faced with extraordinary odds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Business mental toughness is defined as the determination and resilience of an individual to succeed in business, underpinned by clarity of vision and strong self-belief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Business mental toughness is the confidence and ability to make a decision in any situation and deliver a strong and effective solution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Group       | Business mental toughness is having the clarity of vision and self-belief, with determination and resilience to deliver a strong and effective solution when faced with extraordinary odds. |

In light of the difficulty and the time taken in to elicit the definition in subsequent focus groups each participant was provided with the basic introduction to mental toughness using the Jones et al. (2008) definition and their responses recorded as part of the process however no further definitions were captured in order to ensure that there was sufficient time to capture data on the characteristics of a mentally tough business person. The definitions developed are shown below (Table 4.2.)

The problem with developing a definition is that there was too much word manipulations and semantic arguments. Indeed when some of the participants in the individual interviews were shown the group definition they immediately began ‘wordsmithing’ the description in order to make it relevant to them. They did however accept that it did represent an 80% acceptable
description of mental toughness (as measured on a scale of 1-10). As a result the development of a mental toughness definition was dropped after the initial focus group in favour of simply asking the participant what mental toughness meant to them and how it can positively impact what they do. This is not to say that we should not return to address whether or not mental toughness requires its own definition or whether a slight amendment to one of the sporting definitions will suffice. One participant suggested that a revision of the sporting mental toughness definition was urgently required.

“I’ve just reread the sports one and I think you could take this exactly, just change opponents to colleagues. You could play with the words ‘training, competition, lifestyle’. Specifically be better than colleagues in remaining firm, confident and in control under pressure.” [Graham]

Clearly mental toughness is a quality that brings together several human features and allows a performer to consistently get the best out of their ability. The proposed definition of business mental toughness, therefore, seeks to reflect this position and integrate all of the key findings described above.

When the wider audience of participants were asked to define mental toughness there was unanimous agreement and acceptance that there was, and there was also a need for at times, a cognitive skill that enabled business people to cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment and that those who generally were better at this than others were able to succeed (achieve objectives) and perform to higher standards than others who were equally intelligent and experienced. In addition it is important to note that this was achieved in an emotionally balanced or controlled way. As such the researcher offers the following definition of mental toughness based on the responses of the participants in this study.

Business mental toughness is a set of cognitive skills, values and beliefs that enable business people to consistently cope with the stress and pressure of their work and its environment in an emotionally balanced and controlled way, whilst maintaining a positive impact on others.

Note has been taken to ensure that the description focuses on the what rather than the specifics of who as we will see below the how is rather extensive.
4.3 Characteristics & Construct Development

Using a PCP (Kelly 1955) framework to explore definitional and conceptual issues related to mental toughness in business, we endeavoured to identify which key characteristics can and cannot be generalized to a business performance context. The purpose of this study was to provide a more specific understanding of the key characteristics in the context of those business-specific situations which the study participants believed require mental toughness.

Table 4.3. Development of Business Mental Toughness Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gucciardi et al. (2008)</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
<th>Study 2</th>
<th>Study 3</th>
<th>Business MT Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Belief</strong></td>
<td>Self Belief &amp; Confidence</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Self Belief &amp; Confidence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Assured</td>
<td>Self Assured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self Belief (Direction)</td>
<td>Self Belief (Direction)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technically Strong</td>
<td>Technically Strength</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act independently</td>
<td>Act independently</td>
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Relaxed approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Work Ethic</strong></th>
<th>Achiever</th>
<th><strong>Work Ethic</strong></th>
<th>Work Ethic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Goal Oriented</td>
<td>Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Outcome driven</td>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>Meticulous Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Organised</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational</td>
<td>Convincing</td>
<td>Influence others</td>
<td>Inspirational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prepared to take risks</td>
<td>Prepared to take risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pragmatic perfectionist</td>
<td>Pragmatic perfectionist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personal Values</strong></th>
<th>Personal Values</th>
<th><strong>Personal Values</strong></th>
<th>Personal Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>Work to expected standards</td>
<td>Honest self appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride in performance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pride in performance</td>
<td>Pride in performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Accountable</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Considered</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>Considerate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modest &amp; respectful</td>
<td>Modest &amp; respectful</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Self Motivated</strong></th>
<th>Self Motivated</th>
<th><strong>Self Motivated</strong></th>
<th>Self Motivated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive desire</td>
<td>Seek out challenges</td>
<td>Grounded</td>
<td>Competitive desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Success</td>
<td>Dependency on others</td>
<td>Dispassionate</td>
<td>Team Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>See the big picture</td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoys pressure</td>
<td>Enjoys pressure situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Astute</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Tough Attitude</strong></th>
<th>Decisive/Assertive</th>
<th>Decisive</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tough Attitude</td>
<td>Tough Attitude</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Discipline</strong></th>
<th>Realistic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Table 4.3. Development of Business Mental Toughness Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gucciardi et al. (2008)</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
<th>Study 2</th>
<th>Study 3</th>
<th>Business MT Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>Positive outlook</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifices</td>
<td>Dispassionate</td>
<td>Sacrifices (Dispassionate)</td>
<td>Not afraid of conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brave</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brave &amp; Bold</td>
<td>Brave &amp; Bold</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to compromise</td>
<td>Willing to compromise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration &amp; Focus</td>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Concentration &amp; Focus</td>
<td>Concentration &amp; Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to say no</td>
<td>Willing to say no</td>
<td>Willing to disappoint</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Handling Pressure</td>
<td>Deal with pressure</td>
<td>Ability to handle pressure</td>
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<td>Override negative thoughts</td>
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<td>Not afraid of change</td>
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<td>Can deal with ambiguity</td>
<td>Can deal with ambiguity</td>
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<td>Reflect on experiences</td>
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<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
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<td>Sport Intelligence</td>
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<td>Team Role Responsibility</td>
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<td>Experience</td>
<td>Understanding the Game</td>
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<td>Intuitive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social Intelligence</td>
<td>Social Intelligence</td>
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<td>Physical Toughness</td>
<td>Ability to lead others</td>
<td>Ability to lead others</td>
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<td>Consensual</td>
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<td>Manage Upwards</td>
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The interviews and focus groups provided over 350 pages of double spaced verbatim comments (Full copies of the interview and focus group transcripts can be found in Appendix B – I). These were dissected to create over 400 separate quotes identified as being important to
the complex development, characteristics, and attributes of mental toughness. The raw data themes ranged in length from a short sentence to lengthy paragraphs, and these were organized into major themes of similar meaning. The organization of the major themes can be found in table 4.3.

In using the Gucciardi et al. (2008) classification of mental toughness characteristics the author was able to demonstrate that through a thematic analysis of the responses the same major themes of sporting mental toughness were evident within business with the exception of Physical Toughness which was not referenced by any of the participants in any of the three studies. In addition to the 10 major themes, one additional theme was also identified which related to leadership and the impact mental toughness has on others. The attributes are presented separately below with representative quotes (including self-referenced and observed examples) throughout to illustrate the specific meanings and bases upon which attributes were devised.

Table 4.4 provides a list of the key major themes and/or characteristics suggested by the participants in this study. These compare almost identically with those attributes suggested by Gucciardi et al. (2008) in order to demonstrate whether business mental toughness and sporting mental toughness are identical or indeed there are differences as it has been proposed. In addition the characteristics revealed here are also consistent with previous sports psychology research. These include self-belief (Bull et al., 2005; Fourie & Potgieter, 2001; Loehr, 1986; Middleton et al., 2004; Thelwell et al., 2005), motivation (Bull et al., 2005; Fourie & Potgieter, 2001; Jones et al., 2002; Middleton et al., 2004), tough attitude (Bull et al., 2005; Fourie & Potgieter, 2001; Gould et al., 2002; Middleton et al., 2004; Thelwell et al., 2005), concentration and focus (Fawcett, 2005; Fourie & Potgieter, 2001; Jones et al., 2002; Loehr, 1986; Middleton et al., 2004), resilience (Bull et al., 2005; Fourie & Potgieter, 2001; Gordon & Sridhar, 2005; Gould et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2002), and handling pressure (Fawcett, 2005; Gordon & Sridhar, 2005; Jones et al., 2002; Middleton et al., 2004; Thelwell et al., 2005).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Gucciardi</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Ability to bounce back from a disappointment or overwhelming event often stronger as they have learned from them. Keep on going when others would give up, don’t take criticism negatively but see it as a way of adapting to the situation.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self Belief</td>
<td>Self assured of their ability to perform to the necessary level when under pressure through explicit knowledge of their technical and cognitive capabilities. Confident they can overcome any challenge they may face. Able to act independently or as part of a team.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Handle Pressure</td>
<td>Being able to utilise skills and practices when under pressure and stress. Accepting these pressures as challenges to test yourself against and keeping things in perspective. Able to see the big picture as well as the detail and not succumbing to either acute or chronic pressure.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration &amp; Focus</td>
<td>Single-minded and focused on the task at hand. Don’t get side tracked by internal or external pressures. When asked, or there is an opportunity, to do other things they refuse in order to sustain high levels of concentration on what they are doing. Maintain a perspective on what is needed at all times.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tough Attitude</td>
<td>An unshakable attitude directed towards succeeding. Individuals are disciplined, committed, remain positive and act professionally at all times. They are not afraid of conflict and will be bold and assertive when making decisions. However when necessary they are willing to compromise.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Are aware of and understanding your emotions when under pressure. Are able to manage your own emotions so that they do not affect your work or the work of others.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Motivated</td>
<td>Are intrinsically motivated to succeed either individually or as part of a team. Enjoy high pressure environments and have the clarity of thought and astuteness to turn these situations to their advantage.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>Always working hard and being determined to get through mentally demanding situations to achieve their goals and vision. Open minded and willing to try new challenges and take calculated risks. An inspiration to others.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Values</td>
<td>Placing great importance on personal values relevant to becoming a better person and colleague. Always accountable, having pride in your work, you take an honest approach to doing the right thing. Modest and respectful you are considered and considerate of others.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to lead others</td>
<td>The ability to lead people both below and above you in the organisation and to get them to do what you need them to do. Being consensual to other people’s views, ideas and opinions before making a decision.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Knowledge</td>
<td>Having the ability to perceive and understand the business environment, understanding the role you have to play, how social and business interactions work and a level of intuition that enables you to understand situations quicker than others.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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However unlike Gucciardi et al. (2008) and the other sporting mental toughness research studies this study identified significantly more sub characteristics. Participants across the three studies identified 105 attributes in total that were condensed down in to 66 attributes of the ideal mentally tough business performer. The attributes, phrased in the participants’ own words, are presented in Table 4.5 in ranked order and grouped in line with the major mental toughness characteristics identified by Gucciardi et al. (2008). Ranking was conducted upon completion of the interviews and each interviewee was sent (via e-mail) a handout detailing the full list of mental toughness characteristics identified through the interviews. Each participant was requested to (a) describe what they considered to be the contrasting pole for each characteristic, (b) rank the characteristics in order from most important to least important for business mental toughness, and (c) describe whether they believed that the characteristic was always needed to be mentally tough or whether it was scenario or context specific or indeed if the characteristic was not part of mental toughness (see Appendix J for full results). Each characteristic and its suggested contrast is presented below and described with representative quotes. Where the construct is also shared with Bull et al. (B), Gucciardi et al. (G), Jones et al. (J), or Thelwell et al. (T) the associated symbol/letter will be added after the characteristics title.

### 4.3.1 \((R = 1)\) Resilience (G)

Resilience was described by many as the ability to bounce back from adversity or disappointment, or in its more popularised form ‘bouncebackability’. Individuals who are able to bounce back do so often stronger and better as they have learned from their experience. Keep on going when others would give up, don’t take criticism negatively but see it as a way of adapting to the situation. As one participant in the study put it:

> It’s about being able to cope or bounce back through the negative times.  
> [Louise]

There was an acceptance by all participants that there are always setbacks within business and that the mentally tough business person is able to overcome setbacks and get back on track (quickly) and remain focused:

> It’s an ability to overcome hurdles and overcome difficulties or setbacks that for me is an important part of [mental] toughness. [Clare]
In contrast those that lack resilience have a fragile mindset characterised by the inability to adapt to pressure, being easily broken and not putting up a fight in the face of adversity. Not able to come back from setbacks. They are easily put off, highly sensitive to criticism & emotionally unstable. They have a defeatist outlook and failing to reflect & learn when they have faced setbacks.

It was suggested by Louise that perhaps resilience was too negative in terms of a capability and that ‘bouncebackability’ or the ability to bounce back was more pertinent as there was an expectation that individuals came back stronger rather than returned to, or maintained an already achieved level.

Resilience is about being able to keep coming back but I feel it’s bouncing back because it’s even going further – yes, that was negative but that’s OK and push me further forward. [Louise]

All participants interviewed agreed that resilience was a component of business mental toughness.

4.3.1.1 Learn from mistakes

An element of an individual’s resilience is their ability to learn from their mistakes or setbacks. Mentally tough individuals see mistakes as a stepping-stone to success and a way of learning how to cope in the future:

When you’re trying to change things the one thing you can be sure of is that you will make mistakes and making mistakes is not a bad thing, it’s how you respond to them which make it good or bad. [Nick]

In contrast those that do not learn from their mistakes are fearful of mistakes and seek not to do anything that may result in a mistake. Often they don’t make decisions for fear of being wrong. They can appear delusional or ignorant.
All but one of those interviewed considered learning from mistakes to be a characteristic of mental toughness.

4.3.1.2 Respond positively to criticism

Mentally tough individuals were believed to not respond negatively to criticism they have an ability to externalise themselves from the situation and see the issues rather than make them personal.

*She’s able to disassociate herself from the situation and not take it personally*

*Nick*

Those that respond negatively are unable to extract themselves from situations and resolve them. They can become bogged down by the negative aspects of the criticism, can take it to heart and they let it affect their work. It can also manifest itself as narcissism if the criticism is ignored.

All those interviewed considered how people respond to criticism to be a characteristic of business mental toughness.

4.3.1.3 Adaptability

One of the identified behaviours of mentally tough business people was their ability to adjust their approach when faced with challenging situations. These changes are not always ad hoc however but planned or pre-conceived.

*They don’t just stick to plan A, they’ll try all the different avenue...If I’m not going to get there I’ll go somewhere else; I’m not giving in.* [Cris]

In contrast those that are unable to adapt are considered inflexible, they often remain on the same path or activity when it is clear to others they should change direction. They won’t adopt new approaches and often appear rigid in their thought processes.

All those interviewed believed that adaptability was a characteristic of mental toughness.
4.3.1.4 Able to cope with success & recognition

A key attribute of sporting mental toughness is the performer’s ability to bounce back from setbacks and adversity however this can ignore pressures associated with success. Being able to cope with the pressure that comes with success and recognition and not becoming sidetracked or over confident is a key component of mental toughness. It is this ability that distinguishes mental toughness from personality traits such as hardiness and resilience (Jones et al, 2002). Not every participant suggested that this was important, however one participant who now works with entrepreneurs and business start-ups suggested that dealing with success was also important and requires business mental toughness.

*It’s about being able to cope or bounce back through the negative times but because of all the work we do with entrepreneurs, the coping is actually on both sides. [Also] the success, not letting the success get out of control. [Louise]*

Clearly the proportion of success and failure across business start ups is heavily waited to negative experiences, however what the participant suggests is that whilst an ability to bounce back is a prerequisite for entrepreneurial activity, and for that matter for the business coach or supporter, there is also a need to ensure that the response to success is controlled also. This supports the claims of sports psychology researchers that mental toughness is not simply hardiness or resilience, which are focused primarily on negative situational aspects only.

The contrast to coping with success was described as being big headed, unbearable confidence, over confidence, prone to mistakes, easily distracted and not having their feet-on-the-ground.

All those interviewed believed that ability to cope with success was a characteristic of mental toughness.

4.3.2 \((R = 2)\) Self Belief \((B), (G), (J), (T)\)

Unlike the majority of sporting mental toughness research (see Jones et al., 2002; Gucciardi et al., 2008) the findings of this study did not suggest that self belief is the most important factor affecting business mental toughness, however a larger sample size may
change this. Performers who have a high level of self belief are self assured of their ability to perform to the necessary level when under pressure through explicit knowledge of their technical and cognitive capabilities. Confident they can overcome any challenge they may face and as a result are able to act independently or as part of a team.

*If you’re in control, you can push the boundaries as far as you want.* [Leigh]

Performers are “confident in their ability” and also confident that they are able to “achieve the end game” they always appear confident and in control:

*My friend Lindsey, who I think of as the ultimately mentally tough person, is just always, always, always in control. He’s got the confidence, the knowledge, the skills, the self-belief…everything…that he just feels in control all the time.* [Cris]

The contrast to self belief was self doubt, in terms of the ability to perform tasks; performers appear to others to demonstrate a lack of self belief, are unlikely to be proactive and start work, lack the ability to stand their ground, make their point and generally fail to influence others.

*Their confidence goes up and down based on a point in time in terms of what’s happening but they never stop believing that they’ll eventually get there. So they’ll have set-backs, confidence drops but the self-belief doesn’t.* [Nick]

All the participants interviewed believed that self belief was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.2.1 Self assured

Being self assured relates to the empirically tested belief that given the task at hand individuals have the mental, physical and intellectual capability to succeed, overcoming any obstacles put in your way. They not only have confidence in their ability but understand the limitations of their capability and as such have total confidence about the legitimacy of their ability to perform.
It's belief in myself as well and believing in your decision, you don't always make the right decision at a particular time but you stand by it and believe in it and get on with it and that's the strength, isn't it? [Pam]

The contrast of self assured was described as lacking confidence in one's own ability and seeing no justifiable reason why they should succeed, as opposed to simply believing that they can succeed. This can also be described as blind confidence or arrogance. Personal views or egos cloud the decision making process and they believe they are better than they are.

An example of being self assured and how this enabled one of the participants to cope in challenging and potentially stressful situation was provided by Cris:

When I crossed from the pubs division to the beer division, nobody could tell me because I'd been in pub management stuff, no one could tell me anything about pubs; running pubs, about retail in the beer division, nobody could. And then my customers were in pubs, they couldn't tell me anything, you know and it's an immense confidence and a very relaxed innate, I know my stuff with, which comes across and helps you to manage people. [Cris]

All the participants interviewed believed that being self assured was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.2.2 Self Belief (Direction)

Self belief is the explicit belief as viewed by the individual that the direction being taken is correct and that they will succeed. This it is also suggested has a positive effects on the confidence of those around them:

You have to believe in what you are doing is right... there is no point believing that your idea for your business is brilliant if it's actually built on sand and is totally stupid. You have to have the ability to analyse, you've got to have the ability to research, and then come up with an objective. [Mike]
The contrast of directional self belief was doubt that the actions and direction taken are unlikely to succeed. Individuals are waving in the direction to take, going round in circles, doubtful and lacking in confidence.

Three of the participants interviewed believed that being self assured was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person, one considered it to be in some situations only and one [Shane] didn’t believe that this was a characteristic of mental toughness, however Shane did believe that being self assured was a key characteristic of mental toughness.

### 4.3.2.3 Technical Strength

Technical strength refers to individuals who have the technical knowledge and an experience base that whatever the situation they are able to deal with it:

*I think it helps the mental toughness because it gives you the knowledge, the framework, the technical basis to not self-doubt.* [Graeham]

The contrast of technical strength was described as individuals who lack experience and knowledge of a situation which results in self doubt which generates a lack of confidence or credibility with others. One area where mental toughness and confidence may result in further weakness is where the confidence is central to a specific area of business and the individual is taken outside this specific area.

*Is that confidence around their technical skill or generally. I wondered if some of these people were mentally tough or is it just not part of their make-up, are they technical experts or do they just have an appreciation of most things? Are your guys technical experts and therefore, confident in their own ability and can, therefore, stand up to being challenged?* [Leigh]

As such it must also be understood as to what is driving the confidence, and what impact changes to the technical area as described above will have on the individual confidence.

All the participants interviewed believed that having technical strength was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.
4.3.2.4 Act Independently

This refers to the individual’s ability to channel self belief into getting on with things and not requiring micro-management. Have the confidence to act independently or as part of a team when necessary. The participants agreed that an element of independence was required to be mentally tough and that mentally tough performers “got on with it” and didn’t need to be directed. Indeed the mentally tough performer has the “confidence to act independently”:

*But that’s the joy of being mentally tough...you have to have the confidence to act independently. [Pam]*

This is contrasted with an inability for individuals to act on their own often requiring constant direction and support and requiring constant confirmation of what they are doing is correct.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to act independently was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. The ability to act independently was only suggested by Bull *et al.*, (2005), none of the other papers referenced this construct although Bull also associated it with taking responsibility.

4.3.2.5 Relaxed Approach

Mentally tough business people not only appear confident in their own ability but that this also enabled them to appear relaxed.

*Mentally tough people look relaxed, whether they are inside…I think you’re mentally tough but I’m not sure you’re always relaxed inside. [Leigh]*

The contrast to appearing relaxed is the appearance of being stressed, highly strung, lacking in confidence or being emotionally on edge.

All the participants interviewed believed that having a relaxed approach was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.
4.3.3 (R = 3) Handling Pressure (B), (G), (J), (T)

The impact of pressure and associated stress and anxiety was one area where there was considerable healthy debate regarding whether it stimulated or inhibited performance. It was suggested that anxiety over decision making hinders business people from taking decisions (procrastinating), however as one participant reported, this could actually be a positive,

You have to keep reality in context so it is very easy…to lose perception of reality. You can blow things completely out of scale or context or you can find yourself in a complete paradox. It’s Woodward’s adage – you play out all the little scenarios and permutations that you can think of and work out solutions and answers to them. [Nick]

In contrast those who didn’t handle pressure well were viewed as emotionally unstable who’s operational effectiveness reduces substantially when under pressure; unable to deal with unfamiliar situations; unable to work outside of comfort zone; someone who panics, are not able to keep things in perspective and have a tendency to blow things out of proportion. Often they having a poor perception of reality, sometimes considered dreamers. To others they simply fall apart when under pressure and as a result prefer an easy life, accepting the mundane tasks to ensure no pressure.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to handle pressure was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.1 Override Negative Thoughts

One participant referred to an inner positive voice that they believed impacted the way in which he performed. This ‘positive’ internal voice supports self-belief in their ability to perform the task at hand or make the necessary decision.

“so someone who is going to cope or copes better, has an internal voice which says ‘actually, we can do this’ or ‘actually, I’m going to do this and I’m going to do it well’ and that plays out in their behaviour, their language and their performance.” [Alison]
In contrast, individuals who let negative thoughts impact them vacillate; they let negative thoughts ‘run riot’ in their minds which severely impedes their progress. They are considered weak-minded, can become overwhelmed by negative thoughts, and they suffer from self-doubt and are prone to inappropriate hesitation and are unable to make decisions.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to override negative thoughts was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.2 Decisive

The business person’s ability to make decisions could describe their ability to perform. Decisive refers to an individual’s ability to make the right decisions quickly and consistently.

*Some people go through life and business and never, ever make a decision and that’s mentally weak. I think the ability to make a decision does demonstrate toughness.* [Alison]

In contrast, those that are not decisive procrastinate. They over-ponder and appear indecisive or even appear ignorant to the perceived problem. Reference was also made to individuals who acted hastily, however, this suggested contrast was also given for considered which is discussed as part of personal values.

All the participants interviewed believed that being decisive was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.3 Can deal with ambiguity

Individuals who are mentally tough within the workplace are comfortable with a lack of information and have an ability to fill in the gaps in order to develop knowledge of a situation or problem. This lack of resource (Jones, 2002) does not hamper them and they are able to continue to perform.

*She was very good at dealing with ambiguity which is you don’t have all the answers and there are some things you don’t know, people who can deal with ambiguity I think are mentally tough.* [Nick]
In contrast individuals who are unable to deal with ambiguity become fixated on wanting to have complete information and over analyse all the possible permutations. They require a definitive answer and expect others to provide the information. This can also manifest itself as over controlling or bouts of self-doubt; inappropriate hesitation and a lack of decision making.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to cope with ambiguity was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.4 An ability to multitask

The ability to multitask enables individual’s to cope with more than one activity. They are able to cope with many different variables including workloads and different people. One participant described it as:

*Spinning an incredible number of plates at the same time and maintain focus and priority on all the plates whilst having the end game in mind. [David]*

In contrast those individuals who are unable to focus on multiple activities risk not delivering. They can only focus on one activity at a time. In addition it was also suggested that multitasking should not be seen as a willingness to take continuous volumes of work as this could result in indecisiveness. As such the ability to multitask was linked to the ability to prioritise.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to multitask was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.5 Ability to prioritise

The ability to prioritise relates to our ability to balance urgency and importance. Individuals are able to ‘value’ issues/tasks and generate a plan of activity in order to achieve their objectives.

“It’s the urgency versus the importance. I know what’s important but recognise that I have to deal with some urgent stuff. [David]
In contrast those who are unable to prioritise appear disorganised, chaotic, lacking insight, shambolic, scatty, untidy and unstructured. They have an inability to focus on the right things and as such often don’t deliver properly what is expected.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to prioritise work was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.6 Compartmentalise

Like our ability to prioritise the ability to compartmentalise enables the business performer to ring-fence situations or emotional states and not allow one situation is affect another.

*I think you compartmentalize the distractions, saying this is a necessary detour but it’s only a detour off the main road.* [David]

In contrast those individuals that do not compartmentalise allow emotions to transcend situations; they cannot switch off their emotions and have an inability to focus as a result.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to compartmentalise work was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.7 Ability to switch off

Being too focused or over focused could result in the performer missing things as well as risking potential burn out through not switching off. As such being too focused could be a sign of mental weakness and those who are mentally tough are able to switch off when they don’t need to focus on an activity.

*I don’t do decisions at weekend.* [Pam]

This suggests that it may actually benefit the performer to take a break from things and so those who are unable to switch off are risking burn out and a degradation of performance. It doesn’t mean that they are necessarily mentally weak however there does suggest that there is
an aspect relating to the maintenance of mental toughness. In contrast those that cannot switch off have been described as wired, cannot let go, always thinking about things negatively, i.e. they are a worrier.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to switch off from work was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.3.8 Reflect on experiences

Reflecting on activities is not just a business specific activity and is one of the key attributes that sits across both sporting and business mental toughness. Reflecting on personal activities and the experiences of others in order to learn for future events:

“Reflection in business is similar to practice in sport where you trying to practice for all sorts of eventualities and so when it happens during the game, you’re ready to react whereas in business, you’ve not got the practice opportunity, what you’ve got is the preparation and reflection. [Leigh]

In contrast those that do not reflect on their experiences go about their business blindly without any review of any sort; uninterested in learning from past experiences or those of others. Blinkered.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to reflect on your experiences was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Only Bull et al., (2005) identified reflecting as a characteristic and rather than this being a way of handling pressure, Bull et al., (2005) suggest that self-reflection was aligned to sports/emotional knowledge.

4.3.4 (R = 4) Concentration and Focus (B), (G), (J), (T)

Focused individuals are single-minded and focused on the task at hand. Don’t get side tracked by internal or external pressures and adversities, when asked or there is an opportunity to do other things they refuse in order to sustain high levels of concentration on what they are doing. Maintain a perspective on what is need at all times. They can often be referred to as robotic in their actions or “an animal” when it came to focusing on task completion.
She’s just very determined and focussed about what she wanted to achieve and she doesn’t let anything get in the way of her goal and she never gives up despite what goes on around her, she just continues to focus and fixate on what she needs to do. [Nick]

In contrast individuals who are not focused often get side tracked easily and do not remain on the task at hand. They prevaricate or ditherer when making decisions. Enjoy being involved in many things and are not a completer finishers (Belbin, XXXX). They are easily distracted and have poor concentration skill. Shows poor discipline in situations requiring attention to detail and have a tendency to be distracted when faced with intellectual and demanding tasks.

An example of being able to maintain perspective was provided by David:

There’s a guy who used to work with me, in a consultancy environment everybody wanted him to be a leader, he was just so task focused, the job was going to get done on time with this guy – absolutely no distraction, no deviation, he was an animal – it was going to happen and he was a very, very tough person to work with. [David]

Leigh however challenged the current view on focus and suggested that this worked for sport but didn’t for business. His argument was focussed individuals may be too narrow in thought and lack awareness of the bigger picture and context; he preferred vision and clarity rather than focus.

I see focus as narrowing and potentially is unaware of what’s going on outside your focus. Whereas clear vision, I see it as being wider and more open so I’m not sure that mentally tough people are focused to the exclusion of other things. [Leigh]

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to concentrate on your work and remain focused was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

**4.3.4.1 Willing to disappoint**
The work environment places considerable stress on individuals to manage a number of simple and complex tasks. Often it is the build up of these tasks and the lack of time to complete them that either results in poor performance or a build up of stress. As such the ability to say ‘no’ was seen as a way of reducing pressure and ensuring focus. It was suggested by one participant that a secretary that they had observed was mentally tough and that they demonstrated their mental toughness by saying no when asked if they could handle further work.

Johnson and Johnson when they killed me and, you know, I had to take a year off from being depressed and having been on the sick etc, etc and then broken me to the extent that my memory went, why was that; it was because I had an inability to say no. Where does that come from...I didn’t want to let people down. [Cris]

Cannot say no and accept more work or pressure up until breaking point. Have an innate desire to please. Often take too much on and as a result are unable to focus on what matters.

All the participants interviewed believed that being willing to disappoint, to say no to things was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.4.2 Maintain perspective

Individuals who are able to maintain focus and concentration are in control of situations because they are able to focus on what is necessary. They are able to put things into perspective and understand what actions are necessary to succeed.

Keep an eye on the ultimate end game and not get distracted by interesting and perhaps related issues which don’t necessarily contribute to achievement of the end game. [David]

In contrast those that are unable to maintain a perspective on what is required can waste time worrying over issues they can do nothing about, lose control of the real issues at hand, lack of focus on what is necessary and ultimately lose perspective. They tend to be
unsure of what's important, seeing everything as important and unable to prioritise urgent from unimportant.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to maintain a perspective on what you are doing was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5 (R = 4) Tough Attitude (B), (G), (J), (T)

A tough attitude is demonstrated by an unshakable attitude directed towards succeeding. Mentally tough individuals are disciplined, committed, remain positive and act professionally at all times. They are not afraid of conflict and will be bold and assertive when making decisions. However when necessary they are willing to compromise.

*She’s a cold, hard bitch! But she’s a lovely person actually but she would come over as cold, hard. 50% of this job is ability and 50% is thick-skin and that sums her up quite well.* [Nick]

In contract those who do not have a tough attitude are considered weak. They are easily put off or cut corners in their approach, happy to submit to sloppy work and have low standards. They are considered weak minded, lacking in confidence, not able to stand their ground or make their point. They give in to others and fail to influence. Make situations personal and are unable to extract themselves from situations and resolve them.

All the participants interviewed believed that having a tough attitude was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. In addition a touch character was also identified in all of the five qualitative research papers (see Bull et al., 2005; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2002, 2007; Thelwell et al., 2005).

4.3.5.1 Disciplined

Those with a tough attitude are conscious that things can change and are disciplined enough to remain focused on what is needed to maintain performance levels.
So if you’re hitting business plan numbers or you’ve got the cash in the bank to pay salaries...but then the next month or the next six months or the next year don’t rest on your laurels. You’ve got to have that discipline. [Graeham]

In contrast those that lack a tough attitude have a tendency to be complacent and do not expect things to change or miss changes when they happen. They are seen as ill disciplined, easily distracted and lacking in focus.

All the participants interviewed believed that being disciplined was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.2 Commitment

Those with a tough attitude set audacious goals, rather than setting easy to achieve goals and are committed to delivering them. These can be seen as tough or even unrealistic or unachievable by others who may lack commitment, however mentally tough individuals strongly believe they can achieve them.

I think it’s commitment to the cause because of the vision so maybe we’re combining things we shouldn’t be combining right now. I’m mentally tough because I’m absolutely 100% committed to going down that route there which may be good or bad. [David]

In contrast those that lack a tough attitude and commitment set easy to achieve goals, creating a false sense of achievement by not stretching their ability or performance.

All the participants interviewed believed that being committed to the cause was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.3 Positivity

Those individuals with a tough attitude always expect to succeed and are able to see the positives in a situation and people. They remain positive when under duress and do not give into negativity.
They’re confident in their own ability and they’re confident in the achievement of the end game. I am able to deliver it and I believe its deliverable. [David]

In contrast those that lack a tough attitude are seen as pessimistic. They see only the negative in a situation or a person and expect failure. An example of positivity was provided by Cris when describing a business acquaintance:

*Lindsey...just doesn’t get anxious at all...he manages that side of it so he just sees the positives [Cris]*

This would suggest that remaining positive enables business professionals to reduce anxiety and negative thoughts.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to remain positive at all times was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.4 Professionalism

A tough attitude is also observed in those who are driven have a sense of duty or a level of professionalism that ensures that they perform to only the highest level consistently.

*Their sense of duty in and sense of responsibility in a professional situation is very strong, they are very conscious of it and are – it’s a very strong motivation but it’s not something that they’ve decided to be, it’s intrinsic. [Shane]*

Those lacking professionalism are seen to lack a sense of duty, behave irresponsibly or carelessly. They don’t recognise their responsibilities, behave in a sloppy way and are ultimately unprofessional.

All the participants interviewed believed that being professional at all times was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.5 Dispassionate (Sacrifices)
A tough attitude requires individuals to make sacrifices, in business it is suggested that this could relate to a disengagement of personal values in order to make the correct decisions for the business.

*Mentally tough people remain unemotional, process the information quickly and make a decision.* [Graeham]

As described below on area of business that is extremely stressful is redundancy, in making these decisions it is important for the individuals involved to be dispassionate in order to make the necessary sacrifices.

*So you might have personal values that I would never sack anybody who was 50 years old and got a mortgage, but when I'm in the business environment with a role that ... you hope that if you accept the role with it comes responsibility, so you need to be mentally tough in order to deliver the responsibility.* [Graeham]

In contrast those that are not able to make sacrifices can be seen as sentimental, value driven, unable to compromise or have an inability to segregate. These decisions can also be seen as ruthless or uncaring by those who may not possess all of the information.

Not the participants interviewed believed that being willing to make sacrifices was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Cris did not consider this to be a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.5.6 Not afraid of conflict

Those with a tough attitude are willing to stand up for themselves, their colleagues and their business when challenged. They don’t back down easily and will be robust in an argument when confident about the situation. Some may extend this to being ruthless however; this may be seen as a negative aspect of mental toughness.

*I think we’ve all got a ruthless streak within our characteristics, I would say her level of ruthlessness was in terms of a positive construct, she would drive to make decisions and she wasn’t afraid of conflict and she would drive the*
process hard and wasn’t fearful to ask people to do things that they wouldn’t normally do. [Nick]

Those that avoid (necessary) conflict can be seen as passive or as a conformist. They lack the ability to challenge and often shy away from decisions or responsibility.

All the participants interviewed believed that not being afraid of conflict was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.7 Assertive

Those with a tough attitude behave in an assertive way in order to ensure that other people act in a way that is expected. Assertive business people are tough in support of their point of view and have a conviction in terms of the decisions they make.

Remember that some people probably exhibit mental toughness simply because they are assertive. So I guess what I am saying is, is that some situations may not require much analysis as a determination whether they are right/wrong or present opportunity for improvement. [Shane]

In contrast those that lack a tough attitude and are not assertive are seen as submissive, they give in to others and do not press their position. They lack conviction and have an inability to influence.

All the participants interviewed believed that being assertive was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.8 Brave/Bold

Those with a tough attitude can be seen as ruthless, brave or bold in their behaviour. This is seen when they conclude issues quickly and move on. They are not willing to let issues develop and will act decisively.

Mentally tough people are willing and able to make tough decisions that impact on others. [Leigh]
In contract those who are not brave or bold procrastinate, act in a cowardly fashion and are unwilling to reach a conclusion; they let issues fester.

All the participants interviewed believed that being brave or bold was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.5.9 Willing to compromise

Mentally tough business performers are prepared to change without bending to all suggestions, they can accept that they can be wrong and their ego doesn’t get in the way of decisions, however they are prepared to take on board the views of others.

*It's being flexible without seeming to vacillate. I'm flexible because I'm open to persuasion, I’m open to analysis, I’m open to alternative views.* [David]

Those who are not flexible and open to alternative views are dogmatic. They are egotistical and often don’t want to admit that their subordinate or colleague has a better suggestion. These individuals cannot accept that they can be wrong and can appear arrogant or self-focused.

All the participants interviewed believed that being willing to compromise was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.6 *(R = 6)* Emotional Intelligence *(J), (T)*

Mentally tough business people are aware of and understanding their emotions when under pressure and are able to manage their emotions so that they do not affect their work or the work of others. They remain calm in the face of adversity and don’t allow their emotions to cloud their judgement. They are aware of other people’s situations and emotions and act accordingly.

*I don’t get upset easily [and] I can’t ever recollect losing my temper. If you have generally low emotional reactions to demanding situations that will certainly make it easier to be mentally tough.* [Cris]
In contrast those that are unable to control or understand their emotions let emotions affect the work that they do. They can become frustrated and angry when they do not get what they expect. They are emotionally unintelligent, socially unaware, often insensitive to emotions and the emotional needs of other people. Self-centred and inconsiderate they have an inability to consider or understand others’ points of view. Often disliked and distrusted.

Louise referred to using emotions to control others and cited the use of anger as a way instilling control.

*That’s part of the emotional intelligence knowing when to use it because you’re trying to control and create a situation, there’s times when you need to use anger to get things done or you need to use anger to make things clear that lines have been crossed and people are behaving inappropriately.* [Louise]

For Louise this was an acceptable way of managing others, however not everyone was in agreement and the use of emotions was also linked to a loss of control, as such it may be concluded that emotional intelligence is also about emotional control and the use of emotions to control others, as such you need to be aware of the emotions you are using and how they impact others. In addition Louise also point out that she had experience of people who were mentally tough but lacked emotional intelligence.

*You could see times when in business when someone is mentally tough but doesn’t have the greatest emotional intelligence.* [Louise]

All the participants interviewed believed that being emotionally intelligent was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.6.1 Self Awareness

Emotionally intelligent business people are aware of their own emotional capabilities, strengths and weaknesses and are able to manage in order to maintain a high level of performance (emotional control).
Anger is part of mental toughness. It's about channelling it. There are times when you need it, when you're trying to drive stuff through. But I think a mentally tough person you wouldn't necessarily know that they're angry. [Leigh]

In contrast those who are emotionally unaware have little knowledge of how to manage emotional situations; they are susceptible to emotional outbursts and very rarely are they seen as calm.

All the participants interviewed believed that being emotionally self aware was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

**4.3.6.2 Empathetic**

Emotionally intelligent individuals are sensitivity to other people's emotions and situations; they have a tacit understanding of when situations may lead others to feeling stressed or under pressure.

*So there’s a lot of emotional sensitivity in me, that’s as a strength in the sense you know, that I can often see things going on that hardly anybody else can. [Shane]*

In contract those individuals that lack empathy are insensitivity to other people's emotions or situations. They are perceived as uncaring or cold or simply lacking in any emotional intelligence.

Pam provided an example of this in her work environment, where she was able to break focus, show empathy to a colleague and then refocus on what she needed to do.

*Someone comes, I’m totally focused, don’t want to be distracted but they’re in tears so at the point I have to physically switch something over in my brain that goes OK, remember where I’m up to now, change my focus, hello, what’s the problem, sit down, big hug or whatever you’ve got to do and then have the mental strength when they’ve walked back out to forget all about that and just carry on. This ability to show empathy separates mentally tough performers from those who are simply single minded or dogmatic. [Pam]*
All the participants interviewed believed that being empathetic was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.7 (R = 6) Self Motivation (B), (G), (J)

Mentally tough business people like challenge. They like to challenge things and therefore somebody who isn’t mentally tough doesn’t challenge, doesn’t push boundaries. There is a tendency to seek out challenges and for them to be proactive in taking on responsibility.

As a mentally tough person you make the assumption that you’re motivated and spend your mental toughness motivating. [Pam]

In contract those that lack self motivation have no drive to succeed, they lack ambition avoid pressure situations and always aim for their comfort zone.

Being self motivated may also have a negative element to it in that the lack of motivation of others may be distracting or even de-motivating. As such it is not just about being self motivated but also sustaining self motivation when others are de-motivated as Pam suggests:

so quite often in a positive way, it’s a negative because you’re having to take some of your time and energy motivating others whereas you see yourself as self-motivated, you get up every morning. You are motivated therefore why can’t everyone around you be motivated because it is a given that you are motivated. [Pam]

All the participants interviewed believed that being self motivated was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.7.1 Competitive Desire

Self motivated individuals have an innate competitive drive and desire, they enjoy challenging situations as this gets the best out of them.
People who set audacious goals are more mentally tough than those who don't. [Graham]

In contrast those who lack a competitive desire are seen as not up for a challenge, take the easy option and shy away from competition. In short they do not want to win.

All the participants interviewed believed that having a competitive desire was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.7.2 Team success

Self-motivated people value other peoples input. They are driven but understand and accepting that success can require a team approach and when necessary are willing to work with others, in a team environment, in order to achieve a greater level of success.

The importance about building a team is the acceptance that you can’t do everything yourself and you’re not the sole fount of every clever thought. [Mike]

In contract those that do not value team success do not value other peoples input and act selfishly and arrogantly excluding other people’s opinions and inputs from the decision making process.

All the participants interviewed believed that having wanting to ensure that the team succeeded was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.7.3 Vision

Self-motivated individuals have an accurate vision of what it takes for them to succeed. They know where they are going and have the drive forward to not just get themselves there but others as well.

Mental toughness is about having confidence in your own abilities and having not only a vision of where you want to be but a view that you can get there. [Pam]
In contrast those that lack vision are not motivated to succeed. They may appear clueless as to what to do often lacking foresight and clarity of direction.

All the participants interviewed believed that having a clear vision of what you need to do was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.7.4 **Enjoys pressure situations**

Self motivated individuals can enjoy pressure and where there is low levels of pressure they can even seek it out as it enables them to perform. Their performance is enhanced by pressure situations, either internally or externally created.

*I was quite concerned for the amount of pressure she was under and the spotlight she was in and I was concerned that she would break under that.*  
*But* [but she loved it. [Nick]]

Individuals who do not enjoy pressure situations either succumb to pressure, experience anxiety and stress or perform badly. They have a tendency to avoid high pressure situations as a result. This can appear as though they are lazy or lacking in commitment. It was also suggest that mentally tough individuals may also look to create or seek out pressure as it enables them to perform. As Louise points some people can actually get a buzz from being under pressure:

*You look for that buzz so you actually do push things to the wire because there’s a bit of excitement.* [Louise]

All the participants interviewed believed that enjoying pressure situations was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.7.5 **Astuteness**

Self motivated individuals have an ability to accurately assess situations or people and turn this insight to their advantage.

*I mean the person who is astute and as I say astuteness is part of being mentally tough, try and make sure that they don’t make the same mistake*
twice. So you accept that you can make mistakes, what you don’t want to make is the same one two times. [Shane]

In contrast those that are not astute are unable to read or manipulate situations to their advantage. As a result they often miss opportunities; they can appear unaware or clueless of what's actually going on in front of them. If this relates to other people’s emotions then this ties in with emotional intelligence and empathy.

Not all the participants interviewed believed that being astute was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Shane did not believe that this was a characteristic.

4.3.8 \((R = 8)\) Work Ethic

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic are always working hard and being determined to get through mentally demanding situations to achieve their goals and vision. They are considered open minded and willing to try new challenges and take calculated risks; an act as an inspiration to others.

Mental toughness to me as well comes in people who aren't afraid of, “Oh I’ve not experienced this before,” or, “I’ve not dealt with this before, but I will deal with it.” [Graeham]

In contrast those that have a poor work ethic are naturally lazy, unmotivated. They do not push themselves and are not goal oriented. Generally unwilling to take risks, they stay safe and have little positive influence on others.

All the participants interviewed believed that having a good work ethic was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.8.1 Determination

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic have a drive and tenacity to get the job done. They are persistent and maintain a pace that enables and sustains performance.
Why am I mentally tough, because I just have this drive within me that says I’m not giving in? I’m not sure how the odds are against me but forget them, you know, I’m not giving in, I’m going to deliver. [Cris]

In contrast those who are not determined lack the drive and tenacity to get the job done, they give up or put insufficient energy into their work. It doesn’t take much to knock them off course or change their view and they will find reasons not to do things.

All the participants interviewed believed that having determination was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.8.2 Perseverance

Those individuals who persistent and maintain a pace that enables and sustains performance. The ability to persevere when faced with adversities and challenges both on and off the field to achieve your goals.

It’s that primeval drive that gives you that edge sometimes [Claire]

In contrast those who lack perseverance have a tendency to give up, lacks drive and ambition. Easily put off. Doesn’t go the distance.

All the participants interviewed believed that having perseverance was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.8.3 Goal oriented

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic have clearly established goals that focus attention and drive their performance.

Objectives can allow the mental toughness to flourish. Like I believe right now I am lacking a goal and so I’m kind of... coasting [Cris]

In contrast those who lack a goal oriented approach appear to lack direction, may be coasting or lacking energy.
All the participants interviewed believed that being goal oriented was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.8.4 Preparedness

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic have a structured way they go about their work. They do so in a logical and planned way so that they are prepared for all eventualities rather than just getting to an answer. Individuals know the subject area or activity incredibly well and it is easy for them to respond to challenges.

That’s about the preparation, preparing yourself to take advantage of the opportunities as they come across your desk. [Leigh]

In contrast those who are not prepared generally shown very little pre-thought are seen to be ‘winging it’ or ‘blagging it’ are not ready or responsive to changes and have a poor work ethic. Are unable to respond to challenges and perform poorly due to an inability to react to situations, questions or changes.

Cris provided an example of how he prepares for job interviews and how this helps him cope with the stress and pressure of these events.

For an interview I prepare 3 classic questions and then a handful of others and go in feeling confident that I can handle 80% and just wing the rest. It’s the preparation that’s given me the mental toughness. [Cris]

Not all of the participants interviewed believed that being prepared was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Shane did not think this was a characteristic.

4.3.8.5 Time management

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic are able to manage their time efficiently to balance the many demands associated with business in order to get the very best out of themselves.
So you’ve got an issue or you’ve got a problem – whatever – you know you’ve got to deal with it or you’ve got to put that over there and deal with it later or whatever, but that ability to not get swamped with it. [Graeham]

In contrast those who have poor time management get swamped, are unstructured in their approach to work and are unable to prioritise and multitask effectively.

All the participants interviewed believed that having good time management was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.8.6 Positively influence others/Inspirational

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic are able to positively influence the performance of others (colleagues) though their behaviour, attitude and performance.

I think the strength of her own mental state and position on it gave confidence to other people. Confidence to the people she was working with and to people she was working for. [Nick]

In contrast those who have a negative influence on other are uninspiring. Are unable to positively influence others and affect their performance; can be seen as selfish, intimidating or are a bad influence.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to positively influence others was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.8.7 Prepared to take risks

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic are prepared to risk their reputation and take [educated] risks in order to progress.

“If you are running a business you can’t run it without taking risks. Mentally tough people will take risks. [Mike]
In contrast those unwilling to take risks have a reputation for taking the safe or the soft option. However it was also suggested that there are individuals who are mentally tough and are not risk takers. They are able to manage risk and as such they don’t necessarily see any risk in their decisions. This may be linked to confidence in their knowledge or ability.

*I know somebody who is risk averse but is mentally tough in their job, delivers all the time and is incredibly well thought of in their IT project management role. They manage risk on a project role very well but don’t take risks themselves. [Cris]*

All the participants interviewed believed that being willing to take risks was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

**4.3.8.8 Analytical**

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic have an analytical approach to their work. They have a desire to understand how things work and look for empirical evidence before making judgements.

*If you’ve never done any analysis, you’ve never done any research, you actually don’t know what you are trying to do. [Mike]*

In contract those that lack an analytical approach ‘don’t do detail’. May lack clarity of thought and often go with gut feel when making decisions as they lack the ability to, or are unwillingness to, use facts/figures. Take very little notice of data and may be not be numerate. They are not prepared to spend time analysing situations simply ‘fly by the seat of their pants’.

All the participants interviewed believed that being analytical was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

**4.3.8.9 Pragmatic perfectionist**

Those individuals who have a strong work ethic are not perfectionists but do not settling for anything less than is expected but do not over deliver.
A pragmatic perfectionist which I am now understands what standards are required, won’t settle for less but doesn’t necessarily over specify when he doesn’t need to. [Cris]

In contrast those who are not pragmatic perfectionists can have a tendency to over deliver when not necessary and expect higher standards than necessary from others. Alternatively they can be slapdash or lack the ability to complete tasks.

All the participants interviewed believed that being a pragmatic perfectionist was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.9 (R = 9) Personal Values (B), (G)

Mentally tough business people place great importance on personal values relevant to becoming a better person and colleague. Always accountable, having pride in their work, they take an honest approach to doing the right thing. Modest and respectful they are considered and considerate of others.

They have a self-assuredness based on logic about what they’re doing; the rightness of what they’re doing. And some of that in determining if a situation is right or wrong, and if a situation is … what they’re doing, what their position on it and their ability to make a judgement, the concept of decency probably is a component in that. [Shane]

In contrast those that have poor personal values demonstrate low integrity and unreliable. Take very little pride in your work and act without a care for others feelings or situations.

One of the participants was not sure about this characteristic and didn’t believe being a ‘good person’ was part of mental toughness. However they suggested that poor personal values would manifest itself as inconsistence and not true to oneself, selfish rather than selfless outlook, and absence of a sense of duty. Excessively self-centred and guided by personal point of view and aims. Limited or insufficient consideration of needs of organisation, teams or other individuals, always blaming someone else; not taking accountability for actions.
All the participants interviewed believed that having appropriate personal values was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.9.1 *Honest self appraisal*

Mentally tough business people take an honest and pragmatic stance when appraising their own strengths and weaknesses, performances and decisions.

> there’s a massive amount of self-awareness within mental toughness so you’ve got to know when you’ve made your mistakes and how best to handle those mistakes whether you do admit to somebody or not. [Cris]

In contrast they can be seen as narcissistic, over confident, don’t self appraise and have a deluded view of themselves. Cris provided an example of this in him when describing his aversion to perfectionism and the fact that he was aware and honest with himself that this can be a problem

> Beware of your strengths, they may be your weaknesses as well. And that is, perfectionism is a strength for me, but it’s a weakness and I am now so self aware I am aware of it and I control it. [Cris]

Cris also provided another example where he had to reflect and be honest with himself and the business he was working for and suggest that role that he was promoted into was not for him:

> It happened to me, I was given a promotion into a totally alien part of the business and airline management responsibility and a promotion in terms of responsibility, after 9 months I had to go back and say “this is too much”. I think I was mentally tough enough to go and wave the white flag. [Cris]

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to make an honest self appraisal was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.9.2 *Pride in performance*
Mentally tough business people have a personal pride in the work that they complete and the way in which they go about completing their work.

*The quality of my work is excellent which is driven by my [focus on] perfection.*

[Cris]

In contrast those that lack pride in the work can be seen to be sloppy, a couldn’t care less attitude, lacing in interest and a lack of ownership to their work.

All the participants interviewed believed that having pride in your work was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.9.3 Accountable

Mentally tough business people are willing to take responsibility for their actions and what needs to be done. They are prepared to defend their position and their reputation when challenged.

*Alan Sugar went to Court against Stella English because he was mentally tough and he was prepared to do it [risk his reputation]. [Mike]*

In contract those that are not accountable are not willing to take responsibility for what needs to be done. Are unwilling to take risks and do not make decisions that contain a risk. Will look to shift the blame if things go wrong and again demonstrate a lack of ownership.

All the participants interviewed believed that being accountable was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

### 4.3.9.4 Considered

Mentally tough business people are considered, they think things through in an prescribed order to understand the possible inputs, constraints and outputs. Have a habit of examining situations rather than simply trying to deal with them immediately. They don’t jump in and don’t become frustrated with others.
They will react to the stimulus without thought, so they react very quickly, very kind of innately without having thought things through, without having considered options, without having thought through consequences. [Cris]

In contrast those who are not considered are impulsive, apply little thought to what they do, they engage their emotions first rather than their brain.

All the participants interviewed believed that being considered was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.9.5 Considerate

Mentally tough business people understanding that the decisions they take affect other people and this is taken into consideration when decisions are made and actions taken.

I genuinely care about my staff and every decision I make I think about them, but there will be people out there that would sooner sack somebody than worry about them. [Mike]

In contrast to considerate individuals are oblivious to others or simply do not care. They are inconsiderate, have a ‘sod it’ mentality. They are cynical they don’t see that what they are doing has any affect on anybody else.

Leigh suggested that some performers may well appear to be successful but may come across as ruthless or succeed at the expense of others. They lack a consideration for others may be due to ignorance to the situation and as such they are unable to consider the implications of their actions.

I’m just wondering whether there are successful people in business because they don’t appreciate the impact of their decisions and behaviours have on people but they’re personally successful and their business is successful. [Leigh]

All the participants interviewed believed that being considerate to others was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.
4.3.9.6 Modest and respectful

Mentally tough business people show a level of humility. They care about more than just themselves.

You can come across as a person who is highly confident but yet show humility about what it is that you are doing whereas you can also come across as someone who’s highly confident in what they are doing and not give a shit – that’s where the arrogant bit comes in, you don’t really care what happens so long as you achieve what you need to achieve. [Nick]

In contrast those who are not modest are arrogant, uncaring, and disrespectful. Get defensive when criticised; care only for themselves or how others think.

Not all of the participants interviewed believed that being respectful and modest was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Cris did not believe it was a characteristic.

4.3.10(R = 10) Ability to lead others

The findings from the study had one key departure from the high level characteristics suggested by Gucciardi et al. (2008) and this was the implication of mental toughness on leadership. Many people are promoted to lead others due to their ability to perform tasks and the decisions they take. As such it has been suggested that mentally tough business people are also strong leaders. This does not suggest that all leaders are mentally tough, however what it does suggest is that those who are making decisions are generally in a leadership role, whether that is at a director level or within an operational function.

Mentally tough business people have the ability to get other people to do things for them.

it’s not just mental toughness in controlling myself its, and what goes on inside me and what I do but it’s a mental toughness in, applied to getting other people to do things and to get the results you need out of other people. And that isn’t about you managing yourself, it is about you managing other people. [Cris]
In contrast those who are unable to lead others can be described as preferring a specialist role, working on their own. An alternative to this would be a bully or a dictator. They have a limited ability to deduce required strategic and operational needs; are ineffective at leading & managing people and failing to take people/teams 'with them.

All the participants interviewed believed that the ability to lead others was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.10.1 Consensual

It was suggested that mentally tough business people have an understanding and acceptance that other people have an opinion and may have a better solution or direction. They do not feeling inferior to others when they provide better answers and as such are able to lead others effectively without appearing to bully or dictate.

*It's being flexible without seeming to vacillate. What I mean by that is I'm flexible because I open to persuasion, I'm open to analysis, I'm open to alternative views but they'd better be good.* [David]

In contrast those who are not consensual are ego-centric, self-centred and irresponsible. They ignore other people’s opinions and focus only on their own ideas and objectives. They are often scared of asking other’s opinion, because it might be better and denting their ego or seeing this as a sign of weakness.

However it was also suggested that at times mentally tough people do need to take the lead and responsibility, as Pam suggests:

*The focus of mental toughness is not when you’re part of a team but when you’re leading a team, when you’re isolated, that’s the ultimate mental toughness. You’re making the decision, the buck stops with you.* [Pam]

All the participants interviewed believed that being consensual was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.10.2 Manage upwards
One of the key business challenges that were highlighted in the focus groups was the ability to manage upwards and control the demands and expectations of superiors and when necessary says no to these demands.

I didn’t have managing upwards, that’s what I didn’t have which was, that, in effect that’s my way of saying what my dad was saying about being able to say no. I didn’t know how to manage upwards. [Cris]

In contrast those who cannot manage upwards are seen as ‘yes men’ or unassertive. They don’t know how to say no and have difficulty interacting and managing the demands of their bosses. This can be linked to a lack of self belief in their abilities.

All the participants interviewed believed that being able to manage upwards was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person.

4.3.11(R = 11) Business Intelligence

Gucciardi et al. (2008) cited sports intelligence as a major characteristic of mentally tough footballers; however as sporting intelligence has no direct relevance to business the author augmented this to reflect business intelligence which was suggested by a number of the participants in the study. Business Intelligence reflects a level of expertise and knowledge within a general or specific business area that can provide a level of confidence when performance relates to this area.

he just reads something once and he knows it, that is just a benefit, I don’t think that necessarily mental toughness but it just helps. [Cris]

In contrast this has been described as being business naïve. Having limited knowledge or background in the business or working situation and consequently poor ability to use knowledge as an operational, strategic or management tool / resource., Failing to have a business/commercial awareness, and how one action impacts other areas of the business/environment/stakeholders.
Not all the participants interviewed believed that having business intelligence was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Nick didn’t believe that business intelligence was important.

4.3.11.1 Team player

Understanding and accepting that there is a team role to play and working with others within the team environment.

*To be mentally tough you also have to be a team player, you have to be slightly consensual.* [Mike]

In contrast this would describe someone who is happier to operate alone, perhaps selfish in nature, a prima donna or diva. Inability to operate as part of a team.

Not all the participants interviewed believed that being a team player was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Nick didn’t think it was a characteristic.

4.3.11.2 Understand the game

Within business ‘the game’ is referred to when describing office politics and the way in which people are able to succeed and progress. Individuals who can ‘understand the game’ are aware of the tacit rules of corporate life and are able to operate within them or manipulate them to succeed.

*Mental toughness is just another word for emotional intelligence – just being able to manage the politics, manage the people side, manage the emotions you go through in a business and hence you get to rise to the top in your area...because you do that better.* [Cris]

In contrast those who cannot understand the game are oblivious to its existence, are considered non political, naive, inexperienced or blinkered.

Not all the participants interviewed believed that understanding the game was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Nick didn’t think it was a characteristic.
4.3.11.3  **Intuitive**

Those who are mentally tough and able to lead others have the ability to understand complex business situations quickly and are able to make the right decisions.

*Being perceptive and intuitive, those were some words I threw in and for me, that’s about being aware the radar’s out there, I’m aware of all these things but I’m still focused on my goal and I’ll let those influence, if I can work out if they’re appropriate, if I’m given good reason but I’m still heading over there.* [Clare]

In contrast those that lack intuition may simply be described as lacking intuition, ignorant or unable to understand business situations. Another contrast that was suggested was that of a reflector, which has also been described as a positive characteristic of mental toughness. This may be an example of a contextual characteristic where, depending upon the situation, the requirement is to either reflect or act on intuition.

Not all the participants interviewed believed that being intuitive was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Nick and Shane didn’t think it was a characteristic. This was the only characteristic that had two people suggest it was not appropriate.

4.3.11.4  **Socially aware**

Mentally tough business people know how to behave in social situations and understand the implications of their actions on society and their benefits to them within business.

*Where you have a stressful situation that maybe a consequence of personal interaction, so it’s a human relationship thing, a lot of the rules that will apply then are learned, because they’re social characteristics.* [Alison]

Are unable to perform in social situations and do not understand social interactions, behaviour can appear awkward, lacking in social or simply they are not able to act or play the part. This is linked very closely to playing the game.
Leigh went further to suggest that there was an element of social awareness that separated business mental toughness from its sporting counterpart in terms of the affect on others. Leigh suggests that those who may be perceived as mentally tough but negatively influence others are not mentally tough but something else. What that is not yet know; or it is simply they are mentally weak in that context.

Those who made decisions that impacted negatively on others, they’re [not] mentally tough, they’re something else and does mental toughness encompass some sort of social awareness and is that the difference between mental toughness in business and mental toughness in sport. In sport, it’s win/lose and in business it doesn’t have to be win/lose. [Leigh]

Leigh went further to suggest that individuals should balance out their personal needs with those of a wider audience and perhaps this ‘balanced’ approach is what is needed to be mentally tough as opposed to simply tough.

So to be mentally tough, you feel both sides of the scales full of the positives and negatives of the decision but you still make the decision. It’s about making a decision, putting as much as you can in both pots of the balance and see where it comes out. [Leigh]

Not all the participants interviewed believed that being socially aware was a characteristic of a mentally tough business person. Nick didn’t think it was a characteristic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Resilient</td>
<td>Ability to bounce back from a disappointment or an overwhelming event often stronger and better as they have learned from them. Keep on going when others would give up, don’t take criticism negatively but see it as a way of adapting to the situation.</td>
<td>It’s an ability to overcome hurdles and overcome difficulties or setbacks that for me is an important part of toughness. [Clare]</td>
<td>Fragile mindset characterised by the inability to adapt to pressure, being easily broken and not putting up a fight in the face of adversity. Not able to come back from setbacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Learn from mistakes</td>
<td>See mistakes as a stepping-stone to success and a way of learning.</td>
<td>When you’re trying to change things the one thing you can be sure of is that you will make mistakes and making mistakes is not a bad thing, it’s how you respond to them which make it good or bad. [Nick]</td>
<td>Are fearful of mistakes and seek not to do anything that may result in a mistake. Often don’t make decisions for fear of being wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>Respond positively to criticism</td>
<td>Doesn’t respond negatively to criticism. Has the ability to externalise themselves from the situation and see the issues rather than make them personal.</td>
<td>She’s able to disassociate herself from the situation and not take it personally [Nick]</td>
<td>Make situations and criticism personal. Unable to extract themselves from situations and resolve them. Become bogged down by the negative aspects of the criticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Ability to adjust ones approach when faced with different situations.</td>
<td>They don’t just stick to plan A, they’ll try all the different avenue…If I’m not going to get there I’ll go somewhere else; I’m not giving in. [Cris]</td>
<td>Inflexible, they remain on the same path or activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d</td>
<td>Cope with success</td>
<td>Being able to cope with the pressure that comes with success and recognition and not becoming sidetracked or over confident.</td>
<td>It’s about being able to cope or bounce back through the negative times but because of all the work we do with entrepreneurs, the coping is actually on both sides. [Also] the success, not letting the success get out of control. [Louise]</td>
<td>Big headed, unbearable confidence, over confidence, prone to mistakes, easily distracted and not having their feet-on-the-ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self Belief</td>
<td>Self assured of their ability to perform to the necessary level when under pressure through explicit knowledge of their technical and cognitive capabilities. Confident they can overcome any challenge they may face. Able to act independently or as part of a team.</td>
<td>“My friend Lindsey, who I think of as the ultimately mentally tough person, is just always, always, always in control. He’s got the confidence, the knowledge, the skills, the self-belief…everything…that he just feels in control all the time.” [Cris]</td>
<td>Doubt their own ability to perform tasks and have a general appearance to others that demonstrates a lack of self belief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Self Assured</td>
<td>Understand your own capability and have total confidence about the legitimacy of your ability to succeed.</td>
<td>It’s belief in myself as well and believing in your decision, you don’t always make the right decision at a particular time but you stand by it and believe in it and get on with it and that’s the strength, isn’t it? [Pam]</td>
<td>Blind confidence or arrogance. Personal views or egos cloud the decision making process and they believe they are better than they are or their decision is correct when it is not.</td>
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</table>
Table 4.5: Business mental toughness characteristics and their contrasts with representative quotes.

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<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Self Belief (Direction)</td>
<td>The explicit belief that the direction being taken is correct and that will succeed.</td>
<td>You have to believe in what you are doing is right...there is no point believing that your idea for your business is brilliant if it's actually built on sand and is totally stupid. [Mike]</td>
<td>Directional doubt in that the direction being taken is not right and is unlikely to succeed. This affects other people's confidence in the direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>Technically strength</td>
<td>Have the knowledge and the experience of whatever the situation you're dealing with. Linked to specific subject matter or business scenarios.</td>
<td>I think it helps the mental toughness because it gives you the knowledge, the framework, the technical basis to not self-doubt. [Graeham]</td>
<td>Lack experience and knowledge of a situation which results in self doubt and a lack of confidence within others. Can act like a 'loose cannon'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d</td>
<td>Act independently</td>
<td>Know when to get on with it and don't need to be directed. Have the confidence to act independently or as part of a team when necessary.</td>
<td>But that's the joy of being mentally tough...you have to have the confidence to act independently. [Pam]</td>
<td>Are unable to act on their own. Require constant direction and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2e</td>
<td>Appear relaxed</td>
<td>Mentally tough people appear to be relaxed (even if inside they are not) as a result of their confidence in their ability.</td>
<td>Mentally tough people look relaxed whether they are inside...I think you're mentally tough but I'm not sure you're always relaxed. [Leigh]</td>
<td>Appear uncomfortable about situations as a result of a lack of confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Handling Pressure</td>
<td>Keep things in perspective and are able to see the big picture as well as the detail. Do not succumb to either acute or chronic pressure.</td>
<td>You have to keep reality in context so it is very easy...to lose perception of reality. You can blow things completely out of scale or context or you can find yourself in a complete paradox. It's Woodward's adage -- you play out all the little scenarios and permutations that you can think of and work out solutions and answers to them. [Nick]</td>
<td>Unstable. Lack of clarity or vision. Poor perception on reality, often considered dreamers. Are not able to keep things in perspective and have a tendency to blow things out of proportion and succumb to pressure or performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>Override negative thoughts</td>
<td>The ability to override and block out negative thoughts and self-doubts concerning your mental and physical state.</td>
<td>Someone who is going to cope or copes better, has an internal voice which says 'actually, we can do this' or 'actually, I'm going to do this and I'm going to do it well' and that plays out in their behaviour, their language and their performance. [Alison]</td>
<td>Let negative thoughts 'run riot' in their minds which severely impedes progress. They are weak minded, can become overwhelmed by negative thoughts. They suffer from self-doubt are prone to inappropriate hesitation and are unable to make decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>Decisive. The ability to make the right decisions quickly and consistently.</td>
<td>Some people go through life and business and never, ever make a decision and that's mentally weak. I think the ability to make a decision does demonstrate toughness. [Alison]</td>
<td>Procrastinate. Ignorant. Are unable to perceive a problem or understand it and therefore cannot make the correct decision in a consistent timely fashion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3c</td>
<td>Can deal with ambiguity</td>
<td>Are comfortable with a lack of information and have an ability to fill in the gaps in order to develop knowledge of a situation or problem.</td>
<td>she was very good at dealing with ambiguity which is you don’t have all the answers and there are some things you don’t know, people who can deal with ambiguity I think are mentally tough [Nick]</td>
<td>Fixated on having complete data and analysing all the possible permutations. Required a definitive answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3d</td>
<td>Ability to multitask</td>
<td>Able to cope with many different variables including workloads and different people.</td>
<td>Spinning an incredible number of plates at the same time and maintain focus and priority on all the plates whilst having the end game in mind. [David]</td>
<td>Unable to focus on multiple activities and deliver. Can only focus on activity at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3e</td>
<td>Ability to prioritise</td>
<td>The ability to prioritise relates to focus and whether to break it or not; empathy in terms of ‘valuing’ issues/tasks; and supports multi-tasking in terms of generating a list of actions/activities to complete within the individuals ‘focus’.</td>
<td>It’s the urgency versus the importance. I know what’s important but recognise that I have to deal with some urgent stuff. [David]</td>
<td>Disorganised and chaotic which manifests itself in people who don’t deliver properly; they risk not delivering on the big ticket item through a lack of prioritisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3f</td>
<td>Compartmentalise</td>
<td>Ability to ring-fence situations or emotional states and not allow one situation is affect another.</td>
<td>I think you compartmentalize the distractions, saying this is a necessary detour but it’s only a detour off the main road. [David]</td>
<td>Allow emotions to transcend situations; they cannot switch off their emotions and have an inability to focus as a result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3g</td>
<td>Ability to switch off</td>
<td>Being too focused or over focused could result in the performer missing things as well as risking potential burn out through not switching off. Those who are mentally tough are able to switch off when they don’t need to focus on an activity.</td>
<td>I don’t do decisions at weekends. [Fam]</td>
<td>Cannot switch off, are always wired, cannot let go, always thinking about things negatively, i.e. they are a worrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3h</td>
<td>Reflect on experiences</td>
<td>Reflecting on personal activities and the experiences of others in order to learn for future events.</td>
<td>Reflection in business is similar to practice in sport where you trying to practice for all sorts of eventualities and so when it happens during the game, you’re ready to react whereas in business, you’ve not got the practice opportunity, what you’ve got is the preparation and reflection. [Leigh]</td>
<td>Do not reflect on their experiences and go about their business blindly without any review of any sort; uninterested in learning from past experiences or those of others. Blinkered.</td>
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### Table 4.5: Business mental toughness characteristics and their contrasts with representative quotes.

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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Focused</td>
<td>Single-minded and focused on the task at hand. Don’t get side tracked by internal or external pressures and adversities, when asked or there is an opportunity to do other things they refuse in order to sustain high levels of concentration on what they are doing. Maintain a perspective on what is need at all times.</td>
<td>She’s just very determined and focussed about what she wanted to achieve and she doesn’t let anything get in the way of her goal and she never gives up despite what goes on around her, she just continues to focus and fixate on what she needs to do. [Nick]</td>
<td>Individuals often get side tracked easily and do not remain on the task at hand. Are unable to sustain concentration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>Willing to disappoint</td>
<td>A clear willingness to say no, they don’t take on everything. They know their boundaries and work within them. They are willing to let people down</td>
<td>I had to take a year off from being depressed and having been on the sick etc, etc and then broken me to the extent that my memory went, why was that; it was because I had an inability to say no. Where does that come from...I didn’t want to let people down. [Cris]</td>
<td>Cannot say no and accept more work or pressure up until breaking point. Have an innate desire to please. Often take too much on and as a result are unable to focus on what matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>Maintain perspective</td>
<td>Are in control of situations because they are able to focus on what is necessary. Are able to put things into perspective.</td>
<td>Keep an eye on the ultimate end game and not get distracted by interesting and perhaps related issues which don’t necessarily contribute to achievement of the end game. [David]</td>
<td>Waste time worrying over issues they can do nothing about and lose control of the real issues at hand. Lack of focus on what is necessary and lose perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tough Attitude</td>
<td>An unshakable attitude directed towards succeeding. Individuals are disciplined, committed, remain positive and act professionally at all times. They are not afraid of conflict and will be bold and assertive when making decisions. However when necessary they are willing to compromise.</td>
<td>She’s a cold, hard bitch! But she’s a lovely person actually but she would come over as cold, hard. 50% of this job is ability and 50% is thick-skin and that sums her up quite well. [Nick]</td>
<td>Considered weak minded, easily put off or cut corners in their approach, happy to submit to sloppy work and have low standards. They lack confidence, are not able to stand their ground or make their point. They give in to others easily and fail to influence. Make situations personal and are unable to extract themselves from situations and resolve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Disciplined</td>
<td>Conscious that things can change and disciplined to remain focused on what is needed to maintain performance levels.</td>
<td>So if you’re hitting business plan numbers or you’ve got the cash in the bank to pay salaries...but then the next month or the next six months or the next year don’t rest on your laurels. You’ve got to have that discipline. [Graeham]</td>
<td>Tendency to be complacent, not expecting things to change or miss changes when they happen. They are seen as ill disciplined, easily distracted and lacking in focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Characteristic</td>
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<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Setting yourself apart from the rest, setting challenging goals. Rather than</td>
<td>I think it’s commitment to the cause because of the vision so maybe we’re combining things we shouldn’t be combining right now. I’m mentally tough because I’m absolutely 100% committed to going down that route there which may be good or bad. [David]</td>
<td>Set easy to achieve goals and create a false sense of achievement by not stretching their ability or performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5c</td>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>Expect success and see the positives in a situation and people.</td>
<td>Lindsey...just doesn’t get anxious at all...he manages that side of it so he just sees the positives [Cris]</td>
<td>Pessimistic. See the negative in a situation or a person and expect failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5d</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Driven. Sense of duty. Have a level of professionalism that ensures that they</td>
<td>Their sense of duty in and sense of responsibility in a professional situation is very strong, they are very conscious of it...it’s a very strong motivation but it’s not something that they’ve decided to be, it’s intrinsic. [Shane]</td>
<td>Lack a sense of duty. Irresponsible. Careless. Don’t recognise their responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5e</td>
<td>Dispassionate</td>
<td>Disengage personal values in order to make the correct decisions for the business.</td>
<td>Mentally tough people remain unemotional, process the information quickly and make a decision. [Graeham]</td>
<td>Those that are not able to make sacrifices can be seen as sentimental, value driven, unable to compromise or have an inability to segregate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5f</td>
<td>Not afraid of conflict</td>
<td>Willing to stand up for themselves, their colleagues and their business when challenged. Don’t back down easily and will be robust in an argument when confident about the situation.</td>
<td>I think we’ve all got a ruthless streak within our characteristics. I would say her level of ruthlessness was in terms of a positive construct, she would drive to make decisions and she wasn’t afraid of conflict and she would drive the process hard and wasn’t fearful to ask people to do things that they wouldn’t normally do. [Nick]</td>
<td>Avoid (necessary) conflict, can be seen as passive or as a conformist. They lack the ability to challenge and often shy away from decisions or responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5g</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Ability to ensure that other people act in a way that is expected. Being tough in support of your point of view and a conviction in terms of the decision.</td>
<td>Remember that some people probably exhibit mental toughness simply because they are assertive. So I guess what I am saying is, is that some situations may not require much analysis as a determination whether they are right/wrong or present opportunity for improvement. [Shane]</td>
<td>Submissive. Give in to others and do not press their position. Lack conviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5h</td>
<td>Brave/Bold</td>
<td>Willingness to conclude issues quickly and move on. Not willing to let issues develop. Can be seen as ruthless, brave or bold.</td>
<td>Mentally tough people are willing and able to make tough decisions that impact on others. [Leigh]</td>
<td>Procrastinate. Cowardly. Unwilling to reach a conclusion and will let issues fester.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>5i</td>
<td>Willing to compromise</td>
<td>Prepared to accept that they can be wrong. Their ego doesn’t get in the way</td>
<td>It’s being flexible without seeming to vacillate. I’m flexible because I’m open to persuasion, I’m open to analysis, I’m open to alternative views. [David]onsense of decisions.</td>
<td>Egotistical. Don’t want to admit that your subordinate’s got a better suggestion than you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Are aware of and understanding your emotions when under pressure. Are able to</td>
<td>I don’t get upset easily [and] I can’t ever recollect losing my temper. If you have generally low emotional reactions to demanding situations that will certainly make it easier to be mentally tough. [Cris]</td>
<td>Are unable to manage or control their own emotions and as a result their emotions affect their work and that of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
<td>An awareness of one’s own emotional capabilities, strengths and weaknesses and</td>
<td>Anger is part of mental toughness. It’s about channelling it. There are times when you need it, when you’re trying to drive stuff through. But I think a mentally tough person you wouldn’t necessarily know that they’re angry. [Leigh]</td>
<td>Emotionally unaware have little knowledge of how to manage emotional situations; they are susceptible to emotional outbursts and very rarely are they seen as calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>Empathy. Sensitivity to other people’s emotions and situations, a tacit understanding</td>
<td>So there’s a lot of emotional sensitivity in me, that’s as a strength in the sense you know, that I can often see things going on that hardly anybody else can. [Shane]</td>
<td>Lack of empathy. Insensitivity to other people’s emotions or situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Self Motivated</td>
<td>Are challenged internally to achieve levels of performance.</td>
<td>As a mentally tough person you make the assumption that you’re motivated and spend your mental toughness motivating others. [Pam]</td>
<td>Lack self motivation, have no drive to succeed, they lack ambition avoid pressure situations and always aim for their comfort zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7a</td>
<td>Competitive Desire</td>
<td>Have an innate competitive drive and desire, they enjoy challenging situations</td>
<td>Business mental toughness is presumably driven by teams or individuals who want to win. [Graham]</td>
<td>Lack a competitive desire, are seen as not up for a challenge, take the easy option and shy away from competition. In short they do not want to win.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>Team Success</td>
<td>Value other peoples input. Understanding and accepting that success requires a</td>
<td>The importance about building a team is the acceptance that you can’t do everything yourself and you’re not the sole fount of every clever thought. [Mike]</td>
<td>Do not value other peoples input and are not willing to work with others and excluding other people’s opinions and inputs from the decision making process or activity.</td>
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<td>Rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>7c</td>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Have an accurate vision of what it takes for them to succeed. They know where they are going and have the drive forward to not just get themselves there but others as well.</td>
<td>Mental toughness is about having confidence in your own abilities and having not only a vision of where you want to be but a view that you can get there. [Pam]</td>
<td>Lack vision are not motivated to succeed. They may appear clueless as to what to do often lacking foresight and clarity of direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7d</td>
<td>Enjoys pressure</td>
<td>Enjoy pressure and seek it out as it enables them to perform. Their performance is enhanced by pressure situations, either internally or externally created.</td>
<td>I was quite concerned for the amount of pressure she was under and the spotlight she was in and I was concerned that she would break under that. [But] she loved it. [Nick]</td>
<td>Succumb to pressure, experience anxiety and stress or perform badly. Tendency to avoid high pressure situations as a result. Can appear as though they are lazy or lacking in commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7e</td>
<td>Astuteness</td>
<td>Having or showing the ability to accurately assess situations or people and turn this to their advantage.</td>
<td>I mean the person who is astute and as I say astuteness is part of being mentally tough, try and make sure that they don’t make the same mistake twice. So you accept that you can make mistakes, what you don’t want to make is the same one two times. [Shane]</td>
<td>Lacking the ability to read situations of people and as a result no seeing opportunities to enhance performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>Always working hard and being determined to get through mentally demanding situations to achieve their goals and vision. Open minded and willing to try new challenges and take calculated risks. An inspiration to others.</td>
<td>Mental toughness to me as well comes in people who aren’t afraid of, “Oh I’ve not experienced this before,” or, “I’ve not dealt with this before, but I will deal with it.” [Graeham]</td>
<td>Lazy, unmotivated. Do not push themselves and are not goal oriented. Unwilling to take risks and have a negative influence on others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>They have vision of where they want to get to and have a drive and tenacity to get the job done. They are persistent and maintain a pace that enables performance.</td>
<td>Why am I mentally tough, because I just have this drive within me that says I’m not giving in? I’m not sure how the odds are against me but forget them, you know, I’m not giving in, I’m going to deliver. [Cris]</td>
<td>Lack the drive and tenacity to get the job done, give up or put insufficient energy into their work. It doesn’t take much to knock them off course or change their view and they will find reasons not to do things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>The ability to persevere when faced with adversities and challenges both on and off the field to achieve your goals.</td>
<td>It’s that primeval drive that gives you that edge sometimes [Claire]</td>
<td>Has a tendency to give up, lacks drive and ambition. Easily put off. Doesn’t go the distance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8c</td>
<td>Goal oriented</td>
<td>Have clearly established goals that focus attention and drive performance</td>
<td>Objectives can allow the mental toughness to flourish. Like I believe right now I am lacking a goal and so I’m kind of... coasting [Cris]</td>
<td>Lack clearly defined goals and any lack direction. Tend to coast.</td>
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<td>Rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>8d</td>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>Structured about the way they go about their work, do it in a logical and planned way rather than just getting to an answer. Individuals know the subject area or activity incredibly well and it is easy for them to respond to challenges.</td>
<td>That’s about the preparation, preparing yourself to take advantage of the opportunities as they come across your desk. [Leigh]</td>
<td>Are seen to be ‘winging it’ or ‘blagging it’ are not ready or responsive to changes and have a poor work ethic. Unable to respond to challenges and perform poorly due to an inability to react to situations, questions or changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8e</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Managing time efficiently to balance the many demands associated with business in order to get the very best out of yourself.</td>
<td>So you’ve got an issue or you’ve got a problem – whatever – you know you’ve got to deal with it or you’ve got to put that over there and deal with it later or whatever, but that ability to not get swamped with it. [Graeham]</td>
<td>Have poor time management get swamped, are unstructured in their approach to work and are unable to prioritise or multitask effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8f</td>
<td>Positively influence others</td>
<td>Are able to positively influence the performance of others (colleagues) though their behaviour, attitude and performance.</td>
<td>I think the strength of her own mental state and position on it gave confidence to other people. Confidence to the people she was working with and to people she was working for. [Nick]</td>
<td>Have a negative influence on other are uninspiring. Are unable to positively influence others and affect their performance. Can be seen as selfish, intimidating or are a bad influence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8g</td>
<td>Prepared to take risks</td>
<td>Are prepared to risk their reputation and take risks in order to progress.</td>
<td>If you are running a business you can’t run it without taking risks. Mentally tough people will take risks. [Mike]</td>
<td>Are unwilling to take risks and have a reputation for taking the safe option.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8h</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Have an analytical approach to their work. Like to understand how things work and look for empirical evidence before making judgements.</td>
<td>If you’ve never done any analysis, you’ve never done any research, you actually don’t know that what you are trying to do. [Mike]</td>
<td>Don’t do detail. May lack clarity of thought and often go with gut feel when making decisions as they lack the ability to, or are unwillingness to, use facts/figures. Take very little notice of data and may be not be numerate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8i</td>
<td>Pragmatic perfectionist</td>
<td>Not settling for less than is expected but not over delivering</td>
<td>A pragmatic perfectionist which I am now understands what standards are required, won’t settle for less but doesn’t necessarily over specify when he doesn’t need to. [Cris]</td>
<td>Perfectionist tendency to over deliver when not necessary and expect higher standards than necessary from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Personal Values</td>
<td>Placing great importance on personal values relevant to becoming a better person and colleague. Always accountable, having pride in your work, you take an honest approach to doing the right thing. Modest and respectful you are considered and considerate of others.</td>
<td>They have a self-assuredness based on logic about what they’re doing; the rightness of what they’re doing. And some of that in determining if a situation is right or wrong, and if a situation is … what they’re doing, what their position on it and their ability to make a judgement, the concept of decency probably is a component in that. [Shane]</td>
<td>Low integrity and unreliable. Take very little pride in your work and act without a care for others feelings or situations.</td>
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Table 4.5: Business mental toughness characteristics and their contrasts with representative quotes.

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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
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<th>Description</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
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<tr>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Honest self appraisal</td>
<td>Taking an honest and pragmatic stance when appraising your own strengths and weaknesses, performances and decisions.</td>
<td>Beware of your strengths; they may be your weaknesses as well. And that is, perfectionism is a strength for me, but it's a weakness and I am now so self aware I am aware of it and I control it.</td>
<td>Can be seen as narcissistic, over confident, don't self appraise and have a deluded view of themselves.</td>
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<td>9b</td>
<td>Pride in performance and output</td>
<td>Have a personal pride in the work that is completed and the way in which they go about work.</td>
<td>The quality of my work is excellent which is driven by my [focus on] perfection. [Cris]</td>
<td>Have little pride in the work that they complete and produce poor standards or work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9c</td>
<td>Accountable</td>
<td>Are willing to take responsibility for their actions and what needs to be done. Are prepared to defend their reputation when challenged.</td>
<td>Alan Sugar went to Court against Stella English because he was mentally tough and he was prepared to do it [risk his reputation]. [Mike]</td>
<td>Are not willing to take responsibility for what needs to be done. Are unwilling to take risks and do not make decisions that contain a risk. As such often procrastinate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9d</td>
<td>Considered</td>
<td>Think things through in order to understand the possible inputs, constraints and outputs. Have a habit of examining situations rather than simply trying to deal with them immediately. Don't become frustrated with others.</td>
<td>They will react to the stimulus without thought, so they react very quickly, very kind of innately without having thought things through, without having considered options, without having thought through consequences. [Cris]</td>
<td>React to all stimuli and a rather volatile in their responses. Irrational or reckless in their decision making. Become frustrated with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9e</td>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>Understanding that the decisions taken affect other people and this is taken into consideration when decisions are made and actions taken.</td>
<td>I genuinely care about my staff and every decision I make I think about them, but there will be people out there that would sooner sack somebody than worry about them. [Mike]</td>
<td>Oblivious to others or simply do not care. They are inconsiderate, have a ‘sod it’ mentality. They are cynical they don't see that what they are doing has any affect on anybody else.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9f</td>
<td>Modest and respectful</td>
<td>Show a level of humility. care, it's a question of what you care about and confident, mentally tough people care about more than just themselves.</td>
<td>You can come across as a person who is highly confident but yet show humility about what it is that you are doing whereas you can also come across as someone who's highly confident in what they are doing and not give a shit – that's where the arrogant bit comes in, you don't really care what happens so long as you achieve what you need to achieve. [Nick]</td>
<td>Arrogant, uncaring. Get defensive when criticised. Care only for themselves or how others think.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Ability to lead others</td>
<td>Have the ability to get other people to do things for them.</td>
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<td>it’s not just mental toughness in controlling myself its, and what goes on inside me and what I do but it’s a mental toughness in, applied to getting other people to do things and to get the results you need out of other people. And that isn’t about you managing yourself, it is about you managing other people. [Cris]</td>
<td>Lack influence. People are not energised to work with them. Are unable to convince people to work with them or their way.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10a</td>
<td>Consensual</td>
<td>Understanding and accepting that other people have an opinion and may have a better solution or direction. No feeling inferior if others provide better answers.</td>
<td>It’s being flexible without seeming to vacillate. What I mean by that is I’m flexible because I open to persuasion, I’m open to analysis, I’m open to alternative views but they’d better be good. [David]</td>
<td>Ego-centric, self-centred and irresponsible. Ignoring other people opinions and focusing only on own ideas and objectives. Scared of asking other’s opinion, because it might be better and having a dented ego or seeing this as a sign of weakness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10b</td>
<td>Manage upwards.</td>
<td>Able to manage the expectations and demands of superiors and when necessary say no.</td>
<td>I didn’t have managing upwards, that’s what I didn’t have which was, that, in effect that’s my way of saying what my dad was saying about being able to say no. I didn’t know how to manage upwards. [Cris]</td>
<td>Don’t know how to say no and have difficulty interacting and managing the demands of their bosses.</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Business Intelligence</td>
<td>A level of expertise and knowledge within a subject area that provides a level of confidence when performance relates to this area.</td>
<td>He just reads something once and he knows it, that is just a benefit, I don’t think that necessarily mental toughness but it just helps. [Cris]</td>
<td>A lack of expertise and knowledge within a subject area that results in a low level of confidence when performance relates to this area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11a</td>
<td>Team Player</td>
<td>Understanding and accepting that there is a team role to play and working with others within the team environment.</td>
<td>To be mentally tough you also have to be a team player, you have to be slightly consensual. [Mike]</td>
<td>Happier to operate alone, perhaps selfish in nature, a prima donna or diva. Inability to operate as part of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11b</td>
<td>Understand ‘the game’</td>
<td>Are aware of the tacit rules of corporate life and are able to operate within them or manipulate them to succeed. Manipulate the situation to achieve what you want to achieve.</td>
<td>Being able to manage the politics, manage the people side, manage the emotions you go through in a business and hence you get to rise to the top in your area...because you do that better. [Cris]</td>
<td>Are unaware of the tacit rules of corporate life and their ability to operate is limited.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11c</td>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Ability to understand complex situations quickly and make decisions.</td>
<td>Being perceptive and intuitive, those were some words I threw in and for me, that’s about being aware the radar’s out there, I’m aware of all these things but I’m still focused on my goal and I’ll let those influence, if I can work out if they’re appropriate, if I’m given good reason but I’m still heading over there. [Clare]</td>
<td>Ignorant. Unable to understand situations. Slow to pick things up, appear unconfident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11d</td>
<td>Socially Aware</td>
<td>Know how to behave in social situations and understand the implications of social interactions and their benefits.</td>
<td>Where you have a stressful situation that maybe a consequence of personal interaction, so it’s a human relationship thing, a lot of the rules that will apply then are learned, because they’re social characteristics. [Shane]</td>
<td>Are unable to perform in social situations and do not understand social interactions as such their behaviour is awkward.</td>
</tr>
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4.4 Development of business mental toughness

During the focus group and interview discussions a number of factors were referenced as to how mental toughness may be developed. Notwithstanding the nature v nurture debate which I will address shortly these development experiences relate to four scenarios; a) observational workplace development, b) educational development c) parental development and d) development though adversity. Each of these is discussed in the following sections with verbatim references to support the suggested developmental pathways. However before we do it is important to address the nature v nurture question. Mental toughness has been described as a genetic trait (Kroll, 1967) and also as a characteristic that can be developed (Connaughton et al, 2008). All participants within the study were in agreement that in their opinion mental toughness could be developed and whilst some may be predisposed to being more or less mentally toughness from a genetic perspective nevertheless mental toughness can be learned or developed.

Almost certainly something that develops over time I would suggest. I think there are elements of … well you’re going way back now to “nature and nurture” – elements must be contained within your personality. [David]

4.4.1.1 Work place development

It was suggested by one participant that whole companies can be mentally tough as opposed to simply developing mental toughness through work experience. At present very little is known about this however it would be worthy of further investigation to determine whether whole companies are mentally tough, whether mental toughness wear off onto other people or simply working in the environment changes you.

some of the older companies like Kellogg’s and Proctor & Gamble especially who’ve got this marketing excellence aura around them where they don’t seem to do any wrong and people who are recruited in believe that and [this] creates that self-perpetuating sense that ‘we’re brilliant and we’re going to do well’. They’re inspired to do better because of what’s
happened in the past and the enthusiasm to do better in the future. Those individuals do possibly perform better than others because they’re in an environment where success has historically been there and wants to continue in the future. [Graham]

4.4.1.2 Educational development

Another participant suggested that educational background or type of school may also play a role in the development of mental toughness. One participant believed that in attending a Grammar School individuals developed a higher level of self-belief whilst David suggested that the Manchester MBA programme developed mental toughness.

If you go to a Grammar school you’re expected to do well so you go into an environment where people around you expect to do well and that ‘leeches’ into you, you expect to do well and that leeches back into them. The whole ethos of the school is that you are better, you are cleverer than the people who’ve gone to another school so it’s that inspiration, it’s that expectation that you just will do better. [Graham]

The experience here of going on the MBA programme develops a mental toughness. [David]

4.4.1.3 Development through adversity

The high importance of resilience and the element of bouncebackability would suggest that being able to recover from adversity must play a role in developing mental toughness. However this may be simply Darwin’s survival of the mentally tough as those who do fall may not be able to get back up.

I think you can develop mental toughness in that if you’re put through a very stressed environment you usually come out of it stronger and if I can survive that I become even tougher [and] decisive and survive even more. [Clare]
4.4.2 Development through upbringing

It was also suggested by a number of the participants that both the general upbringing and the parenting of individuals can help to develop mental toughness.

*A function of past parentage and some of it would be very much early years’ experience I would have thought but quite a lot of it will also be experience of going in business I think.* [David]

Bull *et al.*, (2005) identified parental influence as a major theme in their analysis of mental toughness within cricket as well as suggesting that our formative years can also help to develop mental toughness, especially when there are setbacks involved. In addition Clarkson (1999) highlights the positive and negative exemplars of parenting in creating the drive behind many successful athletes.

4.5 Observations

In completing this research study into business mental toughness the researcher noted the following observations about the phenomenon and its application whilst collecting the data and completing the analysis stage.

4.5.1 Separating Business and Sport

One observation that is worthy of note is that all twelve participants struggled to separate their view of sport and business mental toughness and as such the researcher ensured a focus on business mental toughness characteristics by asking the participants to provide examples where possible from a business context to ensure that both similarities and differences were identified. For those who participated or viewed sport regularly the ability to provide a sporting example of mental toughness in action was relatively easy, however many had not considered the transfer of the concept to business until now.

Rather than discourage this the researcher used these examples as a building block to tease our business examples and from which the groups were able to discuss whether
these were the same or different in terms of the outcome, the situation and the underlying characteristics of the individuals.

### 4.5.2 Bipolar characteristics

Some characteristics appear to be both positive and negative characteristics of mental toughness, e.g. single mindedness. Individuals who are mentally tough may be single-minded and focused, whilst others may be mentally weak and misguided “We’re all going to jump over the cliff together even though I know it’s going to hurt!” likewise some of the characteristics described above have an element of contradiction, e.g. dependency and the ability to act independently. This would suggest that mental toughness is context specific.

### 4.5.3 Constructs are context specific

All the participants agreed that mental toughness is context specific and that individuals can demonstrate high levels of mental toughness in a particular scenario but equally demonstrate a lack of mental toughness in other scenarios.

one hand we’ve got George, the project manager – totally focused, mentally tough and totally capable of delivering the task. You put George in a Chief Exec’s role where there’s any number of tasks to be done, one minute he’s in front of the BBC cameras trying to explain why his product nearly killed 2 toddlers and the next he’s sitting down in the finance review to look at where the figures are, he’d be hopeless, he’d mentally collapse.

Another participant suggested that there are “different mental toughness types” which would align with Bull et al, (2005) who described different types of mental toughness when investigating mental toughness within footballers.

### 4.5.4 Business mental toughness is temporal

All participants believe that mental toughness is temporal or dynamic “I think you can lose mental toughness, I really do. Something knocks your confidence, people have
breakdowns” and “ability to be mentally tough can vary quite substantially.” This may suggest why resilience is the most important factor.

You are always mentally tough but it’s just there are times, I suppose it’s a bit like adrenalin which kicks in or triggers it or you know there’s going to be a particular situation or a situation arises which requires your mental toughness. [Pam]

4.5.5 Business mental toughness can have a negative effect.

Mental toughness can have negative connotations. One participant described mental toughness as potentially entering into bullying, non-empathetic and [being] unkind. Crust (2008) also suggests that there may also be a negative impact of being mentally tough within sport. Research has shown that athletes who are considered to be mentally tough push themselves further, experiencing higher levels of pain and potential injury than athletes who are less mentally tough (Levy et al., 2006). Whilst this may be the case, further research is required to determine whether this behaviour is solely the effect of mental toughness.

Yes, I’m sure there are times when mental toughness is not a benefit, I’m going to keep on trying to make this business work, I’m going to keep on banging my head against a brick wall and get the same answer but I’m tough so I keep going because my plan’s right. That’s a bad version of mental toughness. [Clare]

I think when you’re defining business mental toughness, you ultimately have to wrestle with your own conscience, those individual decisions that he has made. Independent person, not independent of advice or consideration but ultimately he has to make that decision as an individual and it’s very, very isolating that island that the CEO sits on is very, very isolated. [Pam]
4.5.6 Difficult to define success

One of the common themes running through the focus groups and the interviews was the inability to really define success. Jones et al. (2002) developed a definition of mental toughness that was outcome based which within sport is easily determinable. However in business many of the participants found it difficult to identify what success related to:

\[\text{it could be survival or profit. It could be employing people, it could be opening stores successfully. [Louise]}\]

In addition there it was not accepted that only those that achieved very senior positions were mentally tough or indeed that those who were successful were mentally tough.

\[\text{[In business] there’s no clear winner, there are people who are successful in business and get a lot of publicity whereas you could say there are people who’ve done more or achieved more but you don’t even know about them. [Leigh]}\]

In sport there is normally a win:lose relationship however in business there is a focus on a win:win relationship, especially when working with suppliers and customers as Lee referred to when discussing the differences between sport and business.

\[\text{You see in sport, if you don’t win, you lose! If you’re not on the winning side, you’re on the losing side. Sport’s more straightforward – you don’t win – you lose and business isn’t quite as much as that, you can fail but your levels of success are many fold because to survive is successful and then profitability or overachieving targets is all upside, so you don’t win or lose, you don’t fail and you might succeed by ever-increasing amounts and perhaps that’s where there is a difference. [Leigh]}\]
4.6 Summary

A review of sporting mental toughness literature (see Chapter 2) highlights a number of important conceptual issues: (a) the majority of early studies into the phenomenon were based on anecdotal evidence rather than specific empirical investigations, (b) positive psychological characteristics were often incorrectly labelled as mental toughness with no precise or widely accepted definition and finally, (c) the empirical studies that were conducted via quantitative means used conceptually and psychometrically limited measures (Connaughton et al., 2008) such as the Psychological Performance Inventory (see PPI: Loehr, 1986) and MT48 (see Clough et al., 2002). This lack of conceptually underpinned and psychometrically derived measures, along with the need to gain an in-depth understanding of sporting mental toughness, led the researcher to adopt the same approach taken by sports psychologists in adopting a qualitative approach based on personal construct psychology to examine mental toughness.

4.6.1 Defining business mental toughness

This initial investigation into business mental toughness and the underlying characteristics led the researcher to conclude that no inductively derived definition of business mental toughness and its component parts was possible from the exercise of asking focus group participants to develop a definition without further understanding the phenomenon. All the participants in the focus group agreed that the manifestation of mental toughness in business is more complex than sporting mental toughness, which was summed up by one participant in particular when they suggested:

“I think it’s harder to define mental toughness in business [Graham].

Inherent within the definitions provided was the notion that business people will utilize mental toughness to overcome some form of adversity or setback and that this capability was both ‘natural’ in origin as well as developed over time. The participants of the study had difficult in separating the purpose of mental toughness from its constituent parts. Performance in a sporting arena is often easily measurable, e.g. the time set to run 100
metres and where slightly more subjective, e.g. in gymnastics, there are clear guidelines that set out what is expected and how to ascertain performance levels that are universally accepted. In business the concept of performance and the transferability of measures is not so easily defined and as such the ability to define the ‘performance’ enhancing aspects of mental toughness were difficult to describe. In sport the outcome dimension to mental toughness specifically identifies the development or possession of a ‘psychological edge’, an ability to ‘cope better than an opponents’, and ‘be more consistent and better than an opponent’. All of these require a comparison with other competitors who are considered to be of almost physically and technically identical and as such these aspects would contribute to consistently successful outcomes.

There was unanimous agreement and acceptance that there was, and there was also a need for at times, a cognitive skill that enabled business people to cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment and that those who generally were better at this than others were able to succeed and perform to higher standards than others who were equally intelligent and experienced. In addition it is important to do so in an emotionally balanced or controlled way. As such it is suggested that rather than adopt a new business mental toughness definition that starts to encompass the different idiosyncratic views of individuals that a simper broader definition of mental toughness is used. It is therefore proposed that the following definition of business mental toughness is adopted:

*Business mental toughness is a set of cognitive skills, values and beliefs that enable business people to consistently cope with the stress and pressure of their work and its environment in an emotionally balanced and controlled way, whilst maintaining a positive impact on others.*

This should be treated as a working definition and further investigation is needed to understand its acceptance amongst a wider audience of business professionals. However it does bring together the core element of the sporting definitions provided to date, i.e. coping with stress and pressure (Jones *et al.*, 2002) and based on skills, values and beliefs (Gucciardi *et al.*, 2008).
4.6.2 The characteristics of business mental toughness

Identifying and describing the key characteristics of business mental toughness and their contrasts is one of the key contributions that this study makes to the literature. No other research has conceptualized business mental toughness in the context of what individuals believe it encompasses as well as what it does not. This opens the possibility for constructs to be understood as opposed to being misunderstood or misquoted. Table 4.6 shows the extent to which the study has been able to elicit a high number of characteristics. However this is only the first real assessment of what business mental toughness can be and as such some of the characteristics identified my ultimately be proven not to be a common characteristic of business mental toughness or indeed may be conflated into a single characteristic or expanded into a further set of subordinate characteristics.

Table 4.6: Comparison of business mental toughness characteristics and sport derived characteristics.

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<td>20 Major themes identified in English cricket (Male only)</td>
<td>10 attributes identified in Soccer (Male only)</td>
<td>30 attributes identified in a broad mix of sports and gender</td>
<td>32 characteristics identified in Australian-rules football (Male only)</td>
<td>66 attributes identified across a mixed gender and skill business group.</td>
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<td>Self-belief</td>
<td>Total self-belief</td>
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<td>Robust and resilient confidence</td>
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<td>Thriving on competition</td>
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Control/Emotional Intelligence
Both Jones et al. (2002) and Thelwell et al. (2005) revealed that some of the key characteristics were perceived as being more important for sporting mental toughness than others. Indeed it is has been widely accepted that self belief is the most important...
characteristic for sporting mental toughness however the hierarchical structure of this organization cannot be determined from these investigations as the key characteristics identified, although comparable, were not exactly the same across studies. Nonetheless, an encouraging finding from the present study which is clearly supported by previous research (Jones et al., 2002; Thelwell et al., 2005) is that self-belief is considered one of the most important component of business mental toughness. This trend is not surprising given that high self-confidence and belief in one’s ability to achieve success is commonly associated with many other positive psychological states and optimal experiences such as flow (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and peak performance (Krane & Williams, 2006) and whilst it was only ranked second in this study it would appear that a number of the key components of business mental toughness have a similar level of importance to those in sporting mental toughness. However in assessing the ranking of the higher order characteristics (Table 4.4) then it is clear that some of the participant ranked Personal Values as not that important whilst other considered these to be of much greater importance. As such the hierarchy of characteristics needs further investigation and the reader should not consider the lower ranked characteristics less important, however through an assessment of the prevalence (see Appendix J) then the lower characteristics are not always required where as the higher ranked characteristics are utilised more often in business mental toughness.

The findings also support that business mental toughness is a multidimensional construct comprising components devoted to cognition, affect, emotions and behaviour. Central to this multi-dimensional conceptualization is the idea that the key mental toughness characteristics are not isolated, but rather are interconnected with some being considered more important than others. In comparing the characteristics identified within a business context it is clear than there are significantly more potential characteristics of mental toughness within business. In addition not only has the study identified all the ‘common’ characteristics but it has also highlighted those that only Gucciardi et al., (2008) were able to identify including personal values and emotional intelligence, however no reference was
made to physical toughness and sporting intelligence was changed to business intelligence as there are very few roles where a level of sports knowledge is an advantage.

While it would seem appropriate that self-belief is at the core of mental toughness in sport, determining the hierarchical nature and the contribution that each key characteristic provides to mental toughness is required before any definitive conclusions can be made in this regard. Identifying and understanding those situations that require mental toughness and the behaviours that are commonly displayed by mentally tough business people may help further explain this hierarchy. By identifying those situations that require a high degree of mental toughness, future research may employ observational studies, for example, in which qualitatively derived information can be verified or modified. Importantly, such observational techniques may also prove fruitful for the applied practitioner wishing to supplement the information gleaned from self-report measures of mental toughness. Specifically, we need to understand what situations (internal and external) demand mental toughness and how the key characteristics enable an business person to thrive in, as well as persevere through, such situations so that we can understand how these protective and enabling factors can be enhanced.

When asked to name specific instance that relate to mental toughness within business the participants struggled to generate a list that was not idiosyncratic to their particular business area. Comments such as ‘presenting to the board’, ‘making sure everyone gets paid’ and ‘dealing with my boss’ identified the broad scale of the situations that may require mental toughness. In addition to this whilst sport has clear boundaries and can be described in three components, pre-competition, competition and post competition (see Connaughton et al., 2008) business is significantly more complex, as such rather than try to identify specific situations where mental toughness is required, it is proposed that through interactions with individuals the specific situations that they believe require mental toughness are focused upon to provide an idiosyncratic list of mental toughness situations rather than a long list of potentially stressful situations.
5 DISCUSSION

The objective of this thesis is to examine in detail the psychological construct mental toughness, which has been described in sport as having a significant performance enhancing capability (Golby et al, 1987; Jones et al, 2002), within a business environment in order to understand what role, if any, it can play in enhancing workplace performance and reducing the cost of workplace stress.

When the research was originally proposed there was no accepted or documented definition of business mental toughness, there were however a number of accepted sporting definitions of mental toughness developed by sports psychologists predominantly through their work with elite athletes (see Jones et al., 2002, 2007) and elite sports teams (see Bull et al., 2005; Thelwell et al., 2005 and Gucciardi et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b). As a result, the conceptual ambiguity with regard to business mental toughness warranted further investigation given the relatively unsophisticated and unscientific practice of using sporting mental toughness frameworks within business in order to improve performance. Thus to develop a broader understanding of business mental toughness and validate the use of sporting mental toughness frameworks, it was necessary to develop a research program that facilitated an in-depth understanding of what business mental toughness is from a business persons perspective rather than a sports persons. To achieve this, the author first sought to understand whether business mental toughness was actually a phenomenon recognised by business professionals, whether it could be defined in a similar way to the definitions provided by sporting mental toughness research groups (see Clough et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2002; Gucciardi et al., 2008), and what the essential characteristics of the ideal mentally tough business performer are.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the findings and present the implications of this program of research for future research into business mental toughness. The chapter is organized into the following sections that provide a discussion of (a) the key findings from the research, (b) a discussion of the conceptual issues that emanated from the
overall thesis, (c) the strengths and limitations of the approach taken, and (d) the practical implications for future research and suggested future research directions.

5.1 Key findings

In the following section we will discuss the key finds from the study. These centre on the challenge to recognise business mental toughness, how we define it; how we characterise it and whether there is more than one type that can be observed in both sport and business.

5.1.1 Recognising business mental toughness

Sport provides an almost perfect laboratory within which to analyse psychological and physical phenomenon. The tasks completed are often homogeneous and conducted repeatedly and as a result the specific attributes of athletes in terms of their mental approach or personality can be assessed. In addition the media coverage afforded phenomenon such as mental toughness, has resulted in them being widely recognized amongst sports performers, coaches and commentators as the use the term ‘mental toughness’ is often used to describe the ‘edge’ which athletes utilise to (consistently) succeed over others with similar if not identical physical capabilities or to demonstrate a lack of mental toughness when performance is poor.

In business however, work place performance is generally hidden from view with only a few warranting the media coverage that would allow a large audience to develop an opinion of their performance, e.g. politicians and Chief Executive Officers of large multinational organizations can become ‘celebrities’ and their performances assessed accordingly, however this is rare. As such only a small minority are oblivious to the real work place performance and the associated stress and pressure and it is therefore difficult to formulate a universal understanding of the benefits of mental toughness without investigative research. All the participants in the focus group agreed that the manifestation of mental toughness in business is more complex than sporting mental toughness, which was summed up by one participant in particular when they suggested:
“I think it’s harder to define mental toughness in business [Graham].

Equally just because mental toughness has not been described within a business context does not mean that it doesn’t exist or indeed that it is not a key determinant of success within the workplace, simply without the ability to demonstrate and identify business mental toughness its existence could go unnoticed.

Clearly the findings from this study strongly suggest that business mental toughness does exist and indeed it is now beginning to be recognised as a potential strength. However it is complex and multifaceted and it draws an individual’s own values, beliefs, motivations and emotional intelligence that enables business professionals to cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment.

5.1.2 Defining mental toughness

One observation that is worthy of note is that all twelve participants struggled to separate their view of sport and business mental toughness and as such the researcher ensured a focus on business mental toughness characteristics by asking the participants to provide examples where possible from a business context to ensure that both similarities and differences were identified. For those who participated or viewed sport regularly the ability to provide a sporting example of mental toughness in action was relatively easy, however many had not considered the transfer of the concept to business until now. When asked to do so there was unanimous agreement and acceptance that there was, and there was also a need for at times, a cognitive skill that enabled business people to cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment and that those who generally were better at this than others were able to succeed and perform to higher standards than others who were equally intelligent and experienced. In addition it is important to do so in an emotionally balanced or controlled way. As such it is suggested that rather than adopt a new business mental toughness definition that starts to encompass the different idiosyncratic views of
individuals that a simper broader definition of mental toughness is used. It is therefore proposed that the following definition of business mental toughness is adopted:

*Business mental toughness is a set of cognitive skills, values and beliefs that enable business people to consistently cope with the stress and pressure of their work in an emotionally balanced and controlled way, whilst having a positive influencing effect on others.*

This should be treated as a working definition and further investigation is needed to understand its acceptance amongst a wider audience of business professionals. However it does bring together the core element of the sporting definitions provided to date, i.e. coping with stress and pressure (Jones *et al.*, 2002) and based on skills, values and beliefs (Gucciardi *et al.*, 2008).

### 5.1.3 Characterising business mental toughness

Whilst the purpose of this study is to determine whether the use of a sporting mental toughness approach within a business environment is appropriate it is perhaps first important to acknowledge that there are indeed a number of recognized similarities between sport and business and one could assume that interventions that work within one environment may work within the other, irrespective of whether this is scientifically accurate. At a superficial level there are similarities that exist however this should not be the basis for accepting that business mental toughness is sporting mental toughness.

Aspects of both sport and business have been described as sharing similar challenges in terms of the importance of leadership; demand for high performance; development of skills and capability through experience; expectations of others and dependencies, and competition (Burns and O'Donnell (2011). Indeed a number of these issues were highlighted within this investigation however the extant literature on mental toughness in sport does not reflect all of these, e.g. there is no reference made, in any of the characteristics described to date within sport, to leadership or a dependency on others.
Likewise the ‘competitive’ nature of sport is very different to the competitive markets that companies operate in.

This research study clearly shows that there is clearly a link between the characteristics of a mentally tough businessperson and those of a mentally tough sports person. However the complex nature of business and the ambiguity regarding success or ‘winning’ results in a larger set of characteristics observed within business (66 characteristics) as opposed to sport (33 characteristics). Identifying and describing the key characteristics of business mental toughness and their contrasts is one of the key contributions that this study makes to the literature. No other research has conceptualized business mental toughness in the context of what individuals believe it encompasses as well as what it does not. This opens the possibility for constructs to be understood as opposed to being misunderstood or misquoted. Table 4.6 (p. 140) shows the extent to which the study has been able to elicit a significantly high number of characteristics than research within sport. However this is only the first real assessment of what business mental toughness can be and as such some of the characteristics identified may ultimately be proven not to be a common characteristic of business mental toughness or indeed may be conflated into a single characteristic or expanded into a further set of subordinate characteristics.

Whilst broadly the same set of major characteristics is present in both sport and business this does not mean that the level of importance, utilisation or requirements are the same across sport and business contexts. Indeed it may well be that a lack of a characteristic is as important as the prevalence, i.e. performance is determined by what is missing or are under/over developed as opposed to what is possessed. Perhaps the most notable development from this study is the identification of a new major characteristic centred on mental toughness and its impact on others, as well as the clear omission of a major sporting characteristic, physical toughness. This leadership characteristic is significant as it was portrayed within business as either being positive or negative but in both cases a component or effect of mental toughness.
5.1.4 Impact of mental toughness on others

Perhaps the most distinguishing difference between business and sporting mental toughness is the impact the ability has on other people, i.e. if someone is mentally tough do they have a positive or a negative impact on other peoples performance? In sport the desired effect on others from being mentally tough is generally negative, i.e. the performer wants to intimidate other competitors and impact their performance where as within business the desired effect on others is generally positive. It should be noted that in team sports this can cause a significant conflict of interest as those who are more individually oriented can have a negative effect on the teams performance due to their ability to intimidate fellow teammates. Take Tiger Woods as an example; he is regularly described as mentally tough, some even consider him to be the most mentally tough sports person and someone who has an ability to stay mentally tough even when under the most pressurised situations, whilst also inflicting a negative effect on the mental toughness or cognitive and physical capabilities of fellow competitors. This type of mental toughness it is suggested is a form of Intimidatory Mental Toughness, which is also observed within business where there are “people making decisions for their own ends that impact negatively on others”.

If we contrast Tiger Woods approach to that of another golfer, Colin Montgomery, who throughout his career did not win a major golfing event finishing second 5 times. Many considered him to be mentally weak when playing in an individual events, however mentally tough when competing in a team event, e.g. the Ryder Cup where he was instrumental in securing five Ryder Cup successes for Europe as a player in 1995, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006 (returning in 23.5 points from 36 matches winning 20 of them) and one as captain in 2010). In all of these successes he not only performed at a level that was higher than his individual level but he also had a positive effect on his fellow team mates and enhanced their performances. This type of mental toughness we would suggest is an Influencing Mental Toughness, as athletes like Colin Montgomery have the ability to positively affect their team mates performances as opposed to Tiger Woods’ Ryder Cup performances where he had a a very poor individual performance record, especially when playing in a partnership and a
reputation for intimidating his teammates, as is described below in reference to his poor performance in successive Ryder Cups:

“Tiger Woods is one of the game's great winners...he performs well under pressure...but it's also no coincidence that he keeps losing. For all his incredible talent and mental toughness, he's incapable of making the necessary mental commitment to be a good teammate. He knows how to bring himself up, but he can't quite figure out how to stop bringing everyone else down.”

The implication of this observation is that mental toughness clearly has an impact on others is not just central to an individual’s performance but also to the affect it can have on those working alongside or competing with a mentally tough performer. Indeed the findings from this study supports this distinction in that **intimidatory mental toughness** was identified by a number of the participants and that some business people are not aware of the impact their toughness may have on others:

“There are some people I can think of from my career whose ethics were horrible, they were mentally tough and they achieved.”

This could be further described as a form of social conscience. One participant suggested that the outcome for an individual they described as mentally tough was more important than the process they took; “they didn’t care how they got to the top but they were mentally tough enough to get there”, however another participant questioned the ethics of this type of approach when challenging whether they were mentally tough “if they were ignoring all the ethics” as they put it, they “weren’t making difficult decisions” and as such may not have been in a stressful situation as they didn’t recognise the impact or affect on others. In addition the participants did not share the notion that success within business is driven by mental toughness alone:

“They’re not mentally tough but they’re successful and they are successful because there’s something missing. That’s sort of good mental toughness and bad mental toughness, isn’t it?”

This is not to say that mentally tough individuals are not able to make difficult decisions in business that affect people negatively. Making people redundant, passing over people for promotion or providing negative feedback will have a negative effect on many people however “mentally tough people aren’t afraid to make the tough decisions that affect other people.” You don’t have to be mentally tough to be successful however within business there are clearly consequences to the impact mental toughness can have on others and we must be cognisant of the potential for sporting mental toughness to have an intimidatory effect which is why the utilisation of sporting mental toughness frameworks may indeed be detrimental within business environments.

**5.2 Conceptual issues**

There are a number of conceptual issues that emanate from this research which relate to the confusion of mental toughness with other psychological traits such as hardiness,

**5.2.1 Mental toughness and the confusion with other psychological traits**

As with the development of sporting mental toughness knowledge eleven years ago, the current view of business mental toughness has to date been based on anecdotal accounts (see Jones & Moorhouse, 2008) and the development of sporting mental toughness models aligned to business as evidence that mental toughness exists and is accepted within business. This lack of understanding and confusion has been further impaired by the development and application of mental toughness measurement tools such as MT48 (see Clough et al., 2002) that are not accepted measures of mental toughness, whether you are measuring it within a business or sporting context. It has been suggested by a number of sports psychology researchers that the MT48 is deficient with regard to its conceptualization and development; in particular no rationale was provided by Clough for
the conceptualization of hardiness and confidence into mental toughness. Accordingly, this thesis empirically investigated the acceptance of mental toughness as a concept within business, any differences or commonalities with sporting mental toughness and the underlying characteristics of mental toughness as opposed to the redefinition of mental toughness which at present is not appropriate or possible given the emerging nature of the concept. Further, whilst the findings enable the development of a framework for assessment of business mental toughness further investigation is required to explain the processes and mechanisms involved in the development and maintenance of mental toughness within business.

5.2.2 Separating Business and Sport

One observation that is worthy of note is that all twelve participants struggled to separate their view of sport and business mental toughness and as such the researcher ensured a focus on business mental toughness characteristics by asking the participants to provide examples where possible from a business context to ensure that both similarities and differences were identified. For those who participated or viewed sport regularly the ability to provide a sporting example of mental toughness in action was relatively easy, however many had not considered the transfer of the concept to business until now. Rather than discourage this the researcher used these examples as a building block to tease out business examples and from which the groups were able to discuss whether these were the same or different in terms of the outcome, the situation and the underlying characteristics of the individuals.

5.2.3 Bipolar characteristics

Some characteristics appear to be both positive and negative characteristics of mental toughness, e.g. single mindedness. Individuals who are mentally tough may be single-minded and focused, whilst others may be mentally weak and misguided “We’re all going to jump over the cliff together even though I know it’s going to hurt!” Likewise some of the characteristics described above have an element of contradiction, e.g. dependency and the ability to act independently. This would suggest that mental toughness is context
specific and further investigation is required in order to determine in which situations these characteristics behave differently.

5.2.4 Constructs are context specific

All the participants agreed that mental toughness is context specific and that individuals can demonstrate high levels of mental toughness in a particular scenario but equally demonstrate a lack of mental toughness in other scenarios. Another participant suggested that there are “different mental toughness types” which would align with Bull et al, (2005) who described different types of mental toughness when investigating mental toughness within footballers.

5.2.5 Business mental toughness can have a negative effect.

Mental toughness can have negative connotations. One participant described mental toughness as potentially entering into bullying, non-empathetic and [being] unkind. Crust (2008) also suggests that there may also be a negative impact of being mentally tough within sport. Research has shown that athletes who are considered to be mentally tough push themselves further, experiencing higher levels of pain and potential injury than athletes who are less mentally tough (Levy et al., 2006). Whilst this may be the case, further research is required to determine whether this behaviour is solely the effect of mental toughness.

Yes, I’m sure there are times when mental toughness is not a benefit, I’m going to keep on trying to make this business work, I’m going to keep on banging my head against a brick wall and get the same answer but I’m tough so I keep going because my plan’s right. That’s a bad version of mental toughness. [Clare]

5.2.6 Difficult to define success

One of the common themes running through the focus groups and the interviews was the inability to really define success. Jones et al. (2002) developed a definition of
mental toughness that was outcome based which within sport is easily determinable. In addition there it was not accepted that only those that achieved very senior positions were mentally tough or indeed that those who were successful were mentally tough.

In sport there is normally a win:lose relationship however in business there is a focus on a win:win relationship, especially when working with suppliers and customers as Leigh referred to when discussing the differences between sport and business.

You see in sport, if you don't win, you lose! If you're not on the winning side, you're on the losing side. Sport's more straightforward — you don't win — you lose and business isn't quite as much as that, you can fail but your levels of success are many fold because to survive is successful and then profitability or overachieving targets is all upside, so you don't win or lose, you don't fail and you might succeed by ever-increasing amounts and perhaps that's where there is a difference. [Leigh]

5.3 Limitations of the research

There are a number of strengths and limitations in relation to this research thesis most notably the length of time taken to conduct the research (three years), the qualitative nature of the responses, the sample size and theoretical underpinnings.

5.3.1 Time taken to complete the research

It may have proved more beneficial to the completion of the study to have engaged in the focus groups and the interviews over a shorter time period as some of the participants in the earlier focus groups were no longer willing to participate in the interview stage due to career and location changes. The prolonged time period however did allow the researcher to enhance the trustworthiness of the data by reaffirming some of the comments made through the focus groups and individual interviews due to a pre-existing relationship with a
number of the participants. It also ensured that the participants were able to reflect on their responses and their views on mental toughness and report these back.

5.3.2 Sample Size and type

While all of the participants have considerable experience of workplace performance (>350 years combined experience) generalising the findings would be inappropriate given the sample size and idiosyncratic nature of some of the construct ratings (Nick considered Values as the second most important construct whilst Mike and Cris considered this to be the least important). However, the sample sizes used was in line with several published sport psychology research papers (e.g., Bull et al., 2005; Gucciardi et al., 2008; Jones et al, 2002) and although other researchers have used significantly larger sample sizes (Clough et al., 2002; Marchant et al., 2008) these studies were quantitative in nature and elicited far less contextual information.

Another limitation may also be the exclusion of business psychologists as these were included in the sporting assessment of mental toughness. However business consultants and business coaches were included in the focus groups. Future research should consider gaining the views of both business psychologists and in addition the view of senior Human Resource executives may also benefited findings from a people development perspective.

5.3.3 Retrospective evaluation

The use of retrospective evaluation is also open to attribution effects and memory bias and these must be considered when interpreting the results. Whilst this approach is a legitimate vehicle for obtaining information the researcher was conscious that some of the ‘examples’ provided may not have been first hand experiences or supposition of experiences and these were omitted from the consideration set when constructs were developed, e.g. one participant referred to Sir Fred Goodwin on a number of occasions and reflected on his mental toughness without ever actually meeting him or understanding the business situations and actions relating to the work that Sir Fred Goodwin did).
5.3.4 *Participants and participant selection*

A number of the participants were selected for being mentally tough (in the opinion of the researcher) there is no currently accepted measure of business mental toughness and it was therefore assumed by the researcher that those who had risen to director level within a business environment had experience either personally, or through others, examples of situations where mental toughness was evident in them or others, or indeed situations where mental toughness was not evident in themselves or others. In addition to the level achieved it was also considered appropriate to ensure that participants had the opportunity to view a significant number of people within a work environment so not to bias the findings by using participants who had only experienced a small number of individuals in perhaps only a limited set of environments.

5.3.5 *Previous exposure to psychological training and mental toughness*

The exposure to psychological training and mental toughness was also a limitation identified by sports psychology researchers as a potential source of bias (Gucciardi et al., 2008). All participants were asked to document any exposure to mental toughness training they may have received. Only one participant, Nick, had received any mental toughness training and this constituted a short presentation and workshop completed in 1 day.

5.4 *Practical Implications & Future Research Directions*

A number of practical implications have emerged from this program of research in relation to recognising business mental toughness and the development and maintenance of mental toughness within business people. Existing research into sporting mental toughness suggests that those who possess mental toughness are more successful than those who are not (cf. Bull et al., 2005; Thelwell et al., 2005) and as a result if we are able to develop or identify business mental toughness within employees or identify scenarios or instances where employees are likely to require mental toughness then this may be of significant benefit to both the employee and the organisations in coping with work place stress and the financial burden it brings. The implications of this research may therefore be of particular
interest to business leaders, coaches and psychologists, human resource managers and individual business professionals as they look to develop their own, their employees, or their clients business mental toughness. Additionally, existing sporting research also suggests that mental toughness can be developed and maintained (Connaughton et al., 2007), highlighting an important role for business psychologists and their involvement with business people at various career stages. Specifically, in utilising existing mental skills training and strategies to enhance and optimise key characteristics such as resilience, focus and self confidence in pressure situations should provide benefits.

5.4.1 Identifying mental toughness

The mental toughness constructs identified in this study have the potential to facilitate business psychologists, coaches, and employees in understanding their perceived levels of mental toughness in relation to the 66 constructs identified. Whilst not validated as a psychometric tool it may help in the identification of specific strengths and weaknesses that business people perceive they have in relation to their performance in certain circumstances or in general with regard to their approach to work. Although we should remain tentative about the full extent of these constructs, their use could assist in providing direction, for career planning, and mental skills training programs to counteract the negative effects of workplace stress or to further enhance the characteristics required. In addition the ranking process has identified that some of the higher mental toughness constructs, e.g. values, may be more important than others, and this may be particularly relevant when changing roles or assessing mental toughness across different role types.

5.4.2 Development of mental toughness within business

During the focus group and interview discussions a number of factors were referenced as to how mental toughness may be developed which related to four specific scenarios; a) observational workplace development, b) educational development c) parental development and d) development though adversity.
**Workplace development of mental toughness.** It was suggested by some of the participants that certain company cultures can develop mentally toughnes as opposed to simply developing mental toughness through work experience. However very little is known about this and as such it would be worthy of further investigation to determine whether whole companies are mentally tough and whether mental toughness is contagious. When compared to sporting mental toughness, which has been shown to develop throughout a person’s sporting career, business mental toughness may follow a similar developmental pathway. As such it is a further suggestion that rather than focus on developing mental toughness within senior managers and business leaders that the development of mental toughness starts earlier or targeted at those people entering careers or roles where there is a high prevalence of stress related illness. Additionally, it would be valuable to understand what factors influence the development of mental toughness at certain career and educational stages.

**Educational development of mental toughness.** Educational background or type of school may also play a role in the development of mental toughness. One participant believed that in attending a Grammar School individuals developed a higher level of self-belief whilst David suggested that the Manchester MBA programme developed mental toughness.

*The experience here of going on the MBA programme develops a mental toughness. [David]*

**Development of mental toughness through adversity.** The high importance of resilience and the element of bouncebackability would suggest that being able to recover from adversity must play a role in developing mental toughness. However this may be simply Darwin’s survival of the mentally tough as those who do fall may not be able to get back up.
I think you can develop mental toughness in that if you’re put through a very stressed environment you usually come out of it stronger and if I can survive that I become even tougher [and] decisive and survive even more. [Clare]

Development of mental toughness through upbringing. It was suggested by a number of the participants that both the general upbringing and the parenting of individuals can help to develop mental toughness. Bull et al., (2005) identified parental influence as a major theme in their analysis of mental toughness within cricket as well as suggesting that our formative years can also help to develop mental toughness, especially when there are setbacks involved. In addition Clarkson (1999) highlights the positive and negative exemplars of parenting in creating the drive behind many successful athletes.

A function of past parentage and some of it would be very much early years’ experience I would have thought but quite a lot of it will also be experience of going in business I think. [David]

Finally, the experience and assessment of critical incidents appears to help cultivate mental toughness (Gordon, 2008). While these incidents may be very different in business than sport, our ability to recognize how and when these experiences occur would be of great use to business coaches and psychologists trying to facilitate the enhancement of mental toughness.

5.4.3 Recommendations for further research

There are a number of recommendations for future research that stem from this research thesis that focus on a) Assessment of mental toughness within specific business roles, b) measurement of business mental toughness using Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), c) development of a business mental toughness measure, and d) the identification of different developmental mechanisms for business mental toughness. These recommendations follow the development of sporting mental toughness and future researchers should take note of Connaughton, et al. (2008) and Gucciardi et al., (2009a, b).
5.4.3.1 Assessment of mental toughness within specific business roles

The findings of this study would suggest that the importance placed on specific mental toughness constructs and the contradictory nature of some of the constructs e.g. risk aversion being a positive construct for some roles (e.g. heart surgeon) and a negative construct for others (e.g. investment banker) suggests mental toughness is both individual and situation, activity or role specific. This lends weight to Gucciardi et al.’s (2008) view that mental toughness has three key elements; individual characteristics (values and beliefs), behaviours (skills, actions and mechanisms) and situations. As such when two individuals are exposed to the same situation and react positively or negatively it is either their values and beliefs or their skills, actions and coping mechanisms, or both that differs. Therefore understanding how we appraise situations, what mental toughness characteristics are required, either holistically or individually, will be of benefit when people change roles are promoted or work in new environments.

5.4.3.2 Measuring business mental toughness

The need for a sound measure of mental toughness has been documented within this thesis and elsewhere within sports psychology research (e.g., Golby, Sheard, & Lavallee, 2003; Middleton et al., 2004), however we should be cognisant that whilst there is a desire to measure mental toughness this should not necessarily be a quantitative measure. As we have already seen in sports psychology there are both quantitative and qualitative research focused groups.

The key for business mental toughness from an application perspective should be to select the one that provides the most insight and ultimately aids workplace performance and the development of business mental toughness. The framework for identifying business mental toughness constructs depicted in Table 4.5 can provide a significant qualitative insight into an individual’s view of mental toughness and their mental toughness levels and also add to the detailed information on the qualities and characteristics of the mentally tough performer.
Qualitative measurement of business mental toughness

Whilst not deployed in this research approach the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT) was tested by the researcher on two individuals and considered too complex and time consuming for the capture of the exploratory data required in this study. The technique does however provide a way of uncovering our tacit knowledge about things and as such is particularly useful when exploring topics where employees find it difficult to articulate their opinions and experiences with clarity. The technique, originally developed by Kelly in the 1950’s, is an extension of construct development through semi structured interviews used in this study and is also based on the central belief that everyone, consciously or sub consciously, develops theories to explain the world around them and as such has a theory about every situations that they face or may face. The technique enables such theories or constructs to be identified during an interview and whilst it was originally developed to explore how patients viewed their relationships with friends and families (Fransella and Bannister, 1977) it could be used to within a business mental toughness investigation to elicit characteristics which could then be tested against individual scenarios in order to determine which constructs are more or less important for specific instances requiring mental toughness. In addition RGT will aid in determining an individual’s view of their mental toughness against certain business scenarios which they may consider stressful and where there is a mismatch in terms of capability and the situational requirement.

As our workplace experiences exist at both a conscious and subconscious level and the current knowledge of business mental toughness appears not to be explicit, as such an approach such as RGT should provide significant insight into the tacit knowledge of employees providing that a set of constructs are provided to the interviewee. Whilst the approach has shown results with a greater depth of construct elicitation than direct semi-structured questioning alone the lack of basic knowledge and acceptance of the phenomenon within business means that workplace knowledge is limited and a step straight into RGT would be problematic and prove difficult for business people to accept without prompts.
Further data capture is required to ensure the characteristics identified in this study are exhaustive and suitable for the development of a psychometric measure. To do this data collection from a sample of in excess of 500 performers would be required following which confirmatory factor analysis could then be conducted to examine the goodness of fit of the items under the deductive framework of business mental toughness; that is, to confirm that the proposed items represented their respective subscales.

Once developed and validated a business mental toughness measure would facilitate cross-sectional comparisons of groups and companies, as well as the predictive validity of the scale against workplace and individual performances. Talented or operationally important, but mentally weak, employees could be identified to see which subcomponents or attributes require attention, and interventions designed and implemented to facilitate the development of enhanced levels of mental toughness and the avoidance of unnecessary workplace stress and pressure.

5.5 Summary

In summary the findings from this study strongly suggest that mental toughness does exist within a business context and that it can be recognised within individual business people. All study participants agreed that mental toughness, or a cognitive capability through which individuals are able to cope with the stress and pressure of certain situations, was prevalent with business people, it aided business performance and separated those who achieved from those who did not. However the attributes required for business mental toughness may not be the same as those required within a sporting context and whilst the framework for mental toughness is similar there are differences between mental toughness within a business context when compared to sport.

It was clear from the findings that this individual capability, which we are calling business mental toughness, enables those who demonstrate it, or possess it, to be able to
cope with the stress and pressure of various work environments better than others, who either do not possess mental toughness or are unable to utilise its benefits within the particular business situations or contexts discussed. As with sport, business mental toughness differentiates those individuals who can perform to the highest levels within a high pressure and stressful environment. However this does not mean that those individuals who are unable to perform are mentally weak, simply in that situation their performance would have suffered due to their inability to cope with the stress and pressure of the situation. In other situations the outcome may well be different.

As with the development of sporting mental toughness knowledge, the view of business mental toughness prior to this study had been based on anecdotal accounts and there was an unfounded acceptance that sporting mental toughness models will help define and develop business mental toughness. Whilst the phenomenon is accepted as being prevalent in those who succeed in business or in specific business roles or situations, we cannot simply accept that a sporting framework for mental toughness will both identify and develop business mental toughness within business people.

In attempting to define business mental toughness it became clear from the outputs from the focus groups that the development of a business mental toughness definition by the participants would not be that easy, time consuming and not necessarily that worthwhile. As such the research adopted a similar approach to Jones et al. (2002) and the researcher aggregated the thoughts of the participants into an acceptable definition which encompassed the business contexts within a more general definition of mental toughness rather than one centred on sporting achievement and competition. It is therefore proposed that the following definition of business mental toughness is adopted moving forward:

*Business mental toughness is a set of cognitive skills, values and beliefs that enable business people to consistently cope with the stress and pressure of their work and its environment in an emotionally balanced and controlled way, whilst maintaining a positive impact on others.*
This is a working definition and further investigation is needed to determine its suitability and acceptance amongst a wider audience of business professionals. However it does bring together the core element of the sporting definitions provided to date, i.e. coping with stress and pressure (Jones et al., 2002) and the underlying mechanics, i.e. skills, values and beliefs (Gucciardi et al., 2008).

When characterising the underlying attributes of mental toughness this study identified 66 characteristics compared to a much smaller set of attributes e.g. Jones et al. (2007) identified 30 and Gucciardi et al. (2008) identified 32 attributes. The identification and description of the characteristics of business mental toughness and their contrasts is one of the key contributions that this study makes to the literature. No other research has conceptualized business mental toughness in the context of what individuals believe it encompasses as well as what it does not. This opens the possibility for constructs to be understood as opposed to being misunderstood or misquoted. Table 4.6 (p. 140) shows the extent to which the study has been able to elicit a significantly high number of characteristics than research within sport. However this is only the first real assessment of what business mental toughness can be and as such some of the characteristics identified may ultimately be proven not to be a common characteristic of business mental toughness or indeed may be conflated into a single characteristic or expanded into a further set of subordinate characteristics.

When assessing the relative importance of major themes across sport and business there is a noticeable difference. In sport the three key major themes are self-belief, work ethic and personal values whilst in business they are resilience, self-belief and the ability to handle pressure (see Table 4.4). Indeed work ethic (8th in business) and personal values (9th in business) were strangely low in comparison to their relevance to sporting mental toughness. This clearly shows that whilst the attributes of mental toughness may well be from a common set and similar in nature across business and sport, contextual differences result in a different hierarchy of importance. Success in sport clearly requires self-belief, a good work ethic and a set of personal values, which enable the competitor to succeed,
however within business these attributes are not what differentiates successful performers or may be expected of all performers.

However whilst there was a significant increase in the number of attributes identified almost the same set of major characteristics were evident within business that have been identified in sport i.e. self belief, handling pressure, focus & commitment, motivation, control, tough attitude, resilience, personal values, work ethic, emotional intelligence and knowledge (of the context). Two major themes that were not represented in both contexts were physical toughness and leadership (the impact of mental toughness on others). That is to say they are not prevalent, however as yet no research study has identified leadership or the impact on others as a key attribute to mental toughness within sport, nor did this study identify physical toughness as an attribute within business.

There were also two key difference between business mental toughness and sporting mental toughness that related to the outcome and the effect mental toughness has on others. The ‘competitive’ interactions associated with sport, especially individual sport requires participants to intimidate opponents mentally and physically as this provides a distinct advantage. However this is much less of an advantage within business, indeed it is likely to be a distinct disadvantage and the leadership characteristic identified in this study is significant as it clearly identifies that business mental toughness requires a different output and that an adoption of a sporting mental toughness approach could have detrimental effects within business. As such there is a danger that the wrong type of mental toughness can evolve if a sporting framework is utilised and only sporting attributes are developed. If we consider the example of Tiger Woods and Colin Montgomery and their impact on fellow competitors and teammates when competing, one intimidating and the other influencing, this clearly has an impact on the role mental toughness plays within leadership and as such future researchers and practitioners should be aware of the potentially negative impacts of the intimidatory effects of sporting mental toughness.
The findings from this research will help business psychologists, coaches, and employees to understanding their perceived levels of mental toughness in relation to the 66 constructs identified. Whilst not validated as a psychometric test these characteristics will help in the identification of specific strengths and weaknesses that business people perceive they have in relation to their performance in certain circumstances or in general with regard to their approach to work. Although we should remain tentative about the full extent of these constructs, their use could assist in providing direction, for career planning, and mental skills training programs to counteract weaknesses or to further enhance strengths identified.

There are a number of recommendations for future research that stem from this research that should focus on the assessment of mental toughness within specific business roles, measurement of business mental toughness using tools such as Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), the development of a business mental toughness measure, and the identification of different developmental mechanisms for business mental toughness. These recommendations are concomitant with the development of sporting mental toughness and future researchers should take note of Connaughton, et al. (2008) and Gucciardi et al., (2009a, b) as methodological guides.

The implications of this research will be of particular interest to business leaders, coaches and psychologists, human resource managers and individual business professionals as they look to develop their own, their employees, or their clients business mental toughness and mitigate the effects of work place stress. Additionally, if business mental toughness can be developed and maintained, there is an important role for business psychologists to play in the development of business people at various career stages. As within sport the use of mental skills training and strategies to enhance and optimise key characteristics such as resilience, focus and self-confidence or to identify potential situations where coping with the stress and pressure may be difficult, business people can be guided to work that best suits their individual mental toughness capabilities and as such avoid the development of workplace stress.
The reader should also take note of the key research limitations. The time taken to complete the research meant that some of the focus group participants were unable or unwilling to participate in the individual interviews. The sample size of participants was only twelve and as such further data may provide more attributes and the characteristic of the individuals chosen may provide a general view of business mental toughness, which may well be different if participants were chosen from the same work environment or academic background. The use of retrospective evaluation is also open to attribution bias and these must be considered when reviewing the findings. Finally the reader should also be aware that the analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts and the identification of the major and constituent attributes was completed by the researcher only and as such it is suggested that future researchers review the transcripts and the coding process in order to satisfy themselves that all of the attributes are present and that none have been missed.
6 CONCLUSION

The goals of this thesis were to: (a) understand whether mental toughness was recognised within a business context, (b) determine whether the existing definitions of [sporting] mental toughness also described business mental toughness or whether a revised definition was required, (c) identify the essential characteristics which underpin the mentally tough performer within a business environment, (d) assess these characteristics against a representative sporting framework of mental toughness devised by sports coaches to determine similarities and differences in the characteristics, (e) identify any underlying mechanisms that contribute to the development and maintenance of business mental toughness and (f) determine whether the adoption of a sporting mental toughness approach is suitable within a business environment either directly or in an amended form.

Each question was successfully answered by eliciting the thoughts and personal theories of twelve independent business professionals with over 330 years of business experience. The three focus groups and the five individual interviews produced over 300 pages of verbatim transcripts from which over 400 individual attribute statements were captured creating 105 characteristics which were further codified into sixty-six attributes or characteristics and then grouped into eleven themes. These attributes were then compared with those identified within sport to determine whether the sporting attributes of mental toughness mirrored the business view of mental toughness. The process for capturing the data and analysing the outputs was time consuming but extremely rewarding as the rich context of the verbatim responses highlighted in the findings section clearly articulates what mental toughness is to the business professionals who participated in this study.

*Is mental toughness recognised within a business context?*

As with the development of sporting mental toughness knowledge eleven years ago, prior to this research study the view of business mental toughness has to date been based on anecdotal accounts and the application of sporting mental toughness frameworks within
business as evidence that mental toughness exists and is accepted within business. This research study confirms that mental toughness is recognised within a business context and has many common attributes with sporting mental toughness. Like previous sporting studies (see Bull et al., 2005 and Connaughton et al., 2008) business mental toughness has been described as context and/or industry specific, developed over time and through experiences (Marchant et al., 2008) rather than being purely a genetic trait, although there may be some genetic predisposition to being mentally tough (Horsburgh et al., 2009).

Do sporting definitions of mental toughness described business mental toughness?

As an exploratory study of business mental toughness characteristics it is clear that like the many number of sporting mental toughness definitions, there are a number of core characteristics centred on an individual’s ability to cope with performance or delivery (see Jones et al. 2002, 2007; Bull et al. 2005; Thelwell et al. 2005; Connaughton et al. 2008; Gucciardi et al. 2008). The competitive element of the sporting definitions however does not work for many business contexts and as such it is suggested that a definition that encompasses the different idiosyncratic views of business individuals is required. The following definition is proposed that brings together the core elements of the sporting definitions provided to date, i.e. coping with stress and pressure (Jones et al., 2002) and the underlying mechanics, i.e. skills, values and beliefs (Gucciardi et al., 2008) without the focus on competition and winning:

Business mental toughness is a set of cognitive skills, values and beliefs that enable business people to consistently cope with the stress and pressure of their work and its environment in an emotionally balanced and controlled way, whilst maintaining a positive impact on others.

It should be noted that this is a working definition and further investigation is needed to determine its acceptance amongst a wider audience of business professionals, however in order to further advance the research into business mental toughness a working definition is required.
What are the essential characteristics of the mentally tough businessperson?

Whilst there are clearly differences between business and sporting mental toughness, there are also a set of major themes that transcend contexts and as such could be considered to be central to mental toughness in general. In this study eleven major themes were identified; self belief, handling pressure, focus & commitment, motivation, control, tough attitude, resilience, personal values, work ethic, emotional intelligence and knowledge. Inclusive of these eleven major themes there were a total of sixty-six attributes identified (a full review of these attributes can be found in Table 4.5 (p. 121).

What is also noticeable is that business mental toughness encompasses a broader set of characteristics, behaviours and skills which enable mental toughness. It is suggested that these attributes may also be important within sport, however the coach or sports psychologist may act as a proxy for some of the these attributes, e.g. the ability to prioritise or meticulous planning may not be a skill of the sports performer or indeed may be lacking, however as this skill is provided for by the coach or another support person then the lack of capability does not affect the sports performer. This would suggest that in order to be mentally tough sports performers do require others to support them and where there is a lack of support and capability stress and pressure could affect performance. This is important to understand further as the role of business coaches, mentors and psychologists could aid the development of mental toughness and fill the capability gaps that certain individuals have in order to ensure that they are able to perform to the highest level.

It is also noticeable that one of the major characteristics identified in sport, physical toughness was not identified in business, in addition there was also one new characteristic identified within business that has yet to be documented in sport. This characteristic, the impact of mental toughness on others, has an important role to play when we consider the role that mental toughness may play within leadership. Further there may ultimately be more than one form of mental toughness, one that has an intimidatory effect on others
[competitive mental toughness] and one which has an influencing effect [collaborative mental toughness]. How these are developed or governed is yet to be determined, however there is clearly an intimidating element to sporting mental toughness which may limit its suitability within business and practitioners and business leaders should be mindful of the potential damage a sporting mental toughness approach could take within the workplace.

*Is business and sporting mental toughness characterised in the same way?*

Although business mental toughness research is still in its infancy, this thesis contributes to the current conceptualisation of mental toughness in business. Findings from this research, suggest that business mental toughness is conceptually the same as sporting mental toughness in that; it is multifaceted (Connaughton et al., 2008; Gucciardi et al., 2008); is made up of the same key components broadly classified as attitudes, cognitions, emotions, values, and behaviours (Gucciardi et al., 2008); consists of a core set of key characteristics that would not be very different to sport (e.g., resilience, self-belief/confidence, personal values, emotional control, self-motivation, tough attitudes); and encompasses dealing with and thriving through both negatively and positively construed situations or critical incidents (Gucciardi, Gordon, & Dimmock, 2009a).

The identification and description of the characteristics of business mental toughness and their contrasts is one of the key contributions that this study makes to the literature. No other research has conceptualized business mental toughness in the context of what individuals believe it encompasses as well as what it does not. This opens the possibility for constructs to be understood as opposed to being misunderstood or misquoted. However this is only the first real assessment of what business mental toughness can be and as such some of the characteristics identified may ultimately be proven not to be a common characteristic of business mental toughness or indeed may be conflated into a single characteristic or expanded into a further set of subordinate characteristics. When assessing the relative importance of the attributes there is clearly a difference in what is considered the most important within sport and business which again supports the notion
that mental toughness is context specific, or more specifically the importance and utilisation of attributes is dependent upon both the situation and the individual performer.

**How is business mental toughness developed?**

Unlike Connaughton *et al.* (2008) the primary focus of this study was not to identify specifically how mental toughness is developed and maintained within a business context. During the focus group and interview discussions a number of factors were referenced as to how mental toughness may be developed. Notwithstanding the nature v nurture debate these development experiences relate to four scenarios; a) observational workplace development, b) educational development c) parental development and d) development though adversity. All participants within the study were in agreement that in their opinion mental toughness could be developed and whilst some may be predisposed to being more or less mentally toughness from a genetic perspective nevertheless mental toughness can be learned or developed.

**Are sporting mental toughness frameworks suitable for business?**

Clearly the attributes associated with business mental toughness have similarities with sporting mental toughness however there are also some significantly differences which would suggest that the adoption of the sporting framework for mental toughness is not appropriate. The current frameworks developed within sport should be considered sport specific and as such should not be applied within a business context. Indeed whilst this research provides a comprehensive list of the characteristics that define business mental toughness further work is required before a framework for business mental toughness can be agreed. This research thesis does suggest that the framework developed by Guicciardi *et al.* (2008) may well be suitable within a business context however further research is required in order to test the suitability of this framework or to develop a specific framework for business mental toughness.
Summary

In summary the overall output from this research has a number of implications for practitioners working within businesses. Firstly, not all of the characteristics identified are consistent with sporting definitions of mental toughness, although this research does suggest a similar set of major mental toughness themes are evident in business mental toughness (e.g., self-belief, attention control, motivation, commitment and determination, positive and tough attitude, resilience, enjoying and handling pressure, and quality preparation) the importance of these differ across roles, individuals and business cultures.

Physical Toughness was not considered an element of business mental toughness, as Leadership, or the impact we have on others was not considered a key theme within sport. This may simply be a result of the focus taken in the study and roles such as Debt Collector, stunt man or bodyguard may well be roles where Physical Toughness is essential, as a study in sport focused solely on captains of teams may well elicit more characteristics centred on leadership of others rather than a ‘self’ focus which is consistent with the vast majority of the current sporting literature. As with the findings from sport, efforts to develop and/or enhance mental toughness should incorporate educational and experiential workshops targeting the skills identified in the study.

Whilst there seem to be several major mental toughness characteristics, this study also evidenced several characteristics that are unique to business. It should therefore be recognizing that when developing programmes for business mental toughness that these business-specific characteristics are catered for. The outcome of the research has confirmed that mental toughness is recognised within a business context and the benefits of being able to cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment would be significantly beneficial to businesses and business as a whole. As a result it is expected that as the knowledge and experience of this phenomenon grows it will become more of an important capability as businesses seek to ensure that their employees are less susceptible to work place stress.
Further research is required to ensure that the current list of characteristics is exhaustive. We should accept that mental toughness does exist as a concept within business, and that whilst it shares commonalities with sporting mental toughness the attributes required by performers in both contexts are different. Whilst the findings enable the development of an investigatory framework of business mental toughness further research is also required to explain the processes and mechanisms involved in its development and maintenance of business mental toughness.

Finally this thesis provides the basis for further empirical research into business mental toughness, as well as providing guidance as to some of the conceptual and practical implications for the use of mental toughness techniques within a business environment. Given the £25.9 billion is lost due to workplace stress in the UK alone, there is sufficient demand and reason to further the research into the stress coping capabilities of mental toughness and ensure that the correct type of mental toughness is developed within business.
7 **BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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### Appendix A – Participant Details

<table>
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Focus Group: 1

Topic: Business Mental Toughness

Date: 10/10/10

Attendees: Pam, David and Clare

Interviewer: To start with I’d like you to discuss amongst yourselves what you think the term “business mental toughness” means so we shall just take 5/10 minutes to discuss it amongst yourselves and then I’m going to ask you to think about it from your own perspective and then bring those definitions back together to see if as a group we can make a definition of what you believe “business mental toughness” to be so I’ll leave the floor to you guys.

PAM: OK – well do you think mental toughness is something you have before you start or is it something that develops?

DAVID: Almost certainly something that develops over time I would suggest. I think there are elements of … well you’re going way back now to “nature and nurture” – elements must be contained within your personality.

PAM: Whether that be nature or nurture?

DAVID: Yes, whether some of that would be, I guess, a function of past parentage and some of it would be very much early years’ experience I would have thought but quite a lot of it will also be experience of going in business I think. I mean the experience here of going on the MBA programme develops a mental toughness.

PAM: In what way?

DAVID: In the way that the course I remember which was a while ago, was highly intensive and generated, almost purposely in the way it was developed and put together, created points of conflict and points of tension which groups had to resolve or

PAM: But how are you defining toughness then because I sort of think of it as determination – old fashioned grit and determination and I’m thinking of the sports side of it where you’ve got 2 people who are equally fit and equal in
their capabilities yet one will win every time because they’ve got the mental toughness and the ability to have confidence in themselves and their own abilities.

DAVID  I would call that focus.

PAM  Well they’re both related so for me mental toughness is about having confidence in your own abilities and having not only a vision of where you want to be but a view that you can get there. That’s leadership though as well isn’t it?

CLARE  We could draw a Venn diagram

PAM  Would it be worth having a quick fire of adjectives that describe the facets of toughness because I’ll think we’ll end up with quite a long list?

Interviewer  We’ll come on to that list – what I’m interested in is to say that marketing is making ordinary extraordinary, for example. What would you define business mental toughness is, not the characteristics – if we were describing a car, it’s not a door, a car will take you from A to B – transportation. So what is business mental toughness?

CLARE  Well I would say it’s having the resilience and ability to succeed in a business context.

PAM  I think it’s also that you have to fundamentally have that ability but it’s how it is developed and your individual strength or how you may feel you need a support network but ultimately it’s down to your own grit and determination because you have to stand by your own decisions.

CLARE  But I think you can develop mental toughness in that if you’re put through a very stressed environment you usually come out of it stronger and if I can survive that I become even tougher survive even more.

DAVID  I think that experience of having been through it that’s really important.

PAM  But there’s a flip side of that isn’t there because of dealing with that particular stressful situation, the other side of that is the strength of it all is that you have to make those tough decisions which may not necessarily be
stressful but that you have to make those sole decisions that other people are not prepared to make so you just have to get on with it and do it.

CLARE You’re in a situation where the buck stops here and you’ve just got make somebody redundant, we can’t afford this cost base therefore we’ve got to make some tough decisions but at the end of the day, although I can take a view, I’ve got to make the decision.

PAM The needs of the many outweigh the needs of a few.

DAVID Well I wonder whether one needs to deploy one’s mental toughness all the time or whether its’ key deployment is at times of great stress or great conflict.

PAM Well I don’t agree.

CLARE Different leadership styles come through and its mental toughness that sometimes do you want to show mental weakness to bring a team on that aren’t quite there yet.

DAVID Yes, it’s the contrast of leadership versus being a complete bastard all the time in a sense.

CLARE Being a complete bastard is not necessarily mental toughness in my view

DAVID Yes, it could be mental weakness.

PAM An example of one that may not be to do with being a bastard or being perceived as being strong and tough is that I’ve just ended a 5 year contract with the MOD, it took 2 years to negotiate it and it was mentally tough, to deal with bigoted views, we’re only a small engineering firm, we have unique abilities but I, as MD, have got to be strong enough to deal with each and every focus from different directions which were really quite harsh and bang out of order at times but you deal with it and get on with it and that’s another example of having to be mentally strong enough to deal with different situations.

DAVID So what is mental toughness, complete the sentence. Mental toughness is…
PAM       The ability to deal with given business situations whatever they may be.

DAVID     All business?

CLARE     Could be mental flexibility.

CLARE     Yes, if you think about the word “tough” – resilience, strength.

PAM       At the end of the day, it’s your ability

CLARE     Couldn’t you have group mental toughness?

DAVID     I think resilience is as close as you get to it in terms of your ability to bounce back.

PAM       It’s belief in myself as well and believing in your decision, you don’t always make the right decision at a particular time but you stand by it and believe in it and get on with it and that’s the strength, isn’t it?

CLARE     Yes. But also when you come across something that’s not as you thought you don’t say “oh, that’s it” and through in the towel, you say “right, I’ll adapt and move on”. So it’s an ability to overcome hurdles and overcome difficulties or setbacks that for me is an important part of toughness. You know the person that at the end of day know everything’s against them but they can still pick themselves up and get on with it.

PAM       But there’s also an indication that toughness delivers the right outcomes.

CLARE     But I don’t think it does always.

PAM       OK, I was just thinking that success and all that but you can be mentally tough in a business environment but if actually you screw up every time...

Interviewer You call them a psychopath!

CLARE     Yes, I’m sure there are times when mental toughness is not a benefit, I’m going to keep on trying to make this business work, I’m going to keep on banging my head against a brick wall and get the same answer but I’m tough so I keep going because my plan’s right. That’s a bad version of mental toughness.
Interviewer: And that might be an attribute or characteristic within mental toughness,

CLARE: A good side or a bad side, yes ...

Interviewer: What you are able to define are these are possibly the characteristics of mental toughness that lead to, when you define it, success which some of you alluded to, certainly CLARE at the beginning, mental toughness within sport is linked to success and therefore, what is that success? So you’re all beginning to develop what you think is a view point on what you think mental toughness is and I wanted you to debate it first of all so that you would “powder our kegs” a little bit with regard to our thoughts. What I’d like you to do now is actually think from our own perspective to define a definition of mental toughness. It’s what you think it is, it might not be the finished article, per se, now – you might want to go back and change it later on this afternoon or you might want to go back and change it next week and there’s no right or wrong answer as I said but what I’m interested in is what you think mental toughness is and is like “the car goes from A to B, it’s got 4 doors, tyres and wheels and everything else”. We’re not into the kind of detail yet, we’ll get to that so what I’d like you to do is take 5/10 minutes now, bullet points are OK but if you can come up with a succinct sentence. I’ll give you 5/10 minutes; you’ve got paper, etc.

LONG GAP

Interviewer: What I’d like to do is bring together your own viewpoints and a group definition and I don’t want to lead you in any way to define what you think your definition is but what we want to do is get to a definition of what someone would ultimately gain from being mentally tough as opposed to someone who perhaps lacks it. We’re not saying necessarily that they’re mentally weak but they lack mental toughness. So to kick-start that, it would be worthwhile for you to all read out your definitions and for the other 2 to note down that definition so that we can get all 3 into our heads. So I we take DAVID first and note down his definition and between the three of you come to an agreement. You might not get complete agreement but if we can get as close to a succinct definition as possible, that would be ideal.

DAVID: OK, so I went for a sort of strapline approach like you suggested and it sounds very trite actually! Business mental toughness is believing that you can make the impossible possible when faced with extraordinary odds.
Interviewer  OK.

PAM  Can you read it again?

DAVID  Business mental toughness is believing that you can make the impossible, possible when faced with extraordinary odds.

PAM  Like it.

DAVID  Slightly too facile.

Interviewer  But there are interesting things in that we can tease and play with so it’s a good start.

CLARE  I’ve gone for a definition approach so “mental toughness is defined as the determination and resilience of an individual to succeed in business, underpinned by a clarity of vision and strong self-belief.” Then I had a couple of bullets which followed saying that I think it can be applied to teams, when you get groups of people you can increase your mental toughness because the power and belief of a group of individuals can work even stronger than an individual. I think it can be developed through learning and not gender specific because in a lot of work situations you get male dominant but I think there are a lot of tough women but they might display it in a slightly different way.

Interviewer  OK, can you read it out again?

CLARE  The definition? “Mental toughness is defined as the determination and resilience of an individual to succeed in business, underpinned by a clarity of vision and strong self-belief.”

Interviewer  The criteria you added at the end?

CLARE  I think it can be applied to teams and suppose I’m thinking a synergy effect of a group of people who are tough but can be even tougher when they are together, self-belief increases in teams.

Interviewer  OK.
CLARE: I believe it can be developed through learning and that’s about making small steps and building up confidence.

Interviewer: So nurture as well as …

CLARE: Yes.

Interviewer: Definitely not just nature?

CLARE: Definitely and that it’s not gender specific. You get a lot of talk about tough males.

Interviewer: Excellent, thank you for that, really good. PAM?

PAM: “The confidence and ability to make a decision in any situation and deliver a strong and effective solution”.

Interviewer: OK, can you just read that again?

PAM: “It’s the confidence and ability to make a decision in any situation and deliver a strong and effective solution”.

DAVID: Can you just give me that last clause again?

PAM: “Deliver a strong and effective solution”.

Interviewer: OK, 3 quite different – similar but different definitions there. You’re looking at potentially the same thing from 3 different perspectives.

PAM: The bias is that we will be successful and we have to have that otherwise we’d just be second guessing ourselves all the time.

DAVID: If it was successful …

Interviewer: So if we can get back to, predominantly from an individual perspective, that’s not to discount the fact that teams can have mental toughness. Within sports and sports research, they’ve looked at individual sports as well as team sports and they’ve looked at physical as well as non-physical sports. Obviously, rugby league, American football, Australian rules football are all
physical sports which have a level of toughness associated with them and what we have to be able to do is differentiate between that physical toughness from that mental toughness so gymnasts, darts players, snooker players – whatever the sport.

CLARE  
Golfers must have incredible mental toughness.

Interviewer  
Yes, so it’s mental toughness we’re focussed on, not physical toughness and we are assuming that this is positive attribute for an individual and therefore if someone was to be mentally tough they would be successful. Defining success in business is slightly more complex than within sport and if within your definition, you’ve come up with an element that defines success, this is fine. Can I leave you now to debate this – to go through those 3 definitions which are all right because they’re your definitions but are there things you’ve got in common and tease out that we all agree that this is a component and then pull it back together to create a group definition. I’ll give you 15 minutes to debate/discuss that.

CLARE  
I liked DAVID’s when he said “faced with extraordinary odds”, that this isn’t just a normal level of ability but it’s going beyond, that’s what sets apart someone who’s mentally tough and I haven’t put that at all in mine

PAM  
But you’ve put that it’s an individual which that is what it is ultimately, the focus of mental toughness is not when you’re part of a team but when you’re leading a team, when you’re isolated, that’s the ultimate mental toughness. You’re making the decision, the buck stops with you.

DAVID  
Mental toughness implies that you’re not in an ordinary situation.

CLARE  
You may just be working against extreme boredom and that’s mentally tough.

Interviewer  
And that’s a very interesting point – extreme boredom and what you’re describing in terms of extraordinary – it’s something that enables someone to do something that another cannot do.

CLARE  
Yes, that's right. I like that word “extraordinary”.

DAVID  
It’s not necessarily “Indiana Jones”, just that this job is incredibly uninspiring …
CLARE: Or requires incredible concentration – a very difficult mathematical puzzle. You’re working in some nuclear laboratory somewhere on some really difficult problem and you’ve just got to think.

PAM: And that’s why extraordinary odds or extraordinary situations. I think “extraordinary” is perfect and “individual” is perfect.

CLARE: Keep those words. I’m interested in your word “decisions” as I think “decisions” is important because decisions are important and sometimes those who aren’t considered to be tough are often the ditherers.

Interviewer: Let’s not think about the negative, just the positive.

CLARE: The people who sit on the fence and never really make a decision.

DAVID: You don’t need to be mentally tough if the buck never stops with you, you can always say “it’s not my decision” so the decision making piece, accountability and responsibility are not words we’ve used but they seem to me to be quite powerful because if you didn’t have those …

PAM: The presumption that we are all or assumption is there are a lot of words in here.

DAVID: You know that he’s agonised about it for so long that he’s going to take the flak for it.

PAM: You’re back to that leadership, isn’t it?

DAVID: Yes, although leadership is a result of but there is a piece of accountability and responsibility here. You’ve sweated blood for 2 years because of your belief of what you’re trying to supply to the MOD but also you’re accountable for all the people working, making the product.

PAM: Yes, I had to make a conscious decision that a certain amount of my additional time had to focus on one project whilst keeping the rest going and that’s what you were saying about keeping a particular maths problem, you have to make the decision on that with lack of spending any time with your family, it’s a decision, isn’t it? That’s mental toughness.
Interviewer: This is good because what you’re teasing out now is what the business element means. Football is 11 players either side trying to put the ball in the goal, 90 minutes, defined. But how you define business and what you were saying is that these elements of business, such as making decisions, being accountable are elements that require mental toughness.

DAVID: A sense of responsibility to the other people in the business. Well, if I don’t deliver this there are 200 people out on the shop floor who will lose their jobs. There is a facet of mental toughness around that.

CLARE: And the understanding that not only do you have that responsibility but you have to live with it. I know that I have to make those decisions even though I know it’s going to affect the lives of those 200 people.

DAVID: Yes because the thing about leadership – I sometimes have a bit of a problem with the word “leadership” because people do assume it’s something that you do, in a way you do, but I think leadership’s a result of you doing a bunch of other things.

PAM: No because if you’re not a strong leader and you don’t give direction, people something to focus on and work towards, there will be chaos.

Interviewer: I wouldn’t discount that but we may go into a debate on leadership and we don’t want a definition of that!

CLARE: OK, well we liked “extraordinary”, we liked “individual” …

DAVID: I liked “confidence”, “determination” and “resilience” or are they the same? No, they’re probably different but complimentary words.

PAM: Yes, “resilience” is different to “confidence” because just because you’re confident with something, you’ve got to have the resilience to take the flack.

DAVID: And “ability”. Without ability if you’re mentally tough, would you just fall over at the first hurdle?

CLARE: Well I think you can be mentally tough without having abilities.

PAM: Whether you’re successful or not,
Well, you’re probably not successful then. The ability for me comes in if you’re successful at the outcome but you can be mentally tough without it.

You’re now starting to develop this picture in your head of what mental toughness is which as we go through the rest of the focus group discussion may or may not change. Again, when you talked about being successful and we talked about a number of attributes here, there may be attributes to mental toughness that you do consider to be detrimental and it’s how we balance those.

Do you want us to make a definition out of the words we like?

Yes

It’s a clarity of focus, a strong self-belief.

You do have some words in there where it’s semantics, however, as we go further into this process you may have a different viewpoint – a different viewpoint on determination, I will be interested to see what you consider the opposite to be. That’s quite often what will help us understand what your view is but again what I’ll add is that it’s not wrong.

Can I suggest that we take DAVID’s and we put in the other bits that we like, so if we start with one. We had the words “Business mental toughness is” which is probably a good way to start! Now you had the words “believing you can make the impossible possible”, let’s look at self-belief. So “Business mental toughness is …

What did you say?

Self-belief

OK, let’s start with that.

Sorry, I paraphrased yours. I did like your “making the impossible possible” but think it’s a bit “strap liney”.

Yes, I agree

Is the self-belief and confidence.
PAM Isn’t self-belief and confidence one and the same?

CLARE Yes, it might be, probably similar enough to be

DAVID Self-belief is probably more internal and confidence is more external.

CLARE Well I’ve got determination

DAVID Let’s start with “having the self-belief

CLARE And then we’re going to list so can we list “determination” “resilience”. Do you want both of those or not?

DAVID I think resilience is what gives toughness and determination almost.

CLARE We’ve got “self-belief and resilience to deliver”, shall we pick from yours now,

PAM “A strong and effective solution when faced with extraordinary odds”. So we’ve got “strong and effective” and “resilience”.

DAVID I think “vision” needs to be in there somewhere.

PAM Yes, I was thinking that.

DAVID It is part of the self-belief piece but I think there’s something about the vision because in the end, people say that person was incredibly tough but they kept at it because …

CLARE I used the term “clarity of vision” earlier on; can we fit that in somewhere?

DAVID It’s having the self-belief, determination and resilience …

PAM Is it “having the clarity of vision, self-belief and determination

CLARE “Having the clarity of vision and self-belief with determination and resilience to deliver a strong, effective solution when faced with extraordinary odds”

General agreement
“Business mental toughness is having the clarity of vision and self-belief, with determination and resilience to deliver a strong and effective solution when faced with extraordinary odds”. How about that then, team!

Interviewer Are you all happy with that?

General agreement

CLARE It’s a really good start, actually. We couldn’t have got there an hour ago!

Interviewer Very good. I’m impressed. There’s always a challenge to see if you can get 3 people to come to a consensus and that’s the first hurdle over actually so thank you very much.

CLARE Does that mean we’ve got business mental toughness?!

Interviewer The first thing we have to do is hang our hats on something by having a definition, one of the challenges that we currently face in research is that there currently is no definition of business mental toughness or there wasn’t until 90 seconds ago!

CLARE Oh, I’ve just realised something. I don’t mean to pour rain on the party, or whatever the expression is. We missed out accountability and responsibility out of the definition. Do we want to put those in?

DAVID There’s a whole bunch of words we could have put in. I mean before I came up with my definition I came up with a whole bunch of words and I think you did likewise.

Interviewer It’s not set in stone, what I’ll do whilst we do the next stuff is write this down and we can go back to it. What we’ve done is give ourselves a “starter for ten” for the definition then we’re going to move on to what the characteristics are so you’re already moving down that line with those comments there. So in this section we’re going to talk about what you believe the characteristics are, the qualities of a business mentally tough professional are and this can be based on yourself or another individual or other individuals and the result will be a comprehensive profile that you, as a group, believe are the characteristics or qualities of a mentally tough business performer is. Lots of people have used the term mental toughness, you only have to watch the
TV and the phrase is bandied about by commentators but very few people have been able to define what it is and a list of the characteristics across different sporting arenas.

Interviewer

So we’ve now got our definition of what a car is or a car will do this for us and that’s great, fantastic, what we want to do now we’ve defined the car, what actually makes up the elements of that car. So what are the 4 wheels, the seats, it’s got to have an engine, exhaust, etc, etc. Now, I’ll give you a couple of analogies of the way I’d like you to think about this. Firstly, from a sporting perspective, I play golf and if I was to think about who the most mentally tough golfer is or the ideal golfer – some people might say Tiger Woods but recent times have shown that he isn’t necessarily the best and he doesn’t hit the top of the rankings on everything – he can’t drive the ball as well as some players can but he does have certain mental strengths when he’s playing but then there are people like Phil Mickelson who’s got his tenacity or his stickability, he doesn’t give in. There are people who have a lot of flair when they play like Seve Ballesteros, etc and if we think about business professionals, we might think of the tenacity of Alan Sugar or the creativity of Anita Roddick or the passion and exuberance of Alexander McQueen. So there are a number of different individuals who you might say actually no one individual is perfect and again, we want to temper this with the concept of mental toughness so it may be a person – you might think that person has it all or you might say I have it all and this is the reason why or you might say actually I want to take a little bit from this person and a little bit from that person but as you build it up, those are the characteristics of what I would consider a mentally tough business professional. So again, you can think about your own business environment, situations or scenarios that you have experienced mental toughness in relation to what we can now hang our hat on, situations where people have shown clarity of vision or self-belief, determination or resilience to deliver strong, effective solutions when faced with extraordinary odds. So in those situations what are characteristics those individuals demonstrate. So what I’d like you to do now is to take some time to write down what you think those characteristics are and it can be an exhaustive list so we’ll do it individually in the first instance so again, write down as many characteristics as you believe in and we’ll start to delve into those and make new characteristics to actually be split into a number of characteristics as you all have a different viewpoint. Or it may be that you all think exactly the same thing which again, is fine.

Long pause
Interviewer: OK, we’ll start to discuss them and try to illicit further characteristics and ideas as the whole purpose of what we’re trying to achieve. Again, there’s no right or wrong answer so if you say I think this is a characteristic and the other 2 start to giggle, it doesn’t matter as it’s your own professional viewpoint – although given that you came up with a definition quite quickly I think you’re all thinking about this in the same sort of ways, I don’t think we’ve got group thinking in any way, shape or form but again what we want to do is understand your own individual viewpoints so if you disagree and have a different view, please tell us. What we’ll do is go round each of you individually, naming characteristics, if you’ve named one, we can cross it off but what we will do is illicit the detail around these characteristics – it might identify that you have something that’s different and we’ll come on to that. So we’ll try and create a list in the first instance and then we’ll tease out what we call the opposite to that characteristic. So if I can start with DAVID, what would your first one be?

DAVID: Focus

CLARE: Self-reliance

PAM: Confident

DAVID: Self-belief in one’s own capability

CLARE: Positive outlook

PAM: Deal with pressure

DAVID: Accountable

CLARE: Decisive

PAM: Capable

DAVID: Skilled. Is that the same as capable? I think there is a certain level of basic skills, competencies, capabilities …

Interviewer: OK, well we’ll come back to that.
CLARE Assertiveness

PAM The ability to shut off from external distractions which is different to focus.

Interviewer That's fine

DAVID Experience, by which I mean, tested, fireproofed to a certain extent.

CLARE Target or outcome driven

PAM Decision maker

DAVID Convincing, has personal presence

Interviewer I'm going to split those into two if you don't mind

CLARE Endurance

PAM Responsible

DAVID Situational, able to adopt different styles to meet different needs.

PAM I've put adaptable.

CLARE I've put this down but don't know if I believe it completely – intelligence

PAM Think it helps!

DAVID It's a bit like skilled, isn't it? Below a certain threshold I would have thought mental toughness just becomes stupidity, personal view.

Interviewer And again, it's about your personal view, there may be a threshold and again, research has shown that being above a certain threshold doesn't give you mental toughness. Any more, again if we've exhausted your list, it's not a problem.

CLARE Clarity of thought, we've had focus but it's another way of saying it.

Interviewer That's fine, as we expand on these in a second, we might identify that those are 2 very distinct characteristics or they might be the same.
DAVID Resilient, empathic – having empathy.

CLARE Yes because I started writing down some negative connotations of mental toughness and I had not empathetic in there. People who don’t give a damn about anyone else because you’re so tough.

Interviewer We’ll come back to that one and we’ll pick up on what’s described as negative.

CLARE I’ve got a list of negative ones, you don’t want those yet?

Interviewer Well, what I want is what the positive side is.

DAVID Well I think it’s important to have empathy and I’ve also got forgiving.

Interviewer Have you got any more on your list, PAM?

PAM Not really, just witterings.

Interviewer OK, we can bring those in, don’t hold anything back.

CLARE I’ve got a couple of others. Did we put visionary? Have we got determined? We probably have but if not, it should be on there. Strong, these are just words. Confidence, have we got confidence?

DAVID Well, I put confident and achiever.

CLARE Perceptive and I also put in intuitive.

Interviewer Any more?

DAVID I put in information processor, someone who’s analytical and able to process information.

PAM I stopped myself going down that particular route because, to me, that’s going down the leadership route again, not mental toughness but that must be how my brain works.
We don’t have to within what we’re defining here, limit ourselves into mental toughness is this, leadership is that and there is no overlap. It’s a quality of an individual and an individual may be a good leader and be mentally tough. An individual may not be mentally tough and you may or may not believe they can be good leaders so leadership is potentially a result of followers whereas mental toughness is a result of how an individual deals with situations and has (as you would say) clarity of vision, determination and resilience to deliver a strong, effective solution when faced with extraordinary odds. That could be a leader or that could be a follower. So again, if you’re thinking this might be leadership – if someone was mentally tough at the start would this characteristic, attribute fit?

Now you’ve just gone through that and ticked it, I can see that.

Have we got some more to add to the list?

Can we single-handed and focused?

I thought about a couple of people I regarded as mentally tough, they have a strong values system, they have beliefs that they hold very, very strongly based around the values they hold.

Any more?

Just compulsive, does that start going in the negatives?

No, if you believe compulsive is a negative, when we get to it I’ll ask you “does this support your definition or is it the opposite and therefore there’s an opposite that we’ve not covered yet.

Yes but if you’re not compulsive, you’re not mentally tough. I think there’s an element of compulsion.

I’ve put a phrase “total commitment to the cause”

Is compulsive different to commitment?

Yes, I think it is.

Committed. I put adaptable.
DAVID I think it’s commitment to the cause because of the vision so maybe we’re combining things we shouldn’t be combining right now. I’m mentally tough because I’m absolutely 100% committed to going down that route there which may be good or bad.

CLARE I know and that’s why I got on to, as well as compulsive, obsessive! I might be getting too negative there.

Interviewer You might think of it as a positive or maybe a negative. You may think that’s actually a positive attribute to an immensely tough individual but does it create positivity to your definition, does it align with this and that’s what we’ll come back to.

DAVID Did you have a session yesterday?

Interviewer No.

DAVID OK.

Interviewer You were going to ask me what their definition was.

DAVID No, no I wasn’t going to ask but I was interested to know if you’d got a different perspective.

Interviewer I’ve got different perspectives from the existing research and the sporting research and what I would say is what that the whole plan with this research is that I believe what’s currently available in business is what they’ve taken from sport and is inappropriate and inaccurate. I would speculate at the moment that you’re looking at things and business is a different context to sport and therefore, your characteristics will ultimately be different and the headline things you’re starting to identify may or may not come from sport.

CLARE Or we don’t think they’re very appropriate.

Interviewer Where you going at the moment is perfect from my perspective in the sense that you’re going in the right direction, thinking about it in the right way, the fact that you’re associating it with leadership and that environment, there’s nothing wrong with that. They aren’t mutually exclusive, again there’s no right or wrong answer but what I’d like to do now is really start to tease those
characteristics out and also start to look for some examples of where or whom may have demonstrated by an individual or scenarios where you believe it's important and potentially, why you think it's important as we go through these. Now I know you've all suggested your own individual ones but if you've all put this particular word or concept down so as I introduce it I'll work around the group to see what exactly you think that means and I'm going to challenge you with what you believe the opposite is. So if they didn't have this, what would they be? So if for example, you mentioned the word “empathy” or not empathetic you went on to say “not give a damn” and we may go beyond that to something else. So empathy is one thing and ultimately, we'll end up with it's a ..., it's not a ... That's not really where we want to aim with this, what we want is that if we give you the 2 phrases, you can say “I'm this” or “I'm that” from those particular phrases.

CLARE Oh, I see, like a psychometric tool.

Interviewer Yes, but polar opposites essentially and the reason why I'm interested in the polar opposites for example is that if I was to say “what is the opposite of good?”

PAM/CLARE Bad

Interviewer But it could be evil. Now I'd be thinking slightly differently if I was thinking good and evil and you were thinking good and bad, then again it could be the different context as well, that's why there isn't a right or wrong when you come up with these polar opposites.

DAVID Can I just add another one to the list? People who are incredibly hardworking, diligent and industrious so they really put in a shift as well.

Interviewer We'll start at the top with the first one we put on and again, we'll try and understand what we mean. Focused, so what would you describe as the polar opposite to focused? And give me an example of why you think focused is important as regards business mental toughness.

DAVID Focused is for me is being able to keep my eye on the ultimate end game and not get distracted by interesting and perhaps related issues which don't necessarily contribute to achievement of the end game.
Interviewer OK, so in that description would you say the polar opposite of focused is easily distracted?

DAVID Or incapable of maintaining a single focus.

PAM I’ve just put “ditsy”!

CLARE Well, I put “wishy washy” on my list.

Interviewer So would you say ditsy and wishy washy?

CLARE No, wishy washy is probably more indecisive. But on your focused, I think you’re either focused or you’re distracted by everything else.

Interviewer And do you have examples or are you thinking of specific people or any scenarios where you may have observed or yourselves, you may have been able to maintain focus.

DAVID There are examples of where people have been incredibly focused in delivering the task. There’s a guy who used to work with me, in a consultancy environment everybody wanted him to be a leader, he was just so task focused, the job was going to get done on time with this guy – absolutely no distraction, no deviation, he was an animal – it was going to happen and he was a very, very tough person to work with.

Interviewer This is very interesting and if you don’t mind, can we just explore this. You describe him as an animal and a tough person but he’s also a nice guy. What are the characteristics he demonstrated – he was a nice guy but he was tough, what was the word you used was “animal”, what exactly did you mean by this, was he a tiger or …

DAVID Someone who was a taskmaster who wouldn’t let people get away with not doing something for the delivery of the task.

PAM He was focused, he wasn’t lenient.

DAVID He was totally focused, his mantra (which I think is really good, by the way) was “what value did you deliver today?” or “what value are you going to deliver today?” so he was just down that line whereas people who were
slightly less than that – I think the margin between that good consultant who’s got less focus is very tiny, it’s just perhaps the way that people …

PAM  It’s attention to detail.

DAVID  It is attention to detail but also his style and how he passed the time of day almost – someone else would start the day by saying “come on guys, let’s get a coffee, we’ll sit down and decide how we’re going to play today” whereas George would have none of that crap.

PAM  Decisive

DAVID  So actually not particularly empathetic at times.

Interviewer  But “at times”

DAVID  Very rarely! We were talking about focus.

Interviewer  Yes, but let’s explore – someone you described as tough and focused but would you say that person was mentally tough. Just for the record, DAVID is looking at the definition.

DAVID  Well it ticks most of the boxes but it misses out on one of them.

Interviewer  OK, let’s continue on this – it may not fit 100%. Tiger Woods has been world no. 1 for so long and he’s no longer world no. 1.

PAM  Distractions!

CLARE  His focus got distracted

PAM  So does it mean that if you’re mentally tough you can continue to have that modicum of focus even when you have accept there are distractions?

DAVID  Yes I do because I think you compartmentalize the distractions, saying this is a necessary detour but it’s only a detour off the main road.

CLARE  That’s for me where mental toughness enters into bullying, non-empathetic, unkind – all the negative things.
PAM  No because you …

CLARE  You’re making decisions about what’s important and in the project management situation, task oriented, most of the time it sounds like he got it right which is great and I think in business you do sometimes push slightly to the edge of being a bit aggressive because you know there is a timescale or a value on the business you’ve got to generate but it can go too far and that’s when the team fails.

PAM  That’s being mentally tough is knowing when you have to switch your focus but still knowing what your focus is.

CLARE  That’s the distraction of the team member whose partner’s died.

PAM  Yes, exactly. Someone comes, I’m totally focused, don’t want to be distracted but they’re in tears so at the point I have to physically switch something over in my brain that goes OK, remember where I’m up to now, change my focus, “hello, what’s the problem, sit down”, big hug or whatever you’ve got to do and then have the mental strength when they’ve walked back out to forget all about that and just carry on.

CLARE  But you’ve assumed that that’s not affected your task.

PAM  It won’t have because I’m mentally tough enough to deal with it.

DAVID  Something on the list might be the capability of prioritising.

CLARE  Yes, we’ve not talked about prioritisation. Situations of war, we haven’t talked about military methods.

Interviewer  This is about business and I’ll emphasise the context that within business there are different areas and again, they’ve identified this within sport. The military and that environment would again be a different area that we’d be going off too far at a tangent here. Prioritisation, there are lots of things coming out here so I’ll put prioritisation on the list and we’ll come back to that. You’ve talked about this ability to compartmentalise distractions and again, we’re talking about cognitive processes – mental toughness – cognition and then you talked about the ability to change focus which is different to being focused so somebody who has the ability to change focus you are suggesting is a characteristic of mental toughness.
CLARE: No, because if you’re too good at changing you’re going to fall into indecisiveness. You can change focus for a while…

PAM: But you know you’re going in the right direction.

DAVID: Let’s hold that for a second because we’ve said the definition, talking about a single solution, a strong and effective solution.

PAM: You’re talking about an outcome there.

DAVID: Yes, but people who are mentally tough, who are able to spin an incredible number of plates at the same time and maintain focus and priority on all the plates whilst having the end game in mind so I think there is an element of multi capacity capability to multi-task.

PAM: That’s the joy of being able to focus.

DAVID: That you focus with confidence.

CLARE: I’m getting a bit nervous with that multi-tasking view because I think the tougher you are …

PAM: Shadow me for 24 hours!

CLARE: No, I’m not saying it’s not important relative to mental toughness.

Interviewer: What I think what you guys are alluding to and what you’re challenging with are 2 things here. I think what you’re actually doing is tempering this idea of being able to multi-task so somebody could say “yes, I’ll take that on, I’ll take that on” just keep giving me more then all of a sudden they collapse so there’s a point where, and correct me if I’m wrong – I’m not trying to put words into your mouth here, there’s a capability to multi-task that is mental toughness.

DAVID: Let me give you an example here – on the one hand we’ve got George, the project manager – totally focused, mentally tough and totally capable of delivering the task. You put George in a Chief Exec’s role where there’s any number of tasks to be done, one minute he’s in front of the BBC cameras trying to explain why his product nearly killed 2 toddlers and the next he’s sitting down in the finance review to look at where the figures are, he’d be hopeless, he’d mentally collapse.
There are different mental toughnesses.

There's a certain flexibility.

How can a Secretary of State know so much about his portfolio which he picked up 2 days ago and how can they switch from decision making at a high level to kissing babies on the street and doing the old flesh pressing.

I think this is a different kind of mental toughness here.

There's nothing wrong with what you’ve said but what do you think about the underlying characteristics or the reasons why. Take George as an example – in 1 environment the outcome is a positive outcome and he demonstrates it. In the other environment, he's now given the role as Chief Executive, it doesn't happen – why?

I think he would appear to be mentally weak and maybe I can bring it back together again by saying there are some people who are able to focus on the end game whilst having to take lots and lots of detours in their day, week, monthly work to satisfy the need of various stakeholders but at the end of all that, he’s still bang down that main street.

And I think your explanation is spot on from a focus point of view and you’re bringing in elements of external influences that you can cope with. But if you mention George, does he lack focus in the example you gave when he became Chief Executive, is it focus that he lacks that makes him fail or is it something else that he lacks?

Yes, that is a good challenge. Yes, he probably would lose focus.

We’ll come back to George when we look at some of the other characteristics to see if these characteristics that perhaps in that scenario and this is great because what you’re identifying are the sort of things that I’m theorising at the moment about in business. You’re providing scenarios where this could be the case. So if we go back to focus, we’ve agreed that keeping an eye on the end game, not get distracted or easily distracted, let people get away with things and in describing George, you also mentioned the ability to break away from that focus to deal with things that are important for example, someone having a bit of breakdown
DAVID Well, they’re urgent but not necessarily important.

Interviewer You’ve tempered it with the level of importance …

CLARE Prioritisation

Interviewer The ability to prioritise conflicting priorities.

DAVID It’s the urgency versus the importance. I know what’s important but recognise that I have to deal with some urgent stuff.

PAM My office have the ability when I say “give me some time”, they know that if a phone call comes through, they know that that’s far more important and that could be an important phone call from my family or an important phone call from a potential new customer or a problem with an existing customer but they have to prioritise, have they just not had a delivery.

Interviewer And do you think that some people in your office are better than others at that?

PAM Yes.

Interviewer And is that a quality that you seek in your individuals?

PAM Yes.

Interviewer So if we were to say it’s an important attribute to mental toughness to ability to prioritise, what’s the polar opposite?

DAVID What, to prioritisation? Chaos is the word that springs to mind!

Interviewer So if we’re thinking about an individual?

CLARE Disorganised.

DAVID Well they don’t deliver properly; they risk not delivering on the big ticket item.

PAM It depends because I’ve been introduced to the public sector quite a lot recently and their particular workload means they don’t have to prioritise or
focus the same way as the business sector I’m in certainly does and that develops a different mental toughness.

DAVID So they don’t recognise the importance of priority.

PAM So I don’t necessarily class, when you were talking about politicians and public sector, I’m taking them out of my general equation because they’re not relevant to focus in a business situation.

Interviewer You’re talking about the ability of someone to prioritise.

DAVID Yes.

Interviewer So if I have the ability to prioritise, what’s the opposite? You mentioned disorganised.

DAVID Disappointment because in the end you’ll fail to deliver on something that someone thought was important but you didn’t because you didn’t give any priority to it.

PAM The wishy washy word keeps coming to mind!

CLARE Yes!

DAVID If you work for me and I haven’t given you a good framework for prioritisation then you just can’t do it so you have to treat everything with equal weight in the end I’m going to be disappointed.

Interviewer You’re going to be disappointed but what about the person?

CLARE Ineffective.

Interviewer Ineffective, ultimately you are ineffective but what does it come down to?

DAVID They’re not asking the right questions or they’re not seeking guidance. They’re not asking to be managed; they’re not task focused or task driven.

Interviewer But in relation to the ability to prioritise?

DAVID They are less effective.
Interviewer: But what gives you the ability to prioritise?

PAM: Pressure?

DAVID: It’s understanding the end game, so it’s focus I suppose.

Interviewer: So there’s that understanding, people have that understanding …

CLARE: If you don’t know what’s important, if you work in an environment where nobody briefs you, you’re sat there doing your job and you think you’re doing everything right, if nobody tells you what’s important and you can’t work it out for yourself, then you’re ineffective. You might be the nicest person in the world but if all you worry about is where you’re going to place your desk every day or is the sun shining in on me or I’m going to tidy the store cupboard when everyone else is trying hit the month end target.

PAM: If somebody is capable but haven’t sought priorities or where the goal is or any direction and they carry on with their work and the way they’re working is ineffective or non-structured …

CLARE: We keep coming back to this ineffectiveness as the opposite as we assume there is a business purpose.

Interviewer: And what are they ineffective in doing?

CLARE: They have no mental toughness!

DAVID: They have no clarity of vision; they’re ineffective delivering a strong effective solution.

Interviewer: Because they’re not able to prioritise.

PAM: Or they haven’t sought clarity.

DAVID: They’re potentially effective, if they get it right.

Interviewer: A clock will be right twice a day! So what I’m taking from that is they understand what is important against a lack of understanding of what’s important – an ability to prioritise. We can come back to these but I’ll move
us on to the next one – self-reliant. What do we mean by self-reliant or can you give me an example?

CLARE A strength from within, doesn’t necessarily work on their own all the time.

DAVID But they don’t seek guidance or reinforcement of what’s required every single day.

CLARE They don’t need constant reassurance, they might need reassurance every now and again but they’re looking for it in a positive way, they’re not full of self-doubt.

DAVID They’re self-starting.

PAM They rely on their own abilities because the reliability is they know exactly what they’re capable of and know where to get what they’re not capable of.

CLARE Yes, so they do recognise where they don’t know.

PAM And they’re reliant enough and intelligent enough.

Interviewer So an individual who you consider mentally tough knows their own capabilities and, by definition, an individual who isn’t mentally tough would not have knowledge of their own capabilities.

CLARE That doesn’t necessarily follow.

PAM No it doesn’t, it’s not a given.

DAVID You need to be self-reliant in order to be mentally tough but not being self-reliant doesn’t mean you’re mentally weak.

Interviewer So if you’re not self-reliant, what are you?

CLARE Dependent.

Interviewer So is dependency a positive characteristic of mental toughness and what would be the opposite of dependency?

CLARE Independence.
Interviewer: So is independence a positive attribute of mental toughness or is dependency a positive attribute of mental toughness in the context of self-reliance.

PAM: Independence.

CLARE: Independence is a positive in that context.

DAVID: But there is a negative independence. Flying solo.

PAM: But that's the joy of being mentally tough that you have to have the confidence to act independently.

DAVID: I think there is an element of independence about being mentally tough because in a business environment I can think of very few occasions when being entirely on your own will eventually bring you to the promised land.

CLARE: I agree with you in that because I think in business you either need customers or a team but businesses aren't often one man bands.

DAVID: They can be.

CLARE: Someone polishing shoes is independent but you've got to take into account your customers – suppliers, customers.

PAM: I think when you're defining business mental toughness, you ultimately have to wrestle with your own conscience, those individual decisions that he has made. Independent person, not independent of advice or consideration but ultimately he has to make that decision as an individual and it's very, very isolating that island that the CEO sits on is very, very isolated.

DAVID: And in this world of hyper governance there's also a requirement on the CEO to share the decision making process with his board members and/or at least his non-execs.

PAM: Maybe we need to take it one step back to SMEs.
CLARE: I'm struggling with independence here as well. The sort of role where you think independence is useful is salesmen out there on their own.

Interviewer: You're back to self-reliance.

DAVID: Self-reliance and dependency, I can see those polars. Dependency has a negative connotation around. Self-reliance, I can see that, dependency, I can see that. The salesman who's wearing out his shoe leather walking the streets getting the orders in has to be self-reliant.

CLARE: A soloist.

DAVID: I get very nervous about soloists.

Interviewer: Independence and the soloist are 2 different things.

DAVID: Self-reliance and independence are 2 different things.

CLARE: Although we're not supposed to be discussing sport, to be solo minded in sport leads to individual gold medals but there aren't many individual gold medals in business, are there?

Interviewer: I like these changes but I want to understand is there a difference. That's one of the underlying reasons to look at business, if there's not, we'll get to the end of this and find out.

CLARE: Yes but if you're too independent ...

DAVID: So let's draw this together. Self-reliance is about garnering nourishment from within.

PAM: Inner strength.

DAVID: Inner strength. Independence, at an extreme level, is cutting yourself off and that, for me, is the difference so dependency versus self-reliance makes sense but independence is going too far.

Interviewer: OK, so we've got self-reliance is a positive attribute in mental toughness in an individual and dependent would be seen as the polar opposite and
someone who’s dependent isn’t mentally tough or doesn’t demonstrate mental toughness.

CLARE I would go back to the company worker who does a fantastic job and is clearly focused on what they do but are completely reliant on their support network.

Interviewer What we’ve got is building blocks and ultimately you might say you’ve got enough of them, we would say you’re mentally tough but actually when you look at the characteristics, some of them you have and some you don’t necessarily have.

DAVID A lot of these words have got inter dependence themselves so part of being self-reliant is resilience. Part of being resilient is that you have a high level of self-reliance. If necessary, if everything’s hitting the fan, you’ve got to bounce back, you’ve got the find inner strength, use all your resilience to bounce back and get your shape back.

Interviewer Is that self-reliance though?

DAVID I think self-reliance feeds into resilience, there’s a dependent factor of resilience in self-reliance.

Interviewer All right, we’ll come back to that. So from a self-reliance perspective, we’ve got draw strength from within, doesn’t seek guidance all the time, doesn’t need daily attention – someone who has the ability to get on with things, able to prioritise. I just want to tease out that self-reliance. Someone who’s dependent isn’t necessarily mentally tough.

CLARE I think that’s true because you’ve got the worker who has to be spoon fed every step of the way.

Interviewer So moving on to the next one which is this concept of being single-minded, because you mentioned single-minded, you mentioned it in a negative way, however, you talked about focus being a positive attribute.

CLARE I don’t think single-minded is necessarily negative but it can be if it’s inappropriate. This goes back to prioritisation, we had the discussion earlier about if you know where your goal is, if someone on the team is having a mental breakdown …
Interviewer: What underlies the ability to prioritise then in relation to single-mindedness?

CLARE: Being able to balance conflicting priorities.

DAVID: Understanding the end game.

PAM: But that's not being single-minded, is it?

DAVID: Your priorities are all focused on the end game and being single-minded means that, although you are distracted if someone important needs to see you, nonetheless …

CLARE: You can still get back on track.

PAM: Single-minded does not have any heed for anything else going on around them.

CLARE: So you're saying that's completely negative.

DAVID: That's dogmatic.

Interviewer: OK, cool! This is good, so someone who's dogmatic - is that a positive or negative attribute with regards to mental toughness?

PAM: Probably negative.

Interviewer: So the opposite of dogmatism is?

CLARE: Open-minded.

Interviewer: I'm just trying to illicit those words.

DAVID: Dogmatic implies the basis on which someone has got the views they've got is proven to most rational thinking people as wrong, just built on sand. Dogmatic is “I don’t give a shit that you think it’s wrong” and “I don’t give a shit that all the analysis says it’s wrong, I’m still going there”, whereas single-minded is “you still haven’t shown me that this is the wrong place to go” or “nobody has accepted your proof as being in the wrong place”.
PAM You don’t necessarily allow people to give you that alternative because you’re so single-minded.

DAVID We also used the words “flexible” and “adaptable” earlier and I think all these things act in combination, don’t they?

Interviewer They do but if we just look at single-minded and this concept of influence and alternatives. If somebody’s single-minded, what’s the opposite to single-minded?

CLARE It is open-minded, isn’t it?

DAVID Either open-minded or I have no view, I have no opinion – Homer Simpson!

Interviewer If somebody progresses something in a single-minded way and you mentioned the fact that they could be influenced, what does that illicit?

DAVID It’s flexible and adaptable, isn’t it? Again, it’s being flexible without seeming to vacillate. What I mean by that is I’m flexible because I open to persuasion, I’m open to analysis, I’m open to alternative views but they’d better be good because I’m focused to go over there because I believe that’s the right place to be and all the analysis I’ve seen …

PAM It’s back to prioritising again, isn’t it?

DAVID No, I think it’s slightly different.

Interviewer If you’re open to alternative views, go on…

DAVID Prioritisation is the task whereas flexibility of mind is about the analysis and the purpose and in a way, the belief as well. People who are mentally tough have got to believe.

PAM And then you’re back to believing in yourself.

Interviewer So someone who is mentally tough is open to alternative views.

DAVID I think I would say they’re not closed to alternative views.

Interviewer So people who aren’t mentally tough are opposed to alternative views.
DAVID   Yes, dogmatic.

CLARE   I think that’s important because we’ve talked about being perceptive and intuitive, those were some words I threw in and for me, that’s about being aware the radar’s out there, I’m aware of all these things but I’m still focused on my goal and I’ll let those influence, if I can work out if they’re appropriate, if I’m given good reason but I’m still heading over there.

DAVID   I’m not going to vacillate, I’m going to have a really strong opinion about where we’re going but I’m not so closed that I’m not going to accept that there’s a different way.

CLARE   That’s right because sometimes changing your mind requires a lot of toughness because you’ve invested in a particular solution.

Interviewer   So you then believe that people who are mentally tough are prepared to change?

CLARE   Yes

DAVID   Yes

PAM     And that’s where that adaptable came in.

CLARE   And I think if they’re not you get into dogma and into people who are negatively single-minded.

DAVID   We’re all going to jump over the cliff together even though I know it’s going to hurt!

PAM     The world is flat!

Interviewer   They’re prepared to change their view.

PAM     And they have the mental toughness to do that.

DAVID   Again, I think there are some words under the empathy and forgiveness bit. I put the word “listening” in but didn’t read that out. You can’t be mentally tough in a vacuum, can you because it would become pointless.
CLARE: Well, not in a business context.

PAM: You wouldn’t need to be mentally tough in a vacuum because there are no outside pressures.

Interviewer: If you say being a good listener is an attribute of being mentally tough, what again is the opposite?

DAVID: Totally closed.

CLARE: Closed was the word which came to mind initially.

Interviewer: Closed to what?

PAM: Ideas.

DAVID: Other opinions.

PAM: Other influences.

Interviewer: So when you describe listener, you’re actually describing people who are open to other people’s ideas?

CLARE: Aware of them.

DAVID: I think what they do is that they are always testing themselves and where they’re going. They are convinced they’re on the right track but they are prepared and open to test that and they’re challenging people all the time.

CLARE: It’s important – with confidence because it’s the ability to say I believe this is the right thing to do but I’m prepared to look at other things because I feel very strongly what I’m doing or the way we’re going there. It’s not because I’m threatened by those other views, I’m prepared to look at them.

Interviewer: OK.

DAVID: But they’re also doing is garnering support because as a listener, if I ask you to challenge the ideas I’ve got and offer alternatives, what you do in fact is endorse it.
Quite often if you’re asking people for support and ideas, you can glean additional, better, tweak whatever it is because that’s the joy of being adaptable, isn’t it but having the strength and resolve to be able to do it, i.e. you’re confident in yourself.

Part of the mental toughness is saying “well I’ve heard what you’ve said but I’m still going there because it’s not powerful enough or convincing.

That’s fine because what you’ve demonstrated that there’s an appropriate time for these characteristics to be demonstrated and there may actually be a logical sequence to those so rather than being single-minded what they are is open-minded but, where necessary, single-minded. Is single-minded really what you mean there or is it something else?

Single-minded is becoming more negative.

I think single-minded is also focused.

Focused sounds good where single-minded sounds a bit negative.

So it’s the ability to remain focused.

Yes and to prioritise.

But you’ve also said within that the ability to take on board other people’s views.

Yes, it's vitally important.

Demonstrate flexibility.

That’s true and I think there’s elements of that in sport as well, isn’t there? Because every single individual sportsman has a team of around them, influences, etc.
CLARE Even the best changes their coaches.

Interviewer And again, it’s prioritising what’s right and who has the right idea. You mentioned confidence so someone who is mentally tough is confident as opposed to somebody who lacks confidence. Give me an example of that.

DAVID I think they’re confident in their own ability and they’re confident in the achievement of the end game. I am able to deliver it and I believe its deliverable.

CLARE Or the ability of the team to deliver.

Interviewer Somebody who has confidence in their own ability or someone who lacks confidence in your own ability, and if you lack confidence in your ability you would not be mentally tough.

DAVID I would say temporarily lacking mental toughness, thinking of the goal scorer lacking confidence that would have had a shot under normal circumstances but elects to pass.

Interviewer It can be temporary …

CLARE Absolutely, that sales person is in the situation where they can’t close the deal but they’ve been able to confidently before. Something happened; maybe the product range has changed …

Interviewer But they are naturally displaying a lack of confidence in their ability.

CLARE Yes and they are demonstrating mental weakness for a moment. They might recover their mental strength and toughness.

DAVID Mental toughness is temporal.

CLARE I think you can lose mental toughness, I really do. Something knocks your confidence, people have breakdowns.

DAVID It’s not a sliding scale; you don’t start with nothing and then end up with 80%.
CLARE  Do you think there's a threshold?

DAVID  No, but your ability to be mentally tough can vary quite substantially.

PAM  But is it that need to be mentally tough...

DAVID  Or is it circumstances?

CLARE  Do you need to wind yourself up, “today I’m going to be mentally tough as I’ve got a difficult day or do you always have it?

PAM  You are always mentally tough but it’s just there are times, I suppose it’s a bit like adrenalin which kicks in or triggers it or you know there’s going to be a particular situation or a situation arises which requires your mental toughness.

CLARE  It’s interesting, do you ever say “I don’t do decisions at the weekend”?

PAM  Yes, I do that!

CLARE  I’m going to give my mental toughness a break!

Interviewer  But is that being mentally tough?! What you’ve just said is fantastic because from my perspective because you’re discussing things which I think are very pertinent to this subject area and aren’t being investigated in other areas. However, we’re going slightly off at a tangent and I might want to come back to you individually to talk about these specific things. We talked about confidence in your own ability and confidence in the end goal, how might we describe that? Or what would the opposite be? The end goal is different to my own ability so I know I can score a goal but may not believe we can win the match.

DAVID  If you lack confidence, it’s possibly lack of focus.

CLARE  It might just be lack of skills.

DAVID  Confident it’s the right goal. Let’s take the leadership of being mentally tough – part of engaging other people and supporting your own mental toughness is having a vision, a purpose that people can relate to, buy in to, commit to so you’ve got to have confidence you’ll get that right as well confidence in your abilities. 2 elements of it, is it the right thing to go for and
have we got the skills, experience, commitment to get there. I'm not sure where I'm going with this!

PAM  It’s also the confidence to prioritise correctly so it can be confidence in any of your particular abilities which is back to your self-reliance and your self-belief, isn’t it? Think I’m getting brain freeze here!

Interviewer  OK, do you need a quick break?

CLARE  I need to leave at 4.30pm.

Interviewer  OK, shall we continue until then and you can leave.

PAM  I need to get back for a meeting at 5.

Interviewer  OK, well for me we’ve gone as far as we can in the sense that you 2 have got to leave! I’m going to run a number of these and will come back and talk to you individually and this will be our starter for ten when I do come back to talk to you, if you’re happy to participate. We’ve got quite an exhaustive list here, I won’t go back into the list as I’d like to pick up on a couple of things with regards to mental toughness. If we think about your definition, having had the discussions we’ve had thus far, is there anything in that you’d like to change?

PAM  I think we did a damn good job in the beginning!

CLARE  I wouldn’t take anything out but there’s probably more to it than we’ve got there. I think we were trying to be succinct – clarity of vision, self-belief…

PAM  Which are self-reliance and confidence, sheer grit and determination.

Interviewer  What would sheer grit and determination signify?

PAM  The animal instinct a little bit.

Interviewer  What’s that?

CLARE  It’s that primeval drive that gives you that edge sometimes.

DAVID  Grit and determination – putting in the hard graft and the hours.
Interviewer: Motivation?

DAVID: Personal motivation.

Interviewer: Which is something you've not mentioned so far.

PAM: The trouble is sometimes we take those as given and don't necessarily articulate them.

Interviewer: If you were to describe it.

CLARE: We haven't mentioned motivation; I wonder why we haven't actually.

PAM: Because everything we've said is around motivation so we've taken that as a given which is our fault because we just made a presumption that it's a given.

CLARE: Can you be mentally tough without being motivated?

DAVID: You're a self-starter.

CLARE: I think we just missed that word to be honest.

PAM: Because as a mentally tough person you make the assumption that you're motivated and spend your mental toughness motivating others so quite often in a positive way, it's a negative because you're having to take some of your time and energy motivating others whereas you see yourself as self-motivated, you get up every morning. You are motivated therefore why can't everyone around you be motivated because it is a given that you are motivated.

Interviewer: Given that we've gone to all this trouble and we're going to close in a few minutes, one of the key areas which came out of sporting mental toughness is this that given self-belief, motivation, etc are all key elements and it's the one word you didn't mention.

CLARE: Now you've said it, I think it's bizarre.
This is the first one and I actually believe that these focus groups might take slightly longer with business professionals than sporting professionals and I'll need to take some guidance from the professors about that. The final question for me is that when we want to look for mentally tough business people, in sport one of the things that came out is that when someone has won a gold medal, they've demonstrated the cognitive ability to beat other people who are physically as fit. They went to these people who had beat other people for a gold medal or world championship and said tell us how you do what you do to try and identify what the characteristics of a mentally tough performer are. Now personal construct psychology which was part of it would say that just because they are mentally tough, doesn't mean they know how they do it but they can tell you the way they think and people who observe them come up with their own definitions. Now I selected 4 criteria for people to participate in this study, the first being worked in business for 10 years; the second was worked at director level with companies of more than 15 employees, managed teams of more than a 100 people and have been identified or identify themselves as being mentally tough. But they may not be the right criteria and I wondered if I were to say to you if you were to characterize those sorts of terms or a check list for mentally tough people, where should I look? What should I look for?

CLARE  In a business context?

Interviewer  Yes

CLARE  I guess a starting point might be to look at companies who have gone through tough times and emerge from those tough times being successful against extraordinary circumstances.

PAM  If you do want to be looking for people like that, Lancaster University have piloted a programme called the LEAD programme which the Manufacturing Advisory Service are running and that takes MDs and helps them develop their leadership skills and quite a lot them, in discussions because I've been to a few of the master classes have gone through some really difficult times and quite a lot of them have come through it and they're on cohorts 3 or 4 now so it may be worth talking to the Manufacturing Institute, Jonathan Bennett I think he's called. I'll give you his number.

DAVID  It seems to be the people who have succeeded against all the odds.
Interviewer: Does it have to just be that? What are the other criteria? I think of people who are mentally tough week 1 of their first job.

CLARE: Some might and some might not, some might develop their mental toughness.

PAM: We go back to nature and nurture. Someone might be mentally tough in the playground.

DAVID: I guess all the name callers and you may need to be mentally tough to withstand that. That may one of the experiences that shapes your mental toughness at a fairly early age. A parent dies or leaves, you're bullied at school, you put up with incredible hardship.

CLARE: What about the entrepreneur who has had failures but they're mentally tough and succeed beyond all recognition.

DAVID: Mental toughness is all relative, isn't it? When things go round you can throw your hands in the air and run out or you've mental toughness to see this thing through.

PAM: I always knew I was going to be my own boss!

Interviewer: It's an interesting viewpoint describing your first job and it actually being tough and stressful and having to get through it and on the other side you're talking about someone who's confident in their own personal capabilities and the vision to see the pathway that's right for them rather than going through a series of failures. It's not like working for a big company, but do you understand if after you've had all these experiences.

DAVID: It's all relative, we mentioned earlier about the public sector that the priority setting is not great but actually operating in the public sector has got to be pretty mentally tough, depends what they're doing.

Interviewer: So the criteria, again I need to come up with some criteria to select – I want to come up with some context – somebody who's had 10 years business experience, would you expect those to have observed enough individuals to have an opinion on what business mental toughness is.

CLARE/PAM: Yes.
Interviewer And someone who’s managed sufficient people or run a company of 50 or 100 people has enough experience.

PAM But again this is down to do they have that natural ability in the first place, were they mentally tough before they start out or have they learnt it?

DAVID Or are they anyway? They may not be mentally tough.

CLARE I think there’s an age and experience thing that says you start to understand these things the more you see them. I can describe person A is mentally tough and person B and that’s just from living and working and being in a working environment, irrespective of whether they’re MDs or not, whether you run the company, you will recognise mental toughness even if you haven’t got it yourself.

Interviewer I’ll come back to that identifying others. In a context perspective, when we think about business, what areas of business do you think mental toughness is important?

CLARE Declining industries or rapidly growing industries or industries facing a lot of change.

PAM You’ve got the dot.com type industry that I wouldn’t like to be involved in – you’d have to be incredibly focused and determined. I’m an engineer.

Interviewer And you’re not focused or determined.

PAM That to me if I was to say it’s a different kind of mental toughness, it wouldn’t be something I would enjoy.

Interviewer But you can encompass it all as being mentally tough and we say characteristics are that you’re focused and determined and in your industry, you’re focused and determined plus other things. In that industry, you would still be focused and determined but some of the other things might be missing, what kind of things? What do you think you’d be lacking?

PAM Commercial awareness

Interviewer And that would impact your self-belief.
PAM: Yes.

Interviewer: So you would have self-belief in engineering but potentially lack self-belief in a dot.com business.

PAM: But equally then, like a politician because I know I’m a natural leader, I would utilise my skills but I would still have to be looking outside my self-reliance, I would be slightly out of my comfort zone so therefore, I wouldn’t be as self-reliant.

Interviewer: Would you do that?

PAM: Yes.

Interviewer: So you would say you’re mentally tough.

PAM: Yes.

DAVID: Whilst you’re talking that through, I keep coming back to that accountability thing. I think what makes people mentally tough is the degree to which they’re carrying the can for the decisions that get made. I don’t mean how many pencils you buy for the office stationery cupboard, significant decision making.

Interviewer: But what do you do about the person who buys the pencils and that’s their key job.

DAVID: But what’s the sanction if they get it wrong?

Interviewer: They’d lose their job.

DAVID: They might do but it’s unlikely.

CLARE: We haven’t talked about risk at all, have we?

DAVID: What I was thinking about is in the public sector there’s a lot of places you can hide.

Interviewer: Can you carry on talking for a couple of minutes?
DAVID  Yes.

CLARE/PAM  Really sorry but need to go.

Interviewer  I've got you a bottle of wine as I do appreciate you taking the time out.

General thanks and appreciation!

Interviewer  Thank you very much for participating, it's anonymous and I'll make sure that only the supervisors and myself hear/read the documentation and I will come back to you as well. There's a second exercise around rating yourself around mental toughness. The other thing is if there are people you think are mentally tough now we've been through this and you're happy to put them forward, having asked them. For me it's about gathering knowledge by the domino effect. I'll also drop you an email with the definition of business mental toughness.
APPENDIX C - FOCUS GROUP 2 TRANSCRIPT (CRIS, LEIGH & LOUISE)

Focus Group: 2

Topic: Business Mental Toughness

Date: 27/10/11

Attendees: Cris, Leigh and Louise

Interviewer Thank you for supporting this, you know who I am but I’m Interviewer Williams and part of the psychometrics and work research group. The reason we’re running the focus group and the research is that there is a growing interest within business relating to the performance enhancing qualities of something that’s defined in sport as mental toughness, originally described by sports psychologists as the ability to cope with the stress and anxiety to cope with competitive performance and training better than others. It’s widely considered as the specific reason why certain athletes beat other physically gifted athletes so they have that mental edge. This association saw high levels of performance and now being aligned and looked at within a business perspective so certain athletes have an ability to cope with stress and pressure, is there a link between sporting performance and mental toughness and business or does business mental toughness exist and is this a phenomena that enables people to cope with stress and pressure in a work environment. If we simply take the constructs from a sporting environment and take it into business, that’s not really appropriate from a psychological perspective, taking something developed in one context and transferring it into another isn’t appropriate but what we need to understand is what are the constructs in relation to the specific context we are interested in so just saying something in sport, doesn’t mean it’s the same thing in business as it might be in healthcare, for example. No empirical research has been conducted so there isn’t really a definition of business mental toughness and little is known about the characteristics so what we are trying to understand through this focus group and other focus groups is what are the characteristics of a mentally tough business performer. It’s not about physical toughness so it’s not about the height or weight or anything like that, it’s about how they think and how they behave. You have been chosen to participate because you have worked in the business environment for over 10 years and have worked at director level where you have managed 50 or more people, you’ve managed teams with
over 100 people in them or you are considered to be mentally tough. I’d like to emphasise that all the information provided during this focus group will remain completely confidential and I may want to use your description of particular characteristics or qualities in order to illustrate important ideas but these will remain strictly anonymous and I will ensure that your identity is protected at all times. I’m using audio recording equipment to make sure I get completely accurate record and allows for a typed transcript which will be used for later scrutiny and reference. The data collected in this study will be used in 2 ways – firstly for my DBA research thesis and secondly, the results may be published in scientific journals so that other business researchers, coaches and practitioners can benefit from the findings. As a participant in this study, you will have several defined rights, your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary and you’re free to decline to answer any of the questions or stop the procedure at any point. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will be asking, I want to learn and benefit from your experiences and expertise so that I can better understand what the characteristics and qualities of the ideally tough mental business performer are. I hope therefore, that you will answer the questions in a candid and straightforward way. If there are any questions you are not comfortable answering, then feel free to decline by simply stating “no comment” and no further questions relating to that topic will be asked. If you have any questions as we go along, then please ask as in the case for clarification, if at any time you don’t understand what I’m asking. I’ll be asking you to discuss your personal views on what you think a mentally tough business performer are. The characteristics and qualities can be based on the profile of yourself or any individual you believe to be mentally tough or even a combination of several individuals who you feel have certain aspects but not necessarily all of those of mental toughness. Therefore, feel free to draw on many varied experiences for your answers, if you have problems finding the right words to describe certain qualities of characteristics, then please give examples and describe the whole situation of a process to portray what you mean. Please do not hesitate to ask questions as we proceed if things aren’t clear or you’d like to discuss any issues further. Any questions so far?

LEIGH What does “construct” mean?

Interviewer Like a characteristic – happy, sad. So we’re going to through it in 3 exercises, the first one I’d like you to as a group to discuss the sporting definition and its relevance to business so I’ll give you the sporting
definition. I’m especially interested if there’s a requirement for a business
definition and what performance means in terms of business. The definition
of mental toughness has been widely accepted within sports research and
the definition is “the natural or developed psychological edge that enables a
performer to generally cope better than opponents with the many demands,
be they competition or training or lifestyle that sport places on the performer.
Specifically be more consistent and better than their opponents in remaining
determined, focused, confident and in control under pressure”. So what I’d
like you to do is …

CRIS Have you got that so I could just read it?

Interviewer Yes, I have another copy of the definition. Just generally, what does the
term mental toughness bring to mind? What does it make you think about?

LOUISE I think the toughness implies the pressure bit so it’s about being tough
because there’s something to have to be tough against and so it’s all about
those difficult times and the meat of it is that it’s not physical.

CRIS In sports … I was about to say it’s easier to see it as an individual, the first
thing I think of is Linford Christie from when I watched lots of TV before.
Linford Christie is who I picture as an individual and I think in sport it’s
easier for an individual, like the marathon runner, what’s her name?

LOUISE Paula Radcliffe.

CRIS Then my second example is going to be Martin Johnson when he was
captain of England at that game in Ireland where there was the mix up when
they stood on the wrong side of the red carpet and he made the whole of
the Irish team move because they were going to shake hands with McAleish
in the wrong order and he just stood up and made the point that he and his
team weren’t going to move even though he was under an immense amount
of pressure so that’s another example of an individual leading a team and
perhaps, that’s where the business bit comes in.

LOUISE It’s based on the individual but again, it’s only at the critical times that you
can presume that for those who are the top performers that actually have
got to that point over a longer period of time ..
CRIS Yes, it’s nights like tonight when it drags them out to the training pitch or the pool or track or court or wherever they’re doing their bit.

LOUISE So the toughness comes to the fore at particular short decisions or short aspects but actually that’s just those times..

LEIGH Preparation time. I can imagine it’s totally different analogies from sport to business. I would have thought that it absolutely is because in the mental toughness, toughness is toughness of the mind applied to something in the sporting world that’s quite physical.

Interviewer Is it always physical?

LEIGH In the sporting world?

Interviewer Snooker, darts, clay pigeon shooting..

LEIGH Yes, because there’s a technique or skill involved – darts, snooker – yes, I think that stacks up. In the business world you’ve got different skills. They are learned skills like writing a tender, giving a presentation or as a marketing manager, developing a brand but you are competing all the time as a business person – in your own team, with yourself (your own previous performance the year before), your objectives, your bosses expectations of you, people who want your job, the politics involved in business. Personally I think it’s totally different analogy, totally. You can have all skills, you can be brilliant as a manager – I think I knew exactly what marketing management is about but was I the best marketing manager? I’m not entirely sure, there have been other people who’ve got further than me and they were more mentally tough.

LOUISE You made the point about physicality and if you think of something like Chess, there’s nothing physical about that, it’s all about mental toughness but also, in business (what I was thinking about) you were saying it’s all about the individual whereas in sport your skill seems to be quite clearly defined into a particular skill set. There are set rules of the game, whereas in business, there are rules (you can’t really run an illegal business) but actually there’s a lot more flexibility – you can completely change the rules of the game whereas you can’t with Chess, the rules are the rules. You could perhaps change your strategy or your tactics whereas in business you can win by completely changing the rules, if whatever winning is.
Interviewer: That’s an interesting point. In sport, winning’s quite objective, whereas mental toughness allows athletes to win, in business what’s this.

LEIGH: That depends where you, it could be achieving objectives, it could be getting a promotion, it could be surviving – not losing your job in a very tough environment when others are losing their jobs. It could be making the next sale.

CRIS: But at an organisation level, it could be survival or profit. It could be employing people, it could be opening stores successfully.

LEIGH: You’re right, it’s a lot more fluffy. There are objective and subjective things you could say they’ve achieved this and this but you can’t necessarily quantify it.

LOUISE: There’s no clear winner, there are people who are successful in business and get a lot of publicity whereas you could say there are people who’ve done more or achieved more but you don’t even know about them.

LEIGH: And in sport, because there is a big skill element, could there be people who are really mentally tough but don’t achieve the result because actually they’re not as good at hitting the ball or catching it – the physicality of it.

CRIS: And it depends on their level, in football you could be mentally tough but at league division 2.

LEIGH: Or Sunday afternoon on the park.

CRIS: Absolutely.

LOUISE: You could say that there are people who could be successful at this but when their firm grows, they actually become unsuccessful. They were really successful when it was this size but couldn’t cope when it became that size.

LEIGH: In my early days some of the most mentally tough people were the secretaries, they just told you “no” when they didn’t want to do something. “Could you help me here” …
And there are a number of interesting things coming from this, the different levels and originally the research was carried out in athletes because it was easier to define comparable skill sets and therefore, why is it Andy Murray never wins and Rafa Nadal always wins when he gets to the final. That sort of analogy.

And Djokovic and Murray are best mates, train together but one wins and one doesn’t.

In training, they’re probably fifty/fifty but in competition there’s the difference. Is it just about the elite or in business can somebody lower down still be mentally tough? And then again, with regard to different context within business areas. So these are the things you identifying which is great.

What I’d now like you to start to think about individually for 10 minutes. If I give you the analogy that a car takes us from A to B, so what is a car? It’s a vehicle which takes us from A to B, it does have 4 wheels but what is its purpose, what does it do for us? What’s the outcome? So I’d like you to think about a business performance that you’ve experienced and feel free to encompass other aspects of your life if you feel that’s important but from a business context I’d like you to develop a short definition (bullet points are fine) but I’d like you to define what you think mental toughness is within business. Again, think back to the car analogy, it’s not that it’s got 2 or 4 doors, takes us from A to B so what do you think mental toughness is within business? What does it do, what does it provide?

I’m struggling to get past one word!

Go on.

And it’s resilience, the resilience to do what has to be done. The analogy I’ve got in my mind is more of a small boat on rough seas and it’s about the personal resilience to deliver what has to be delivered. That actually puts you in any part of the organisation.

So something like achieving the goals or objectives you have within your role, it can be any role, achieving the goals or objectives without experiencing unhealthy stress and without experiencing anxiety, any anxiety.

OK.
LEIGH
That’s my working definition.

Interviewer
There is no right or wrong answer here and it seems interesting that you introduce resilience. Resilience is identified as overcoming negativity. One of the interesting things about mental toughness from a sporting perspective is that’s also about how you cope with success.

LOUISE
When I was thinking about you asking us to come up with one definition, mental toughness because of the “tough” word, I think it is a very negative concept. It’s about being able to cope or bounce back through the negative times but because of all the work we do with entrepreneurs, the coping is actually on both sides. The success, not letting the success get out of control but equally it’s the negative side that quite often puts people under or makes people give up. So I think business mental toughness is about driving forward over a long period of time, not that I don’t agree with goals but it’s more the vision and being able to communicate that and actually take people with you which perhaps in sport you do in the team type events but not so much in the individual ones.

LEIGH
You see in sport, if you don’t win, you lose! If you’re not on the winning side, you’re on the losing side. Sport’s more straightforward – you don’t win – you lose and business isn’t quite as much as that, you can fail but your levels of success are many fold because to survive is successful and then profitability or overachieving targets is all upside, so you don’t win or lose, you don’t fail and you might succeed by ever-increasing amounts and perhaps that’s where there is a difference. So you can win and indeed, if you’re competing in business you don’t have to both lose. If you’re playing tennis, you’ve got a winner and a loser but if you’re both competing in a marketplace, you can both be mega profitable but somebody makes a £1B and someone makes £900M! Is making £900M unsuccessful? No!

CRIS
Absolutely, because what we’re talking about there is the end result but I’m not too fussed right now on whether it’s objective or subjective, it’s just “have you been successful?” Yes or no?

Interviewer
So if it enhances performance, what’s the success? What does it enable people to do if you are mentally tough in the business environment?
LOUISE Get through the tough times. I wouldn't agree that there's no anxiety because I think your life is full of periods of anxiety but you can still keep going and win, have you made the right decision. You can still win when you've made the wrong decision.

CRIS I know somebody, Lindsey, who just doesn't get anxious at all because getting into the mental toughness elements of it but he manages that side of it so he just sees the positives — “if I've gone the wrong way, OK, I'll just learn from it”. He doesn't get anxious.

LOUISE It doesn't mean he doesn't get anxious internally, he might not show it.

CRIS No, I've had a good discussion with him about it, he doesn't get anxious and for a definition of mental toughness, I would still stand by that because you can have degrees of mental toughness, it isn't an either or so the goal would be pure mental toughness which I'm saying would be no anxiety whatsoever. Some people may be mentally tough...

LOUISE I think that would be abnormal because as humans you're supposed to have different emotions. I just come from a different viewpoint, I think anxiety is something which helps you to stop you making decisions too quickly.

CRIS Well I think that's the difference between stress and anxiety. Stress, I agree and that's why I said unhealthy stress.

Interviewer Or there could be unhealthy anxiety.

CRIS I think anxiety can only be unhealthy, I don't think there's any healthy anxiety, I've never heard of that.

LOUISE Of course there is. What about positive anxiety? You're anxious because Christmas is coming.

CRIS That's excitement, that's not anxiety.

LOUISE Well if you see my kids, it looks like anxiety on their faces! Or "will we win that tender, we really need it but will we win it?"

CRIS Well I would call that stress but I have no clinical background.
The transparent text is as follows:

Interviewer: This is really interesting because some people see anxiety as a positive that enables them to drive forward whereas others see anxiety as a limitation that holds them back and it may well be with Lindsey that he does feel anxiety but he channels it a different way from how other people may see anxiety as a negative. It would be interesting to talk to Lindsey to see how he deals with situations that in some people, would cause anxiety.

Leigh: Thinking back to when I played sport, I always used to enjoy the pre-match nerves so there you were waiting to open the batting and you were nervous but it was fun and that was part of why you did it. And it's not dissimilar in the work situation – presentations or you're up against a deadline.

Cris: I wouldn't want to stick the group on “anxiety”.

Interviewer: No, this is really interesting.

Cris: Because I would say that's good nerves which was stress.

Interviewer: Some of it's semantics but when you describe the positive anxiety and you said mental toughness is resilience, are those positive nerves, resilience?

Cris: Isn't it the management of those nerves?

Louise: Isn't resilience more on the longer term, to keep coming back when it goes wrong so it's more associated with things going wrong and having the resilience to get through it. Actually when it's successful, it's about managing those aspects. I think the resilience needed to manage success after success after success would be much easier than the toughness to go through failure and more failure and more failure but still keep coming through.

Interviewer: But if it's about performance and mental toughness is about this ability to sustain performance and resilience is about coming back from negative situations, are they not necessarily 2 different things in that if I'm mentally tough, I maintain performance but if I'm resilient, I fail but I get back up. Are they different things or do you think mental toughness is resilience?

Louise: I would have thought that mental toughness is more than one thing. I think if you didn't have resilience, you won't have mental toughness so there's a number of aspects you need in business to have the mental toughness
aspect because there is no predefined goal or predefined “you are the winner”.

LEIGH So the pre-match nerves I hadn’t thought of in the mental toughness category. If mental toughness is the big thing, resilience is part of it.

Interviewer In that analogy, there are some people who arrive with pre-match nerves whereas others succumb. In mental toughness the whole point is that I can train, I can hit the cricket ball out there that’s no problem but as soon as the game’s on and I’m out there stood there facing the first ball, the nerves take over and I go for a duck.

LOUISE It’s the same in business that when there are particular key moments, it’s about performing at that point in time – swinging that meeting or getting that piece of work when you need to.

LEIGH And there’s a question that when in business, are you apt to put yourself into a position where you look for that buzz so you actually do push things to the wire because there’s a bit of excitement.

Interviewer So you don’t start the document you need to write when you get given it, you wait til the very last minute and work through the night because you enjoy that positive anxiety.

LOUISE Or on a bigger scale, you don’t sit back, you risk it all and go the next step even though it could sink everything so you push everything out there so you are creating those really difficult situations and then you’ve got to get through them.

CRIS I’m not disagreeing with that because it’s fascinating because I know somebody who is risk averse but is mentally tough in their job, delivers all the time and is incredibly well thought of in their IT project management role. They manage risk on a project role very well but don’t take risks themselves. When you were talking, I was going “yes, yes” but then thought I know someone who doesn’t take risk but she’s mentally tough.

Interviewer So if we look at those situations, what is it that people are doing in those 2 scenarios because there is a commonality to both those scenarios so the risk-averse person does certain things and the entrepreneur does certain things.
Although entrepreneurs can be perceived to be risky and seen to take some risk but the element of risk about doing something otherwise nothing will happen but actually we’re very risk averse. We’ve never taken a loan or borrowed money.

So maybe the definition of risk is taking a calculated risk or a well thought through approach to risk.

So in taking a risk, what you do take – a judgement or a decision?

Probably in sport that’s the case – making a decision “do I go for that ball?” or “is it in or out?” I guess you can practice that a lot more whereas in business you might never have been in that experience before.

True but in those 2 scenarios, what you were really defining about risk taking or being risk-averse, what you’re really talking about is the decisions made and the ability to make those decisions.

Is there an element of control as well? If you’re in control, you can push the boundaries as far as you want.

If we go back to the sporting analogy, it’s got set rules of the game whereas in business you don’t know where the next random problem is going to come from that you just don’t know what the right decision is, you don’t know how to play it. There could be some serious consequences but you don’t know what they are. In sport it’s clearer whereas in business you really don’t know what could come up or maybe that’s our area of business.

You could see that the other way, if you hit a golf ball you don’t actually know it’s going to land and so with every single shot you play, even if you play the same course week in, week out, it’s always different – the pin’s always in a different place, the wind’s coming in a different direction, temperature, wetness of the grass and nothing’s the same whereas you might carry out certain processes or actions in a business that are the same every time. It’s interesting how you view sport as more homogenous than business.
LOUISE When you run 400 metres it’s more tightly defined. On a golf course, you’ll still going to be hitting a golf ball every time, the wind’s going to be a factor, etc.

Interviewer So you think there’s more context?

LOUISE Yes, so maybe in sport you can refine your skill a lot tighter whereas in business you have to keep it a bit more broad because you don’t know where the next problem’s going to come from.

Interviewer So if we brought it back to business mental toughness is … Do you think you could come up with a short definition amongst yourselves? What does it enable you to do?

CRIS I’ve just reread the sports one and I think you could take this exactly, just change opponents to colleagues. You could play with the words “training, competition, lifestyle”. Specifically be better than colleagues in remaining firm, confident and in control under pressure.

LEIGH I don’t see as much competition in business.

CRIS You’re trying to break down what is business there, we could do that.

LEIGH You can all win, even your competitors are not necessarily competition, they can be colleagues in business.

Interviewer Almost “collaborate”.

LEIGH Yes, so with a café in Levenshulme, we want more cafes there so more people come in.

LOUISE We can be good at what we do but we want more competition so we can actually be better.

LEIGH And if you’re in a team in business, you might need to be the one who’s mentally toughest for the benefit of the team, someone on the team might have better technical skill. If I think back to rugby, you’ve got 15 on the team but England at the moment are rubbish because there’s no one on that team who’s mentally tough. 8 years ago they were successful because they had many leaders who were mentally tough.
Interviewer: So how do that manifest itself, what was different between the team 8 years ago and the team now? If they were mentally tough, what did they do differently?

LOUISE: I’m not going to answer that question but I think, in sport, there’s a clearly defined finish line whereas in business isn’t. So you were talking about these different levels, so 8 years ago England were judged as winners whereas now they are judged as not being very good so they don’t have mental toughness.

Interviewer: Was it mental toughness or they were just physically not strong enough or quick enough?

CRIS: It took mental toughness to get there. It takes mental toughness to get the best out of what you’ve got.

Interviewer: That’s what the sporting would describe that athletes at the elite level are more mentally tough than somebody else will win more often than someone who’s equally physically capable but not as mentally tough. Because it’s teams it’s more difficult to compare and contrast because it’s different people but it’s interesting that you said you thought they were mentally tougher and why did you think that?

LEIGH: What I saw was the right decisions being made right the way across the pitch in lots of different situations so apart from the fact they had a handful of world class players, they seemed to making the right decisions at the right time more often than not and as an observer, you had confidence that if something happened in one part of the pitch, they’d be able to sort it out in a positive way.

LOUISE: To bring the topic back to the winners – the All Blacks! They were saying afterwards that they had to call up the 4th ranked guy.

CRIS: There’s mental toughness – the 4th ranked guy who’d gone fishing to be called up, not have the same amount of training as everyone else, to come within a week and deliver the kick that wins the world cup in rugby. I think we need to be sure we’re talking about individual mental toughness, not corporate mental toughness.
LOUISE  But afterwards the team captain said it’s about planning for the worst and so if the worst happens, you’re not going to collapse, you’re going to bring in your 4th ranked guy.

CRIS  But that’s corporate, organisational mental toughness. I think we’re looking for individual mental toughness.

Interviewer  It’s interesting that you raise this from a team perspective – it’s been looked at from team and individual sports. I don’t want to go too far off into the corporate mental toughness because if we’re trying to understand the collective, it must be in the individual – there must be a cognitive entity that sits within us and therefore, it may be grouped.

LOUISE  Although in business, there are very few businesses which are just one person.

Interviewer  That’s true.

LOUISE  Business is about multiple people, generally and you’ve got to ..

LEIGH  And were you to recruit people and could spot mental toughness in the interview and bugger the skill set but just recruit mentally tough people, you’d have an organisation that was mentally tough.

CRIS  The sum of the parts.

LOUISE  But would they perform?

LEIGH  And that’s coming back to the England team of 8 years ago, it had got mentally tough people and the coach put them into the situation 8 years ago to prove that mental toughness.

Interviewer  It’s a collection of individual activity so I’d like to focus on the individual, you can relate it to teams or companies but if we’re able to focus on the individual, we’re able to focus on that.

LEIGH  You made a good point a few minutes ago, it’s about time and longevity. So in sport, you’ve got a finite career – 5, 10 or 15 years before your body gives up and you’re not at the top. You might still be mentally tough and your mental toughness might end up in the part when you’re 50 but your skills
are gone. But in business, you've got 40 years in business and that's a far longer engagement in the need to be mentally tough and it might be something that builds up – it might plateau out but you've got longer time at it.

CRIS Being mentally tough in business, it doesn't seem appropriate to talk about a one-off snapshot of "today I was mentally tough". It needs to be resilience over a good period of time, so a sustained performance over x number of years.

Interviewer That's interesting, you talked before about taking decisions. If you take Johnny Wilkinson, when the ball came him he made some decisions – he didn't kick off his right, he kicked off his left (or the other way round!) but he kicked off his worse foot but he made those decisions instantly and people make instantaneous decisions in business.

CRIS Yes, one of the first things I learnt at Whitbread – the very first day of my working career – the guy stood up in front of us and said “success equals 2 things – in Whitbread, having the surname "Whitbread" or the ability to make decisions”. You may make the wrong one but it’s the ability to actually do something, to make a decision. I’ve never forgotten that.

Interviewer When I said instantaneous, it could be calculated but we make a decision at a moment in time. A career isn’t one decision, it’s a series of decisions. So if we think about business mental toughness and it was interesting that you read through the sporting definition and changed it to business then raised the question is it about competition and winning. If we take the competition bits out, what might you replace them with?

CRIS Different things, you can be a mentally tough secretary and a very good PA – very mentally tough but at different things. People skills, managing your boss – maybe it's not so different! Working by yourself, team work, etc.

Interviewer They’re the components.

LEIGH I think I’d replace with success because success is whole range of …

Interviewer Taking it back to Whitbread, is that about being a Whitbread or making decisions?
LOUISE Maybe the way to look at it is to think of the people who you think aren't mentally tough in business and what is it that they do wrong or don't do. Quite often it would be that they don't take the decision.

CRIS They prevaricate or procrastinate.

Interviewer Or they perform poorly.

CRIS Or they just absolutely “bottle it”. If you sat down in a room with no pressure and talk about it, they could hit it on the head and just go “we'll do this, this and this”. Get them to stand up in front of the board and present their plan and they bottle it.

Interviewer Because …

CRIS There's a mental toughness there to be able to .. I'm saying there that the definition of success is being able to get up in front of a board.

LEIGH It's also about being proactive, it's about looking for things to improve the situation not just accepting the status quo. There's a whole range of attributes that contribute.

Interviewer That's what we're going to come on to next so hold that thought.

LOUISE That's something about this that sort of fits and sort of doesn't!

CRIS Which bits don't?

LOUISE Well, it's not just about the competition.

CRIS Didn't you feel in competition when you were working? To begin with, I was one of 10 people in the marketing department at Whitbread and it grew to 80 and there was a massive sense of competition there. When I went out to America, it was just me and I loved it!

Interviewer That's interesting, did you love it when you were in Whitbread?

CRIS No.

Interviewer So actually for you, competition, you find stressful in that context.
CRIS A bit of competition is healthy.

Interviewer If you’d been up against 79 footballers playing football, would you have felt the same?

CRIS Good question. Difficult, maybe that’s what it is – there were people who would have just risen to the top of 80 whereas I found it difficult to differentiate myself. Part of me thinks mental toughness is just another word for emotional intelligence – just being able to manage the politics, manage the people side, manage the emotions you go through in a business and hence you get to rise to the top in your area or your game because you do that better whereas most people get upset at this or that or get angry when they should have just calmed down.

Interviewer So do you think anger for example is not part of a mentally tough performer?

LOUISE Absolutely it is.

CRIS It’s about channelling it.

LOUISE Yes, there are times when you need it, when you’re trying to drive stuff through.

CRIS But I think a mentally tough person you wouldn’t necessarily know that they’re angry.

Interviewer That’s interesting, you seem to have a negative viewpoint whereas LOUISE is saying “no, actually the demonstrating of anger and the channelling of anger are attributes. Now you may be thinking about different contexts.

LOUISE When I think of the times you would use that, that’s part of the emotional intelligence knowing when to use it because you’re trying to control and create a situation, there’s times when you need to use anger to get things done or you need to use anger to make things clear that lines have been crossed and people are behaving inappropriately.

CRIS But you don’t necessarily do that with anger, you channel the anger into assertiveness, you don’t come over as aggressive.
LOUISE Well I’m just thinking of one particular person who said that she deliberately banged on the table when she had to make a very important point and she got it across. It was a really important board meeting and lots of people were mouthing off so she used that technique. I’ve never had an opportunity to use it until now!

LEIGH Is it about not just anger but the negative losing your temper.

LOUISE Yes, it shouldn’t be that.

Interviewer We’re moving into the components now, so someone who’s mentally tough, you would say is in control of their temper or are they in control of their emotions?

LOUISE Well, they’re in control of what they’re trying to achieve and they’re using different techniques.

Interviewer So they’re not in control of what they’re trying to achieve, they’re in control of something that will enable them to achieve what they’re trying to achieve? Are they in control of their emotions or do they feel they’re in control of what they’re trying to achieve because in that sense because they’re 2 different things?

LOUISE I lost you on the control! I think they’re in control of controlling the whole situation, they’re using anger as a tool to achieve something, other things aren’t going to work in that situation. So maybe the person who’s mentally tough is not losing their temper, they’re using it to remain in control.

Interviewer And those who aren’t mentally tough, aren’t in control of their temper?

CRIS Or not consistently in control. Like my friend Lindsey, who I think of as the ultimately mentally tough person, is just always, always, always in control. He’s got the confidence, the knowledge, the skills, the self-belief – everything - that he just feels in control all the time.

Interviewer Do you know he’s in control or does he appear to be in control?

CRIS Both. I’ve watched him during the university days and I’ve asked him. I’ve tried to model myself on him, just asked him what’s going through your
head? I like the word “control”, can we put that in the definition? He’s in control of all emotions to do with business, he’s control of all situations.

Interviewer: So “control” is an aspect of what you believe to be a mentally tough business person?

CRIS: Emotional control, people control.

Interviewer: So is that emotion or is that behaviour? The lady who slapped the table, is that emotion or the manifestation of emotion?

LOUISE: No, she said she did it deliberately to make a point, she’s not an aggressive person.

CRIS: So did she think “I don’t feel aggressive but I’m going to use an aggressive technique to make a point”. Is that what you’re trying to get to?

Interviewer: I’m not trying to get anywhere, I’m trying to understand what you think.

CRIS: You see if she wasn’t feeling aggressive internally but she was so control of what was going on ..

LOUISE: The dynamics

CRIS: And where they were trying to get to that but they were absolutely going off at a tangent and never get to a resolution that she went through all the different mental tools and went to shock treatment to go “bang”. That’s brilliant, I think that’s mentally tough to have the confidence to doing something like the shock action. Confidence is a big word, I think. How many times do you come out of a meeting, have a good chat around the water cooler and someone goes this or that should have happened and you say “why didn’t you say something!?”. They’re either not mentally tough enough to do it or they just don’t care.

Interviewer: They obviously did care because they mentioned it.

CRIS: But not enough to do anything.

Interviewer: Or the decision they made was to do nothing.
LEIGH And only on reflection over time would that decision seen to be successful or not and that’s the longevity of business against the immediacy of the sport because if you decide not to put back-spin on the golf ball, it ends up in the water – it happens immediately. Whereas in business..

Interviewer But what about the next time you play that round, you play that shot? Would you not reflect on that experience?

LEIGH Probably, yes.

Interviewer It’s back to this winning bit – is it about you getting a par or birdie or is it about you playing your round in the competition you’re in. You mentioned reflection and the ability to reflect through longevity so do you think our ability to reflect has a part to play?

LEIGH I think in business you will only succeed as the result of a whole series of decisions over a longer period of time and therefore, you potentially need to look back on what you’ve done. For sport, I quite like the idea that mental toughness is being able to get out of bed at 4am for 8 years to go swimming.

Interviewer But what does that demonstrate – “I used to get out of bed at 4am and go swimming”! I wouldn’t necessarily thought at the time “I’m mentally tough” or described myself or any other person who did that as mentally tough but if someone’s prepared to do that, what does it demonstrate?

LOUISE Well, it’s commitment. Commitment to the cause.

CRIS But is that mental toughness, I used to play football willingly in sleet and snow, slide tackle right through pools of frozen water! It wasn’t because I was mentally tough, it was because I loved it!

Interviewer Therefore what some people might see as a negative, you see as a positive.

LEIGH And perhaps that’s the difference, there are lots of people who love it and that’s where the quality in sport is around your physical capability, there are lots of swimmers who get up at 4am..

Interviewer But they’re not all successful.
LEIGH  You’re right, they’re not all successful.

CRIS  At football I didn’t make it as high as I should have done because I wasn’t mentally tough enough to take the knock backs. I’m kind of coming right back to the beginning because in my football career I got knocked back a number of times, when everyone started growing and I got elbows in the face and I didn’t have the mental toughness to take that and I actually pulled out which set me back. I did get back into it and when I was at university, the same thing happened. I didn’t have the mental toughness, I didn’t even bother competing in the first year trials. I returned the year after when I got my passion back but I didn’t have the toughness the first time round.

Interviewer  Is that toughness or resilience?

CRIS  I’m generally very resilient but it was the mental toughness – I bottled it.

Interviewer  You gave up. So a characteristic of somebody who’s mentally tough is that they don’t give up?

CRIS  Yes.

Interviewer  So if you were going to describe it another way than not give up, how would you describe it? What did you lack?

CRIS  I think it was the ability to..

Interviewer  Because you said “passion”.

LOUISE  You talked about in your football that you gave up and then came back and actually in business, you can give and then come back because of the longer period.

LEIGH  It might be a good idea but at the wrong time so let’s up the idea to one side until the time comes right. So that’s about decision making, I mean part of our success in working with entrepreneurs is telling them to stop and give up because the fact they may be totally..

CRIS  Professional.

Interviewer  Confident, driven.
LEIGH  But there's no market, no business there. Might be a brilliant idea but there's no business.

LOUISE  So they need to refocus that passion.

Interviewer  How would you define that as a characteristic of somebody?

LEIGH  What, the entrepreneur character?

Interviewer  The fact they know when to give up. Is that what you saying, a mentally tough person knows when to give up?

LOUISE  It's not giving up though, it's refocusing.

CRIS  The analogy would be losing a battle but winning a war. You know when to retreat to save a situation and you can fight again to win the war.

Interviewer  That's interesting because in sport some athletes would die to win.

CRIS  But others, like it was said of New Zealand, they peaked every 4 years. They didn't worry about the competitions in between, they didn't mind losing because they were focused on every 4 years and that's what was important to them.

Interviewer  So you think a mentally tough performer is focused?

CRIS  A mentally tough performer can tell you what they're trying to achieve and how they're going to achieve it and doesn't worry about small knockbacks on the way and will bounce back when they do happen. They don't worry about what others may perceive as underperformance as long as it's in their plan.

Interviewer  Are you talking about sport or business.

CRIS  No, business. I've got this saying "short-term pain for long-term gain". Sometimes you have to go to your boss and say "I've f...... up". You don't want to say that and it doesn't look very good and in their eyes, you've taken a step back but long-term you can win that back, manage that situation, get through that tough situation. Long-term you can get back.
Interviewer: So actually mental toughness is a willingness to admit to mistakes.

CRIS: Yes, I think there’s a massive amount of self-awareness within mental toughness so you’ve got to know when you’ve made your mistakes and how best to handle those mistakes whether you do admit to somebody or not.

Interviewer: What you’ve got there is self-awareness and emotional intelligence which is our understanding of things and potentially the way that we perform or make decisions but not necessarily in the definitions of emotional intelligence where we look at mental toughness and we talk about performance or decision making then being self-aware doesn’t necessarily lead to a decision but what you’ve described there is that you will make a decision.

CRIS: So it would be decision making based on quality self-awareness or others awareness, context awareness.

LOUISE: It’s quite hard not to stray into other areas.

Interviewer: These aren’t mutually exclusive so resilience is something that’s been researched, hardiness is something that’s been research and defined. Mental toughness in sport. Emotional intelligence in business, sport and health. All of these define psychological constructs and characteristics that aren’t mutually exclusive.

LOUISE: But mental toughness and emotional intelligence, you could see times when in business when someone is mentally tough but doesn’t have the greatest emotional intelligence.

Interviewer: Yes, I’m working with someone now who I would say whose emotional intelligence levels are miniscule! The guy doesn’t really understand empathy at all but he’s mentally tough. If I scored him on mental toughness 1 to 10, I would give him an 8. If I scored him on emotional intelligence, I’d give him a 2 and that’s probably me exaggerating his capability!

CRIS: Is there a sense of belligerence or a sense of destiny? I think it’s fascinating.

LOUISE: I know a few people like that.
CRIS    I thought the 2 were quite related.

Interviewer    We’re in danger of discussing the relationship between those 2 things and I
don’t really want to go down that, even though it’s very interesting. I would
like you to take 5 minutes to write down individually what you think the
characteristics of a mentally tough business performer are. Then we’ll
discuss those.

BREAK

Interviewer    So let’s go around the table and each introduce a characteristic and if
you’ve got the same characteristic, it’ll be interesting to see what you think
the opposite is. What I’m also interested in is how you’ve seen it
manifested.

LEIGH    Resilience in adversity.

Interviewer    Have you got an example of that?

LEIGH    Just the whole of the business environment at the moment is tough.

Interviewer    So how are certain people performing and excelling?

LEIGH    Most people understand that it’s tough out there and it’s the ones who are
doing things and trying to move forwards, still trying to create opportunities
despite the fact that it’s not all successful as opposed to ..

Interviewer    So there’s a number of things in that, creating opportunities even though
they’re not all successful so it’s our ability to accept failure and move on
rather than something that’s physically going to hurt us or a personal
rejection, just something didn’t work and I’ll move on from that in a way
defining resilience.

LEIGH    But there are individuals who don’t do things and just go with the flow and
the flow’s a negative flow so it’s about battling against the tide of adversity.
It might mean you get nowhere but at least you’re not going backwards. I
think that’s an element in where we find ourselves in some of the stuff we’re
doing.
Interviewer  So if someone isn’t resilient what are they then? What’s the opposite to resilience.

LOUISE  They give up.

CRIS  Weak.

LOUISE  No, I don’t think they’re weak just it’s so tough they just give up or in an entrepreneurial sense, they’ll go and get a job. Removal of that problem because it’s too tough. It’s too tough so I’ll just give up.

LEIGH  Avoid it.

Interviewer  It’s interesting because you said you do advise some people to give up and that’s the best decision to make?

LOUISE  It wasn’t to give up, it was to give up on that market. To give up on the way you’ve shaped that idea and refocus. It’s never about giving up.

Interviewer  But surely some of the people who come are very resilient potentially but actually their idea is a waste of time.

LEIGH  It’s rubbish! We see 5 out of 6 at every patent clinic but we’d never tell them it’s a rubbish idea because there’s strengths in most everything we see and you’re not going to succeed by telling them to stop so what you need to do is redirect their efforts and energies in what you might perceive as being more beneficial.

Interviewer  OK. But what if I invented and wanted to market the chocolate fireguard! Obviously that’s not going to work.

LEIGH  Not as a fireguard but if you entered a completely different market of children’s confectionary, not only could you do fireguards, you could do teapots, kettles and all sorts of chocolate confectionary.

LOUISE  What you’re trying to do is help them is remember their passion but perhaps point out that they need to find a customer for that particular thing or give up on that particular market just because there’s an obvious block they haven’t spotted. It isn’t ever about giving up.
LEIGH  Because as advisors you’d never succeed by telling someone to give up because they never, ever listen to that.

LOUISE  I actually used the words “bouncing back” from adversity. I don’t know whether I’ve got uncomfortable with the word “resilience” or whether I originally said “bouncing back”. It is almost a positive thing about the bouncing back so it’s been a horrible situation but you were talking about the person who appears to have no anxiety and always positive but yesterday that business failed or they lost that major customer.

Interviewer  So is that positive outlook?

LOUISE  No, it’s not a positive outlook, you might talk to them about it and it might still be raw and a negative experience but they just bounce back and go “OK, but ..” They might reflect on it and it’s not just about coming back. Resilience is about being able to keep coming back but I feel it’s bouncing back because it’s even going further – yes, that was negative but that’s OK and push me further forward.

Interviewer  So is that about seeing the positives in negatives or ..

LOUISE  No, I guess it’s about helping push you to do more the next time so it’s sugar-coating anything, it’s not just about seeing the positives and negatives – is there stuff I could have done differently and it would’ve worked or it was never going to work but this time it’s a new page, new day.

LEIGH  It’s about accepting the negatives and just getting on with something else, what’s done’s done.

Interviewer  Are they able to leave things behind, draw a line under things?

LOUISE  If I think about my own experiences, I feel like now compared to when I was 20, I just deliver tons more and attack more opportunities at the same time.

Interviewer  Why’s that?

LOUISE  It’s probably some of the elements of confidence and experience.

CRIS  Maturity.
LOUISE  I had a major failure and it's all the learning experiences from that. It's still very raw but it's about bouncing back and going "OK, that's not going to stop me, that's going to drive me further".

LEIGH  I've got experience down here with a question mark. Then I've got a question – can you be mentally tough at 20 in a business environment?

CRIS  I don't know about 20 but I was absolutely amazed by somebody in America who had already run a company at the age of 30.

LOUISE  But running a company doesn't mean you're mentally tough.

Interviewer  How old's Mark Zuckerberg?

LOUISE  Not necessarily mentally tough, you can get a lot of luck.

Interviewer  It's interesting when you say can you be mentally tough at 20.

LOUISE  In a business context is what you said.

Interviewer  When you talked before about what mental toughness is and the aspect of decision making, is it about the decisions we can make at the ages we're at?

LOUISE  No, I think it's maybe a confidence thing to go for those decisions that you may be didn't go for when you were 20. I've got decision making as a point and I've got 2 aspects. It's not only the ability to do them but people who aren't mentally tough can't make a decision when they need to. The other aspect, it's not that all the decisions will be good but the balance will be that they were the right decisions in the end.

Interviewer  Hence the performance bit.

LOUISE  Another aspect about bouncing back from adversity, I actually put below that "pushes the boundaries" so keeps either pushing people you work with or pushing the boundaries of can we go further, can we do more, can we do it differently.
Interviewer: Would you describe that as challenging? They like to challenge things and therefore somebody who isn’t mentally tough doesn’t challenge, doesn’t push boundaries.

LOUISE: Yes.

CRIS: I could argue for and against. I’m trying to think back to some of the people I think are mentally tough at their level and they weren’t pushing boundaries at all but they had to be mentally tough just to survive with people trying to get them to do this, this and this but to get their job done, they had to be mentally tough.

Interviewer: And how did that manifest itself? They said no, they were willing to disappoint and not always looking to please.

CRIS: Exactly.

Interviewer: What other characteristics?

LOUISE: One thing I was thinking was the opposite side, people who you think aren’t mentally tough are people you don’t want to follow so when things are going wrong people won’t follow you. People congeal around a mentally tough person when things are wrong, maybe because they think they will at least make a decision.

LEIGH: I wonder if that’s a manifestation of a whole skill set that includes leadership, knowledge and external confidence.

LOUISE: If you think about physical toughness, who are you going to follow if there’s a fight? Being a small person, I’m going to follow any large New Zealand rugby player.

Interviewer: Is it just leaders who are mentally tough and by default, are followers mentally weak?

General consensus – no.

CRIS: I’ve got a number of people in my mind who I would describe as mentally tough but they’re no great shakes in the business world but very good at what they do at their level, can’t be shaken but they’re not drivers.
LOUISE  Mental toughness in a business context?

Interviewer  It’s also about performance..

LEIGH  Is that confidence around their technical skill or generally. I wondered if some of these people were mentally tough or is it just not part of their make-up, are they technical experts or do they just have an appreciation of most things? Are your guys technical experts and therefore, confident in their own ability and can, therefore, stand up to being challenged?

CRIS  I’ve got things like “sense of self”, I had a list of self-confidence, self-awareness, self-belief and self-esteem. That’s kind of just knowing yourself but having a sense of purpose, knowing your role and its place. Like a secretary can be mentally tough, she’s not going to drive the boundaries but she has a sense of purpose, knows what her role is.

Interviewer  It depends what you mean by the boundaries in that if it’s about performance, what is it that the secretary has to do to perform her job? Is it number of words per minute, inaccuracies in what she does, delivering on time?

CRIS  Ability on the phone..

Interviewer  A good telephone manner in that she isn’t rude to people who are rude to her. So this is where we have to try to disassociate ourselves from this winning context that’s brought within sport. It’s a bit one-dimensional in sport – it’s easy to measure. Whereas in business if only CEOs where mentally tough, we’d just need to talk to CEOs but if all CEOs are mentally tough, how do they get that – do they have it before or do they just get it once they become CEO? Referring back to the secretary, you talked before about “unshakeable”, what do you mean by that?

CRIS  I’m just thinking absolutely knew why they were there and I’m saying that mental toughness is outside skills and knowledge – you apply mental toughness to those skills. They just know that they know their job – a sense of self, a sense of purpose and a sense of where they fit in with other people and they’re just very confident.
LOUISE I would also add that a number of secretaries or PAs are quite belligerent so I’m not sure that’s mental toughness or it’s just part of the role to bat everyone off, just like a debt collector – they might not be mentally tough, they’re just going to know on every door and ask for the money.

LEIGH I just got thinking about another analogy, are the mentally tough the ones who are unconsciously competent?

Interviewer Do you think that people who are mentally tough, know they’re mentally tough?

Consensus – no, not always.

CRIS I used to say to the secretary “I think you’re brilliant at what you do” and she didn’t recognise it at all.

Interviewer And again it’s that performance element. The secretary who’s belligerent, is that a positive or negative in the way they perform? Could they perform and not be belligerent? You thought that person was mentally tough by the way they performed, the focus, self-efficacy.

CRIS And they could take the knocks, when you get rude people calling in, they could handle that – water off a duck’s back. Negativity in meetings, bosses who are stressed out, they can manage it and smooth it out but not get emotional, not get frazzled. I had this sense of self, kind of 3 different types of bands of characteristic. One was internal, the “self” thing, control of or managing emotions, some sort of drive, resilience or passion, sense of purpose, results orientation, making it happen, decision making. Then I had another band – “others”. You deal well with others.

Interviewer So how would you describe that? Personable?

CRIS It’s having the good interpersonal skills, the team-working skills, the ability to gauge and understand others – empathy, their strengths and weaknesses, where the risks and opportunities are of people. You’ve gauged potential flash points in advance.

Interviewer Understanding other’s emotions?
CRIS  Yes, gauging other people emotionally so that you can manage difficult situations so you can manage upwards. That’s where I failed in my career was managing upwards. The third band was “context”, I haven’t got a lot on this. The environmental or contextual awareness which in the business world is political awareness.

LEIGH  I’ve got clear vision and therefore, visionary.

Interviewer  And does that align with your sense of purpose.

LEIGH  Yes and confidence but I also wondered if there was something missing, so if you’re mentally tough but you’ve got something missing. I’ve got handle self-doubt and outwardly calm.

Interviewer  Can you give me an example of somebody or a situation where you think they’ve handled self-doubt or demonstrated mental toughness.

LEIGH  I can’t really but I was just assuming that everyone’s got some element of self-doubt and to be mentally tough and make tough decisions..

LOUISE  We can give lots of examples of that actually. When you think of the meeting with Pure and they’ve got 6 canopies(???) which we think they own and we want to take off their hands so we’re at a meeting at their place, in their environment, meeting that woman for the first time, of course we’ve got to have some doubt as they’re running a £6M T/O business and we’ve got our £0.5M but we turned her and that’s what it’s about. She didn’t once say “who are you to come in here and challenge us”, it’s about the outward calmness and managing the self-doubts.

CRIS  And that’s where you’d use “NLP type” tools. When you’re feeling self-doubt there are things you can do to reduce that doubt or actually turn into positivity and you just remember similar situations when you had that doubt and you achieved it.

Interviewer  You reflect.

CRIS  Yes, use reflective skills and turn it into a very positive experience.
LOUISE: I actually had a point which wasn’t quite like that, there’s a review and reflection both before and after key, critical instances. So you reflect and review before on what you think might happen and the same afterwards.

Interviewer: So mentally tough people are reflective?

General consensus – yes.

CRIS: They’re not overly reflective and spend all their days just reflecting! They use it. You do get lots of people who talk for England! They reflect and move on.

LOUISE: I think it’s before and after so they know the critical incident is coming and prepare and even after, no matter if it went well or badly, review it.

LEIGH: Bring that back to sport and that’s about practice, isn’t it? So the reflection in business is similar to practice in sport where you trying to practice for all sorts of eventualities and so when it happens during the game, you’re ready to react whereas in business, you’ve not got the practice opportunity, what you’ve got is the preparation and reflection. So perhaps it’s preparation that’s actually the reflecting activities. Preparing for the potential occurrences. Can I just leap back into this self-doubt thing because I think that’s about pre-match nerves so coming back to sport, it’s handling self-doubt and knowing you’re going to be nervous when you take that bat but it’s how you deal with it. Almost getting the buzz from the game and going into business environments when you don’t quite know what’s going to happen.

Interviewer: So handling self-doubt, is that about handling anxiety or is it different?

LEIGH: I’m unsure on what anxiety is, I’m lucky there. You can get nervous and get unsure of your detail, is that anxiety?

LOUISE: Anxious could be that you want a certain outcome and it might not go like that. It’s just a human emotion, isn’t it? There’s a few things that we talked about previously that we hadn’t listed the control and longevity.

LEIGH: I’ve got control and longevity.
And there’s destiny. I’ve got a question mark against that, is someone who’s mentally tough is creating a longer vision. A visionary?

Do they have clarity of vision?

Clear vision and visionary, are they different? I think they are. A visionary is somebody who’s a developer, a shaper, some of your entrepreneurs are absolutely visionary. But you don’t need to be visionary to be mentally tough. I think you may be very clear about your role, I’ve got “sense of self” but clarity is a great word, of your role, your objectives and what you’re working towards. It may not be just yours, it may be a group one.

What you were saying earlier about focus. I see focus as narrowing and potentially is unaware of what’s going on outside your focus. Whereas clear vision, I see it as being wider and more open so I’m not sure that mentally tough people are focused to the exclusion of other things.

OK, so they are focused but they’re aware of other things?

Yes, they have a clear understanding of how they sit in a wider context.

So would you say that people who are mentally weak are focused but blinded to other things? Narrow minded?

It could be, to use the sporting thought of it. Those who are less mentally tough are focused totally and have all the skill sets but the mentally tough people have a wider appreciation of where it sits and do other things so not only do they get up at 4am to go swimming but they’re able on the day of the competition to relax more because they’re not as focused.

It’s your thoughts and how you view it. When you got to the end, you said relaxed, so are mentally tough people relaxed? You used that a little bit as you described Lindsey, he’s not anxious, therefore, is he relaxed and mentally tough because he’s relaxed?

Lindsey – absolutely. I think they will look “this is the difference of what’s going on inside and what other people see”. I think mentally tough people look relaxed whether they are inside, I think Lindsey is but other people may not be. I think you’re mentally tough but I’m not sure you’re always relaxed.
LOUISE Relaxed could be one element but I would say it’s actually the other way, it’s excited and maybe that’s the pre-match nerves but it’s the excitement of the big thing.

CRIS You see the secretary and the team leader in the logistics side of Whitbread, they weren’t excited, they didn’t want to work but they were mentally tough and did a good job, performed very well but business was not their life. They weren’t excited about their work but mentally tough people, I would’ve said.

Interviewer Not excited or relaxed.

CRIS They would drive and drive you but I don’t think these people were passionate at all.

Interviewer So you think the key characteristics and we talked about sport which as you said has got quite clear boundaries and relatively easy to define, do you think that some of the characteristics such as being relaxed or excited by certain situations are positive or negative with regards to mental toughness depending on the context.

LOUISE If you turn that on its head and think about people who aren’t mentally tough, if it was a particularly hard situation as we’re putting that as the context, will avoid those situations or prevaricate, don’t step up to the plate using the sporting analogy.

LEIGH In business, are mentally tough people, mentally tough in all situations? So if we took your team leader in logistics and made them head of distribution for the whole organisation, would they be mentally tough there?

CRIS Excellent point.

Interviewer So if you took the secretary and made her a sales person?

CRIS I think they would be mentally tough enough to say this is not for me. Put them in a situation which isn’t suited to them on a skills and knowledge and experience level, I think they would be mentally tough to say this isn’t for me. It happened to me, I was given a promotion into a totally alien part of the business and airline management responsibility and a promotion in
terms of responsibility, after 9 months I had to go back and say “this is too much”. I think I was mentally tough enough to go and wave the white flag.

LOUISE Is that something about age or experience?

CRIS Failing or not succeeding doesn’t mean you’re not mentally tough.

Interviewer So it’s about the decisions you make?

LOUISE Pushing back to the experience thing, does it make it nature or nurture then? Are you creating these opportunities to push yourself further or have you innately got this mental toughness? Maybe it’s built up by exposure to situations.

LEIGH Everyone’s mentally tough to a greater or lesser degree in all sorts of situations, so you rise to the position of your mental toughness.

Interviewer So everyone’s promoted to a level of incompetence and the mentally tough are the ones who say I don’t want that job because I know I won’t be able to do that job so I’ll stay where I am because I can do this one.

CRIS We’re kind of talking about relating mental toughness to progression but those 2 examples I keep coming back to weren’t interested in progression, they just wanted to do a really good job, get paid appropriately and go home enjoy their lives.

Interviewer The way I suggested that was about the change in context so in this role, secretary, I can cope with everything that goes on – the telephone calls, the belligerent managers, whatever it is – I can cope, I can perform. If I become the leader of the secretary pool, I may not necessarily be able to do that. So it’s not about promotion, it’s about the change in context. Is that what you were thinking about.

LEIGH Yes, I think everyone’s mentally tough..

Interviewer It’s different contexts that either enable you to be, so Tiger Woods is mentally tough on a golf course or was but not necessarily in a bar or lap dancing club where he makes the wrong decisions. Right decisions on the golf course but wrong decisions in other aspects of his life. John Terry makes good decisions on a football pitch or has done historically but poor
decisions off the pitch and actually, does that impact him again and he makes poor decisions on the pitch.

LEIGH You can take that into the business world as well – people making good decisions in business but poor decisions elsewhere.

Interviewer Look at Nick Leason, highly successful decisions for himself but not for his investors.

LEIGH Talking about longevity, pretty poor for himself as well!

CRIS There are people I would describe as not mentally tough.

LOUISE But if mental toughness is a spectrum, they’ve got less.

Interviewer Not as much as others and that’s the whole point. That’s not to say that an athlete who wins the gold is mentally tough and the athlete who gets silver is mentally weak.

CRIS They could be totally equal on mental toughness but one’s just got longer legs!

Interviewer So we can’t move away from that physical aspect and again, in business you’ve got intelligence ..

CRIS Yes, that’s the skills and knowledge.

LEIGH And luck?

CRIS I think you make your own luck.

Interviewer Gary Player said the harder I practice, the luckier I get!

CRIS I believe in that totally.

LOUISE You can create your own opportunities so you get luckier but there are still things that are completely out of our control.

LEIGH That’s about the preparation, preparing yourself to take advantage of the opportunities as they come across your desk.
CRIS: You see that’s what my definition of luck is, you don’t wait for it. In a sailing analogy, everything on the boat is working right, you set your sails, etc and if the wind blows then you can capture it there and then quicker.

LOUISE: Yes but a less mentally tough group might have captured the wind.

Interviewer: You were talking about preparedness. Mentally tough people, do they prepare.

LEIGH: It’s coming back to the pre and post reflection and I think pre reflection is about preparing.

Interviewer: Because that enables you to make better decisions?

LOUISE: It allows them to think through different possibilities so there might be surprises but most likely not because you’ve thought through all the different options.

LEIGH: You can think on your feet better.

CRIS: That’s because you’ve prepared it. It happens to me, for an interview I prepare 3 classic questions and then a handful of others and go in feeling confident that I can handle 80% and just wing the rest. It’s the preparation that’s given me the mental toughness.

LEIGH: Do you need to be mentally tough to prepare or does preparing make you mentally tough?

CRIS: For me, it’s that way.

LEIGH: Preparing makes you mentally tough.

CRIS: But I’m mentally tough enough to force myself to prepare.

Interviewer: So is that about forcing yourself to do something you don’t necessarily want to do?

CRIS: I could just wing it but I know I’m much better if I’m prepared and confident and hence, mentally prepared and able and flexible and just free.
Interviewer: You’ve talked about this ability to improvise, is that something that mentally tough ..

LOUISE: Yes because when you were talking about that and being prepared, I was thinking about that ..

CRIS: I think you’re right because that fits with my 2 – the secretary and team leader, they were flexible, they could deal with things they hadn’t prepared for.

LEIGH: Experience?

CRIS: Yes, that helped them.

Interviewer: So is it flexible or adaptable?

LEIGH: Both. I think it’s the need to adapt to situations but be flexible enough that the tools you are using in different situations, you’ve got a range of tools to use.

Interviewer: So if somebody is focused, are they flexible or inflexible?

LEIGH: I think that’s where I was coming from with clearer vision, the context is wider whereas focused tends to be ..

CRIS: You can be focused then something happens and you have to adapt so you change your focus.

LOUISE: You can be focused on the longer term – you might be focused on the 2, 5 year mission.

CRIS: Like the secretary, she’s focused on some administration then her boss says “you’ve got help me, I need a meeting set up” and she adapts, focus and then come back. It’s the same.

Interviewer: What if Tom, Dick or Harry turned up and asked a question, where is the focus.
CRIS: And that’s where the flexibility and ability to adapt and say “no”, they’re managing others and juggling a number of things. Maybe that’s mental toughness being able to juggle all these things at once. You don’t say “I’m going to have a flexible day today”.

Interviewer: And within that, is there a hierarchy? What you described there was an ability to prioritise.

CRIS: I prefer the word “balance”. You balance everything that’s coming in at you, there will be certain things like if the CEO comes to me, I’m going to be more adaptable for him but if “so and so” comes, I’m going to put him off and ask him to come back tomorrow. So there is prioritisation.

LOUISE: That’s decision making.

CRIS: I think mentally tough people can balance all these different things, they have a nice balance of everything.

Interviewer: Therefore, someone who is mentally weak isn’t able to balance and is unbalanced in their ..

CRIS: Performance.

LEIGH: Or wouldn’t put themselves or get themselves into that situation.

LOUISE: Maybe someone who isn’t mentally tough, because they’re slightly unbalanced, can easily be thrown off.

Interviewer: And lose focus.

CRIS: Coming back to resilience, there will be times when you drop the balls but you get back up, pick them up and start juggling again.

Interviewer: Have we covered all your ..

LEIGH: I had something about having something missing. It’s something like the generals in WW1 where the bad generals had no problem giving the order to attack, the good generals really had angst about giving that same order but there are people who could give those difficult decisions easily because they didn’t appreciate the situation, the consequence, the impact. That’s an
extreme but I’m just wondering whether there are successful people in business because they don’t appreciate the impact of their decisions and behaviours have on people but they’re personally successful and their business is successful.

LOUISE
Is this ruthless?

LEIGH
Yes and they’re not mentally tough but they’re successful and they are successful because there’s something missing.

Interviewer
So is there an element of linking society and social awareness to mental toughness? Mentally tough people do the right thing? Or is there a negative side to mental toughness in the choices and decisions they make.

LOUISE
So was Hitler mentally tough? Probably was as he had half the population wanting to kill him.

CRIS
Mentally tough people aren’t afraid to make the tough decisions that affect other people.

LOUISE
But do they without knowledge, Hitler did it because he ignored..

LEIGH
In the business environment there are people making decisions for their own ends that impact negatively on others.

CRIS
There are some people I can think of from my career whose ethics were horrible, they were mentally tough and they achieved.

LOUISE
But were they really mentally tough because if they were ignoring all the ethics they weren’t making difficult decisions.

CRIS
They didn’t care how they got to the top but they were mentally tough enough to get there.

LEIGH
I don’t know if mental toughness has got a definition but if it did, would it be a positive definition so that those who made decisions that impacted negatively on others, they’re mentally tough, they’re something else and does mental toughness encompass some sort of social awareness and is that the difference between mental toughness in business and mental
toughness in sport. In sport, it’s win/lose and in business it doesn’t have to be win/lose.

Interviewer It’s interesting, really fascinating because it rounds itself on this question “are there negative aspects to mental toughness or can it be applied in a negative way” and when we talk about performance, is it other people’s appreciation of the performance that deems it successful? So when we say someone’s decisions are successful, is it they themselves that think “I’ve made a successful decision” because the guy that goes out and murders 20 people may in his head think he’s made 20 sensible decisions and been successful whereas the people who appreciate it say that was highly poor performance! Do you think it’s other people’s perception of performance that brings in this aspect of social morality.

LOUISE In sport, all the aspects of success are about win or lose and that’s people’s perceptions.

Interviewer Well it could be but you could take drugs and win, is that acceptable?

LEIGH No, that’s cheating.

Interviewer So you might have a performer who’s mentally tough but he’s mentally weak because he took drugs.

LEIGH But in a business environment, there you are running a company and you have to close one of your factories because the business performance says that factory’s no longer sustainable so you’re going to make 250 people redundant but it saves the business for the other 3,500. You can make that decision with lots of thought and angst but have to make it, does that make you more mentally tough than your FD just coming along and saying “you need to close that one” and does the mentally tough Chief Exec then go and eyeball the people and say “I’m closing your factory” and the less mentally tough CEO send his personnel manager.

Interviewer So is it about a sense of responsibility? Mentally weak people don’t feel responsible?

LOUISE It’s probably not that they don’t feel responsible but maybe they don’t step up to the responsibility. They don’t make the decisions knowing it’s too big
a responsibility. Realistically, the guy who kills 20 people should still know his responsibility, he may try and justify it in his mind.

CRIS I can think of some quite despicable people that I’ve met but I would describe them as mentally tough.

LOUISE Or is that just ruthless? Because actually if they don’t care, it wouldn’t be a difficult decision for them.

LEIGH I think we’re coming to the definition of mental toughness because it might manifest the behaviour that looks the same but driven by mental toughness and in others, by ruthlessness, lack of understanding or ignorance.

Interviewer So is it about positive outcomes rather than negative?

LEIGH I think positive has to be there in the whole.

CRIS In business I think the definition is both. When I think about mental toughness, it’s got to be about dealing with pressure, dealing with stress, dealing with anxiety in some incredible way that means they feel it but turn it into positive stuff or just deal with it. But then there’s the positiveness of driving forward or making things happen.

Interviewer But it’s the performance the outcome? So we use our mental toughness, apply our mental toughness or are mentally tough in a situation in order to see a positive outcome. So winning would be a positive outcome in sport, the positive outcome we’re looking for whereas in business, how would you define? You might have met some people who are mentally tough but LOUISE said are ruthless and therefore, the outcome for others may not be positive but for them, it may be. Is it about a broad positive outcome? The outcome might end up with redundancies but you are prepared to accept some losses for an overall positive outcome.

LEIGH And again it’s about behaviour and how you deal with the negative aspects and that is resilience because that is adverse for others but it’s about accepting that. You’re not going to turn the redundancy scenario round but you can do everything in the right way and make it less painful.
Interviewer: On that point then, it's really important for me to understand how you get there. You said all the negative things, how you deal with them, the tough decisions. When you were promoted and given this new job, was that a negative situation at the onset?

CRIS: No.

Interviewer: Positive. So you were given something that was a positive and it was how you dealt with that.

CRIS: I was passionate, full of energy, I was loving it but it became tougher and tougher. The people I was meant to be partnering didn't want me there, he wanted somebody else which I didn't know about at the time so I had all this negative stuff happening to me and also, I didn't get a good induction, it all went wrong.

Interviewer: OK, so it was ultimately the negative things.

CRIS: Before I said that mental toughness had an internal element, others element and a contextual element, now I'm not, I'm thinking it's just all about yourself. It's all about how you deal with tough times and the negatives. Elements of performance would be how you prepare, I think preparation is still part of mental toughness but I think it's about you deal with the negative s... It's easy to deal with positive stuff but mentally tough people can deal with the knockbacks, they can deal with the horrible situations, they can deal with the boss who's a bully, they can deal with all of those things.

LEIGH: Are we getting into a position where you could almost train and coach mental toughness into people? If you could identify some of the skills and traits, so preparation for example – here's your checklist to be mentally tough.

CRIS: I think there are base characteristics that support mental toughness, like preparation and things like that but when the negative situations come in, you've got some stuff that you do like NLP that you train people with to handle the s... and to either block it, turn it around or into positives, etc.
LEIGH But there are positive elements to it because in terms of having clear vision, focus but that's not a skill to train, it’s a trait to build on. It’s about empathy, confidence, flexibility, etc.

CRIS So you have a base that you stand on, they give you the opportunity to be mentally tough.

LEIGH On your model here I see skills whereas these not only allow you to deal with the tough stuff, but on the positive side, allow you to grow and develop. It’s the same skill sets, it’s like us dealing with entrepreneurs and when you actually break it down to what we do on creating a business, it's exactly the same skill sets as turnaround accountants but one’s positive and one’s negative.

LOUISE Did we say persistence?

Interviewer No.

LOUISE I’m just wondering if that’s a relevant point.

Interviewer If you think it’s relevant, it’s all about your own personal constructs.

LOUISE I think it’s part of the longevity.

Interviewer Persistence is that you will keep at something.

LOUISE I’m thinking about a particular issue we have, it’s not to do with entrepreneurs, my favourite café manager who is completely inappropriate for the job, the easiest thing would have been to have fired her years ago and we had the power to do that but the social responsibility thing is there are some good aspects but she’s the biggest pain in the a… ever! It’s about persistence to keep chipping away, she hates me and I’m organising her hen do!

Interviewer There are 2 interesting things in that – social responsibility…

LOUISE She’s got her own personal issues, she’s not the most popular person.
Interviewer: The social responsibility bit, do you think that’s an attribute of mental toughness? That people are socially responsible?

CRIS: No.

Interviewer: So you can be socially irresponsible and be mentally tough?

CRIS: Yes.

LOUISE: No, I think the ruthlessness, the people who don’t actually care, it’s not a difficult decision for them, it’s not a tough decision, they just do it. It’s quite clear, an easy decision. No anxiety about it, an easy decision, they can’t even understand why we’d be anxious about firing a person because it’s just a number on the books, “why are you putting up with that?” Their approach is an easy approach, there’s no difficulty in that.

Interviewer: Is it like having a conscience, if you’re mentally tough, you have a conscience as opposed to ruthless?

CRIS: Doesn’t this bring in the negative things? Their ruthlessness isn’t mentally tough because there’s no negative stuff to be mentally tough against.

Interviewer: The lack of conscience, ruthless.

LEIGH: It’s about having balance, big scales on either side, so to be mentally tough, you feel both sides of the scales full of the positives and negatives of the decision but you still make the decision. It’s about making a decision, putting as much as you can in both pots of the balance and see where it comes out. You do it quickly and effectively.

CRIS: Somebody who’s incredibly self-focused, just thinks about themselves, it would be very difficult to strip that all out and say, “yes, they are mentally tough” because they’re full of self, self, self. It’s much easier to describe someone who’s got these things as aware of the impact on others. That makes it easier to describe someone who’s mentally tough, that they’ve considered everybody and everything but they’re still willing to make a decision.

Interviewer: So they’re prepared to make difficult decisions?
CRIS: That would be an output, absolutely. Mentally tough people are willing and able to make tough decisions that impact on others. They're also able to make decisions that impact on themselves.

LEIGH: That's a big difference to the sporting analogy.

Interviewer: It may well be.

LOUISE: In the sporting analogy, you're looking for applause from the audience whereas in business, quite often, there is no applause, there's just negativity from everybody!

LEIGH: So business success and winning in sport are distinctly different.

CRIS: Do mentally tough people need applause, can they provide their own applause?

LEIGH: So is it intrinsically motivated?

Interviewer: Self-motivating?

CRIS: All the 3 people I've been using in my head are very self-driven, 2 of them just want to go in and do a good job, maintain their job and salary and go home. Lindsey knows what he wants and just does it, he doesn't anyone to pat him on the back, he certainly doesn't need me to say “wow Lindsey, you're great!”

LOUISE: But if you look at your discussion about the secretary, does she ever really have to make the difficult decisions?

CRIS: Difficult to her, in her role – yes.

Interviewer: That's an interesting point, what is a difficult decision?

CRIS: Yes, it's very job related.

LOUISE: Maybe it's Interviewer's point about both positives and negatives, there is no right or wrong answer.
Interviewer: It’s back to the serial killer who doesn’t think it’s a difficult decision to kill somebody whereas we would all find it difficult.

LEIGH: And that’s where someone ruthless in business ..

LOUISE: Can be successful, might not even be mentally tough.

LEIGH: Because there’s no balance.

CRIS: Alan Sugar is a ruthless b…… but could you say he’s mentally tough? You’d guess that he is, I knew somebody who worked for him, he’s a bully, belligerent, etc. I’m not saying he hasn’t got mental toughness but it’s very difficult to say he’s mentally tough.

LEIGH: And if the mental toughness definition has a positive element to it then you could argue he’s not.

LOUISE: We’re talking about someone we see on TV ..

CRIS: I know someone who worked for him directly .

LOUISE: But when you see him on TV making the decisions, you can see that he’s trying be pretty fair, he’s trying to give an opportunity to the person he thinks he should give the opportunity to.

Interviewer: So you’ve got this aspect of fair and unfair.

LOUISE: Which comes back to social responsibility.

Interviewer: An athlete who wins isn’t necessarily mentally tough, he might just be taller, slimmer, faster than the others and again, with Alan Sugar ..

LEIGH: But we know that sports people and teams who win well and others who don’t win well. Is how you win important?

CRIS: I’m not sure I can stand by the statement “to be mentally tough, you must have social awareness”. That sentence doesn’t stack up for me.

Interviewer: OK, people who lack social conscience are mentally tough.
CRIS: No. I don’t think it’s an either or.

LEIGH: You could say that those who are mentally tough make decisions taking social outputs are part of that decision making process.

CRIS: People who are mentally tough make tough decisions some of which may have a social impact on others. I don’t think it’s 100%, it’s one element of their decision making.

Interviewer: Overall, it’s positive and there may be some negative.

LOUISE: Maybe as humans, some of the most difficult decisions are these social impact ones because ..

LEIGH: Accountants have it easy – just close that factory.

CRIS: Are accountants mentally tough? A lot of accountants set up their own business and take risks so perhaps that’s mentally tough ..

LOUISE: They don’t take risks!

LEIGH: A GOOD accountants don’t take risks!

CRIS: If you’re mentally tough, are you necessarily a high performer?

Interviewer: Well, the statement would be that mental toughness enables high performance, however, it’s what you mean by “high performance”, so you might only have one leg so you can’t run as fast as Usain Bolt but you’re faster than all the other one-legged runners. It’s all about how you measure that performance and again, you talk about the decisions you make so a mentally tough person makes better decisions than other people, are able to make decisions where others wouldn’t or make socially acceptable decisions.

CRIS: They may not be socially acceptable but they make the decision anyway. Mentally tough people make well-considered, possibly tough, decisions.

Interviewer: So it’s for the overall good or ..

CRIS: No, for their own good. He doesn’t do a lot for me but he’s mentally tough.
LOUISE He might just be ruthless, it might not be a difficult decision at all, he’s very clear about what he wants and he’s out for himself.

Interviewer That’s describing selfishness, are mentally tough people selfish or unselfish?

CRIS Or are they focused and focused on themselves.

LOUISE Selfishness is a completely different topic, isn’t it.

CRIS You can be selfish and mentally tough at the same time. You can be mentally tough in a situation with a tough customer and be selfish as well. Lindsey has built his own business but he’s not put much help to me in building mine even though we’re great friends.

LEIGH But if you’re simply driven by extrinsic motivators, then in a positive definition of being mentally tough, I don’t think that stacks up because the win at all costs element of business and I don’t think that’s right.

LOUISE Which would fit with the sporting analogy of winning because you took the drugs to win so you’re not playing fairly.

CRIS If you can gauge some business rules, the business context of you are socially orientated, then mental toughness is this …

Interviewer So it’s playing within the rules.

CRIS So you set the rules and laws of the game, I feel happier with that rather than having it in the definition, you have it as part of the context. I’d be totally happy with that actually.

Interviewer We’re nearly at the end now so we’ll draw it to a conclusion. Is there anything you’ve still got a question mark about or add before we wrap up and finish? Nothing concerns you about what we’ve discussed, you’re happy for me to use the material?

CRIS Just don’t say anything about my friend, Lindsey!
Interviewer: This is the end so thank you very much for doing this, it's been extremely useful. It didn't go quite like the first focus group but a semi-structured group goes where you go! Finally, if you do know people like Lindsey, who you think are mentally tough, the next stage for me is to interview individuals and that doesn't preclude me interviewing you individually. One of things I'm interested in understanding are what are those critical incidents or do you think genetically you were born tough, you've made tough decisions all your life. So if there are some people you could suggest, that would be very useful. One that note, thank you very much for your support, it's much appreciated.

LEIGH: Good luck with getting something out of that!
APPENDIX D - FOCUS GROUP 3 TRANSCRIPT (ALISON, MIKE & GRAHAM)

Focus Group: 3

Topic: Business Mental Toughness
Date: 14/12/11
Attendees: Alison, Mike and Graham

Interviewer: What I’ll do is give you the sporting definition and its relevance to business and whether there’s a requirement for a business definition and what performance actually means. Does this work for business and if it does or it doesn’t, what do you think mental toughness might mean to a business professional. In developing your discussions, I’d like you to formulate a definition in your own heads and I’d like you to discuss it for 5 or 10 minutes, then I’d like you to take 5 minutes to think about what you think it might be and then we’ll share those definitions to see if there’s some commonality there or whether you’re in diametric opposition to each other.

MIKE: We’re allowed to disagree with the initial premise?

Interviewer: Yes, this is about your thoughts, there’s nothing right or wrong in this, I’m not looking to try and coerce you towards a definition, it’s what you think. We can revisit the definitions as we go through, if you do want to change them at some point, just let us know why you want to, it may be a different way of thinking about it. To help you think about how we define business mental toughness or any other sort of phenomena, if we take the analogy of a car, if we were to say “what is a car?” A car is something that generally has 4 wheels, an engine, doors, etc but the purpose of a car, what it does, is to transport us from A to B. So at the moment, I’m looking for the components of business mental toughness and again, you can see from the sporting definition what that might lead to, so this is the sporting definition that I’ve been using and has been widely accepted. So if we spend 10 minutes thinking what your thoughts are as a group and then take 5/10 minutes for what it might mean for your personal definition.

GRAHAM: It’s talking about coping, being more determined, focused and confident. It’s the longest bunch of words I’ve seen talking about sport which doesn’t mention winning! Nothing in there about winning, “thank you for coping
better than anyone else”. Not winning is not an acceptable result if you’re a senior sports person.

Interviewer: Giving you some context, how this was researched was looking at winners so it’s basically saying that people who won, performed better than others …

GRAHAM: It doesn’t say anything there about winning – it says ability to cope. The person who came 5th may have coped brilliantly and win a marathon in 3 days’ time but he didn’t win this one. The team who came 2nd or 3rd might have remained determined, focused and confident, the other lot just happened to play better and win. Now I’m off my hobby horse! I’m just amazed that you can wrap all kinds of sport round us but not mention the one thing that drives them and their coaches which is the silver medal wasn’t worth turning up for. There’s a young lady called Shanaze Reade who rode BMX at the Olympics.

Interviewer: Oh yes, she fell off.

GRAHAM: No, she didn’t fall off. 8 weeks before the Olympics began, the Americans changed the track because none of them could cope with the way she went about it. Instead of being a slide of 45° into the track, it became a vertical drop. It took away her start which was the fastest start anywhere in the world so she had to go away and start again. She still got the final, she was in second place at the last bend and she went for the undertake, the person saw her coming, moved across and she crashed. So she didn’t fall off, she went for it and when they interviewed her afterwards asked her “why did you do that?” and she said “I didn’t come here to finish second”. That lady is unbelievable, I’ve met her. If you go to the cycle area, they’ve built a new standard Olympic BMX track to make sure that doesn’t happen to her again. You walk around that building, there are an awful lot of mentally tough people.

Interviewer: But are only winners …

GRAHAM: They want to win.

Interviewer: So are only winners mentally tough then?
GRAHAM  No. I didn’t say only winners. There are some winners who aren’t mentally
tough at all, there are quite a few boxers who are bloody good with their
hands, they’re physically tough but they’re not necessarily mentally tough.
What I said was, I find it very odd that a definition of sports mental
toughness doesn’t, at any point, focus towards winning – it just says
determined and focused, it doesn’t say towards what.

Interviewer  That’s fair comment, I would like to talk about business mental toughness …

GRAHAM  It’s a fair analogy, business mental toughness is presumably driven by
teams or individuals who want to win so the conversation should be what
does winning mean?

ALISON  I would like to add to that, I thought it was an excellent example of
somebody who knows exactly what they want and you might define what
that person really wants as winning but it could be defined in other ways. I
think the definition is a really interesting one – winning is one definition of
knowing what you want but it might be just so focused on what you want to
achieve that you’ll do anything. This lady was prepared to crash to come
first but I might argue that somebody might exhibit mental toughness if they
clearly determined to do well but not risk their health and fitness, for
example so what they wanted was different but they were equally committed
to achieving it.

GRAHAM  I think it’s harder to define mental toughness in business.

ALISON  Yes, I agree.

GRAHAM  In this case, it’s fairly straightforward, you cross the line first and top of the
podium and in sport winning isn’t a difficult concept. It’s coming first in a
division, it’s straightforward – there’s a batting order or a 1, 2, 3. In a
business, winning isn’t so easy to work out. I think Steve Jobs or the people
who started Google weren’t mentally tough, they were brilliant techies but in
about 2 years they had to get tough and work out their accounting system
because the IRS were chasing them and they didn’t understand what
marketplaces were about, they understood research programmes and all
liked the idea of Friday where you could play and do whatever you wanted
to do but that wasn’t particularly tough.
Interviewer: So if you think about winning – you’ve given some examples of people who you think aren’t …

GRAHAM: And/or.

Interviewer: And/or but if we talk about winning in business, what does winning mean?

MIKE: I don’t think the word “winning” is actually applicable, it’s about being successful.

Interviewer: OK, successful then.

MIKE: Successful is making a profit generally and being reviewed by your peer group in a positive manner.

GRAHAM: Can I suggest that if you’re a plc, it’s about achieving your budgets for the year consistently and always a bit better than you were last year.

MIKE: Well that’s a bad view in my opinion, in a recession you can’t possibly achieve a better profit this year compared to last year so people should accept less …

GRAHAM: It depends what you’re doing

Interviewer: What about the individual’s performance so you’re an accountant …

GRAHAM: If you can’t do better than last year, why is that a fair number of people are announcing better results?

MIKE: Well, they’re obviously in the right industries, aren’t they.

GRAHAM: It depends what they do, if you define success as making a profit, that sounds great. “I’m successful, I’m making a profit” but you make half the profit you thought you were going to make, knowing what you did when you decided what your target was going to be, that’s not success. Success is deciding what profit you’re going to have, pushing for it and achieving it.

MIKE: But the ballpark can change very quickly, the reason that Thomas Cook have got into such a mess is that all their holiday destinations in North Africa have all gone down the pan and all the holidays they expected to sell when
they made their budget plans have not worked out because they couldn't predict it.

Interviewer: These are factors around the business issues but I want us to try and bring this down a level because you're talking at the corporate level and that's not where we're talking with regards to mental toughness – a business doesn't have a mentality in the sense that people do so if you can bring it down a level to people, what does an individual success look like in the business environment?

MIKE: Have we dispensed with the sporting thing because I think this is a bit flawed, to be honest.

Interviewer: OK, tell me why you think it's flawed.

MIKE: If you look at people like Usain Bolt and Paula Radcliffe – I think Paula Radcliffe is weak beyond belief because any time anything goes against her, she drops out.

Interviewer: I don't want you to tell me why you think individuals are weak, part of the definition is that if you had 2 equally physically capable people, so if there was someone as good physically as Paula Radcliffe, they would always beat her but if they were physically equal but mentally weaker, this definition suggests they would lose.

MIKE: But on part B, people might think she is but I don't think she is.

Interviewer: But what I want to try and understand is if you don't agree with that definition, that's fine but what you're saying is that you don't believe a particular individual is mentally tough and I didn't ask that question.

MIKE: No, what I'm saying is that she may be perceived as being successful by a lot of people and may fit into your sporting toughness definition by default but I don't think in actuality, she is and I also think the same of Lewis Hamilton, I think he's a complete brat!

Interviewer: Again, that's fine but if you look …

GRAHAM: But no-one has suggested they're mentally tough people. People think Lewis Hamilton is bloody good at driving, hasn't got a lot between the ears
and is a spoilt kid. I thought the point here wasn’t to describe who you think wasn’t tough but what makes you tough. I know you didn’t want to go down the plc route but quite a lot of people I regard in business as mentally tough got to the top of plc food chain.

Interviewer  I want to know about them.

GRAHAM  Because they did a number of things to get there.

Interviewer  And that’s what I want to know about.

GRAHAM  One of those happened to be politics – they were particularly good at achieving the budget and …

Interviewer  Now we’re starting to get there!

GRAHAM  We’re not going to argue about who’s tough and who’s not tough – stand back a bit and say “in what circumstances do you think people would have to demonstrate toughness to do a good job here” and the serious irony is that I don’t disagree that business people have to be tough but in the real world, the toughest calls I’ve had to make are to do with a product. Occasionally it’s what market shall I launch it in but the tougher ones are can I try, can I rely on this new marketing mechanism work because nobody has ever done that before. Somebody at Dell decided they were going to sell direct when nobody else did – everyone else went through a middle group but they went a totally different way, I think that’s a tough call personally but the tough calls in my world are recruiting people, disciplining people and getting rid of them. You need to be very tough in all 3 cases. I got involved in company turnarounds in a person Joanne knows called David Hole.

Joanne  Interviewer knows David

GRAHAM  David’s an IP – I’m the person who tries to rescue it and if I can’t rescue it, David closes it! I did a job with Matchbox Toys some years ago, it was losing money in quite a few markets and I ended up closing a factory on 21 December in East London so I made the Evening Standard newspaper because 240 people lost their jobs on 21 December so you can guess what I got called! Ironically that wasn’t that tough because they were all in the same boat and being interviewed wasn’t hard. The hard bit was actually
making 18 people redundant one at a time in a totally different context because they were all going to take it personally and work out why it happened, some shouting like there's no tomorrow, some go catatonic and some cry. I think it's much tougher to do things with people whether it's recruit them or get rid of them than to decide whether this product's going to be £4.99, that's what I think personally.

Interviewer  OK.

ALISON  I agree with that. In business there’s a twin ship to sail, isn’t there? There’s the people and there’s the task and generally, tasks are easy – easy to write a report, pull out number and sort out a plan but the people are absolutely the toughest part. Also from what you said, I want to pull out context – in my view, this definition of sporting mental toughness misses the context of the time zone – sporting people are mentally tough when they’re doing sport not necessarily when they’re at home. They’re also mentally tough for a defined period while they’re running, jumping, whatever they’re doing and they’re not necessarily mentally tough all the time and I would argue that you cannot be mentally tough all the time because you’d actually become almost robotic, you wouldn’t be human which then comes down to what’s driving it, well that’s a really interesting question but in the context of business, I would say mentally tough people – OK, they’ve got the task wrapped up but actually, they’re good with people. They can cope with the demands and pressures, as it says in the sporting definition, put on them by their staff.

GRAHAM  They’re not necessarily always the most popular of people. I had the reputation of being really pushy, if you did well you got the promotions, if you did REALLY well, you got the money. I had a reputation of being tough but fair and I don’t mind that. By and large, I think tough people have to be very focused – hopefully focused on a decent result commercially, but it also needs to be fair.

Interviewer  So if I’ve got 4 secretaries in a secretarial pool – 3 of them just don’t quite perform but one of them does, she gets all her work done on time, complete before she goes home at 5pm but the other 3 can’t quite seem to do it, how does performance in that environment relate to the way you view mental toughness? Does it relate to that? They’re not mentally tough?
MIKE: Not necessarily, no.

GRAHAM: It could be that her typing speeds are superior.

Interviewer: Let's say their typing speeds are all the same, IT skills, etc. What I'm saying is that do you believe that only the CEO is mentally tough?

ALISON: No.

GRAHAM: Oh, come on! If you're suggesting that all their typing speeds are the same, all got exactly the same qualities, then what will the difference in performance be, it just might be ... I'm not allowed environment, I'm not allowed family background, I'm not allowed education – if I'm not allowed those things and all other things are equal – you did have to give me 5 or 6 artificial hurdles to jump over.

Interviewer: What I'm saying is can secretaries, can nurses, can sales people, can administrators demonstrate and be mentally tough?

GRAHAM: Nurses who don't get to be matron, secretaries who don't get to run the NHS (which quite a few do!).

Interviewer: So you align mental toughness with some form of progression because you said nurses wouldn't get to become matrons and I'm not trying to lead you anywhere here.

ALISON: I like the word “copes” here – it doesn’t matter what the environment is, they just cope better so we need to understand what coping better actually means but anybody can do that, anybody at all, at any age can vary in their ability to cope.

GRAHAM: The difficulty is that you have to keep introducing the word “stress” though because otherwise the way you choosing to define the terms appear to be exactly the same, they appear to all come from the same background – socially, family-wise and everything else so there aren’t too many differentiations you can put on the table.

Interviewer: I'm not trying to give you a definition at all, what I've shown you is a definition that's been developed in sport. What I believe and what my
research believes is that definition isn’t applicable or suitable within business. Basic psychology tells us that you can’t take set of characteristics or constructs and move it to another context so you have to redefine it what I’m interested in understanding is – is the phenomena of mental toughness, ie. the individuals have this mental capability more than others in different scenarios what does it illicit them to do? So if it's that they stand out, why and I'll come back to you on the why.

MIKE I was going to give an example of mental toughness at lower levels. At the Robert Jones Magnusson hospital in Oswestry they have the “barn”, it’s basically 6 operating theatres in a row and I’ve been there quite a few times because my partner’s a consultant there and the nurses have to be extremely tough mentally, not because necessarily that doing a hip operation is overly difficult because it’s not anymore, but what they do have to cope with is the belligerence, arrogance and complete bullying nature of the orthopaedic surgeons and if they weren’t able to cope with that scenario, they would not be nurses in the theatre and it’s because the surgeons are complete prima-donnas.

GRAHAM You’re right there!

MIKE So what I’m saying is mental toughness in business and nurses are in business, in effect, exists at all levels and in different ways and this example shows that they have to be tough not necessarily because of the operation itself but because of the people that surround them and because the orthopaedic surgeons are such prima-donnas and swear an awful lot (we’re talking really badly), bully, etc – if they weren’t able to cope with that, they wouldn’t last a day.

Interviewer So if they cope, what’s the outcome in the sense of their performance? How do we measure their performance?

MIKE They’re doing operations this week and the week after, don’t have days off sick – they do their job professionally without getting upset because someone’s been pompous and horrible to them.

Interviewer Because they do their job …

GRAHAM They deal with pressure.
MIKE  Yes, pressure.

Interviewer  There’s an output with regards to the patient but their job might not be directly linked to the patient.

MIKE  Well it of course as they’re part of the team.

Interviewer  I’m on about the performance of the nurse, the nurse could be doing something that’s not necessarily directly linked to somebody.

MIKE  She’s in the “barn” so she’s part of the team.

Interviewer  Yes, what do they do when they perform and I don’t mean the specifics.

ALISON  I think they’re focusing their energy and attention on what they’re supposed to be doing rather than wasting mental energy over-thinking the bullying tactics – worrying, panicking, getting emotional. It’s having a managed internal state which allows them to go on and perform as normal.

GRAHAM  I wouldn’t regard medical as a business community.

Interviewer  No, those were Michael’s words. The hospital is a business, I would describe aspects of it as administrative, physical so …

GRAHAM  Would you regard public sector as part of this research on business mental toughness or not?

Interviewer  I’m not heavily focused on public sector, I’m more interested in …

GRAHAM  So was that “yes” or “no”!

Interviewer  No, I’m more interested in responses to business, however, if your experiences relate to something outside of it, it’s better for me to understand what those experiences are and what your thoughts are because what I want to understand is if we think about is enabling businesses to perform better – the output from this is really can we help people in the work environment perform and cope with the stress and pressure better and if we can do that, it should have a beneficial effect to business but if we can do the same in the army, in the public sector, in the health service, again we would expect it would enable those people to perform better as has been
identified within sport such as mental toughness training has enabled people to improve performance so the original research was carried out on Olympic gold medallists because those people were considered to be of equal physical capability to their fellow competitors but somehow continued to win or be able to be world champions. Now that's not to say that was the right way to conduct that research or in fact, this description is the right description for sport – what I'm saying is that it has been defined in sport that there are mental capabilities that enable certain performers to beat others and to sustain performance and not to succumb to stress and pressure of the performance environment. So within the business environment (and we've all worked in the business environment) when we perform, what does performance mean and how does mental toughness enable us to perform. I want to bring it back to the way people think, not the way the company thinks.

GRAHAM People behave inside a company by and large, alongside the ethos of that company and that's usually created by its top people – right or wrong, they create the environment. The Chairman and MD create it. Some people create a much less stressful environment anyway because they're open and friendly, some people it's like watching Machiavellian work – much tougher, perhaps in the same market, you've got to be much tougher to survive. The bit where you can take away all that frippery is in a negative economy where the survival of the individual and the survival and progress of business has a lot of stress involved in it. Watch your share price.

Interviewer If we go back 6 years people still suffered from stress and pressure and still didn’t cope with the work environment.

GRAHAM I wouldn’t use the word “stress” then, people have been using stress as an excuse, there’s a lot more stress about now as people are losing jobs and it’s a great measure. Stress of whether I’m going to continue to have a job.

Interviewer It's a continuum, what I'm interested in understanding is at the personal level, at the individual level, how do people cope with the stress and pressure of the work environment?

MIKE Have you accepted that some people cope with stress better than others or have we gone past that?
Interviewer: No, obviously people do cope with certain environments better than others so personally …

MIKE: That's a given now, is it?

Interviewer: We would look from the evidence that some people cope and some people don't. People who work in the same environment, same educational background – some people cope with that and some people don't. I don't want to lead you into this, some people will and something will manifest so they cope and some people don't.

MIKE: I'd like to know how your apotheosis copes with the public sector because if you look at the absentee levels in local councils, it's horrendous – they have twice as many days off as anybody else and yet, arguably, they don't have stressful jobs so I don't quite understand it myself.

Interviewer: You're into the specifics of the public sector.

MIKE: No, I'm into stress.

Interviewer: But it's your interpretation of stress – "that's not a stressful job".

MIKE: It's my opinion but there's a lot of stuff in the papers about it as well.

Interviewer: You have presenteeism as well as absenteeism so there are people under pressure because they feel they have to go to work even though they're ill. What I want to understand is what do you mean by performance in the work environment? If we're able to enhance performance, what does that mean in a business work environment?

MIKE: That's assuming it's been defined already.

Interviewer: No, I'm asking you what you think.

MIKE: Any person has to have their role defined, explained to them in terms of physical work, mental work, their cultural relationships with their colleagues, etc and at least once a year, hopefully, they have an appraisal where someone looks at their performance over the year, as defined in their contract and presumably says "you've done a good job this year" or "you've done a bad job".
Interviewer: OK, I might have done a good job, does that mean I’m mentally tough?

MIKE: Not necessarily, no.

Interviewer: Now what if I’ve got the same educational background as somebody else and mentally we’re equivalent with regards to academic knowledge, age …

MIKE: I don’t think academia has anything to with it either.

Interviewer: OK, one person copes and the other person doesn’t, how might that be manifested?

MIKE: Well, absenteeism.

ALISON: Can I throw in a thought? I’m not sure it’s manifesting necessarily but it’s a thought – generally speaking, if someone is not coping with stress inside them they have an “I can’t do this” message. They have an internal voice which says this is probably going to fail or I can’t do it or it’s not going to work out – any of those combinations, so someone who is going to cope or copes better, has an internal voice which says “actually, we can do this” or “actually, I’m going to do this and I’m going to do it well” and that plays out in their behaviour – their language and their performance.

Interviewer: What is it that they’re going to do so take an environment where there’s no physical work so we’re not putting things together, we’re not making anything – if we take the office environment, what are the things that they can or cannot do? What is it, how does it get manifested?

ALISON: It’s probably dealing with multiple tasks at the same time because, generally speaking, when people are stressed they cannot do more than one or two things because their energy is directed into stressing and panicking and it just adds to the stress the more demands that are on them so maybe they continue to be able to do many things at once. It might just be relative, it might appear that what appears to be performing just above, it’s difficult to really pin it down.

GRAHAM: This research is directed at helping which groups of people?

Interviewer: Business professionals.
GRAHAM Would that be a senior management levels, middle management levels?

Interviewer Potentially all of those.

MIKE If you just changed the ballpark, I think we should just stick to that level because things I’ve brought up and ALISON’s brought up, we are talking at a lower level.

GRAHAM It’s just that I think the more you drop down the less useful the conclusions will be.

Interviewer In your opinion, that’s fine.

ALISON I was arguing that you have more people at shop level.

GRAHAM I understand that but real mental toughness isn’t necessarily 40 coping, it’s people driven and driving lots of other people as well in that direction that, by and large, requires some kind of toughness. Yes or no?

Interviewer That’s up to you, I’m not here to lead or tell you whether you’re right or wrong. I’m here to understand what do you think so I’m not going to go “yes, you’re right” or “no, you’re wrong”.

GRAHAM The reason why I’m asking the question is that we’ve 7 or 8 different attempts to talk about toughness in some way and what’s tending to happen is that one of us will throw in an example, we all don’t have to agree, that’s simple. “Here’s an example …” and you very quickly say “well, if we’ve got the same educational background, age, and and and … who will cope better” and you’re almost writing the answer down irrespective of the question, to be honest which is why I was very clear about saying “do you want to talk about public sector and private”, you replied “largely private but public, if that’s your experiences”. I’m saying “do you want all levels in an organisation or do you want the top or middle” – the wider you make it and you’ll struggle with the army, I do assure you! Fundamentally the bigger you want to make the discussion the less likely you’ll make any progress at all because we haven’t yet decided, we don’t all agree what stress looks like – we agree that there are situations which are quite stressful. We haven’t begun to talk about what is it mentally tough people actually do that’s different to people who we would regard as not so tough and we’re not
going to get to that point if we haven’t really figured out whether we’re going public, private, health, military and all the different levels and any time any of us make a comment and gives an example, we immediately get sent back with “peas in a pod” and one makes it and one doesn’t so one must be tougher. Answer – not necessarily.

Interviewer  OK, why not?

GRAHAM  Generally speaking, you’re doing the psychology bit, you’re not answering our questions.

Interviewer  I’m not here to confirm things for you, I’m interested what you think.

GRAHAM  Well, what I think is we are floundering to find some genuine context to have a good debate. We don’t really know what you want mental toughness to be because each time we come up with a definition, you say “that’s not quite it”.

Interviewer  You haven’t.

GRAHAM  Well, actually we have several times in terms of ability to cope and ability to succeed and in terms of being driven.

Interviewer  Yes and I asked you to define what succeed means.

GRAHAM  Did you? MIKE said profit and I said budgets – setting targets and more than achieving those targets.

Joanne  GRAHAM, I think Interviewer’s actually trying to talk about what makes an individual …

GRAHAM  Isn’t that what I just said? We don’t stand a chance of figuring out what mentally tough people do if we’re still doing that in terms of what area he wants us to talk about, it’s far too big an area. If you want the whole of business and the public sector …

Interviewer  No, you’re taking the word business to mean anything …

GRAHAM  No, I actually asked you very specifically …
Interviewer  In a business context, if you can’t find an example in business but you can give me an example in the public sector or an example in your personal life, that’s better than not giving me an example at all. However, I would prefer for you to give me an example of how people cope with the stress and pressure in the work environment or if you believe (I should say) that mental toughness is about coping with the stress and pressure of the work environment which is what we focused it on. So when we talk about success and performance, I’m not talking about profit because individuals don’t make profit, companies make profit – profits aren’t related to people, they’re related to companies so what is it that enables a company to perform better from a people perspective in order for it to make profits, so if I succeed in a job be it an orderly in a private hospital which is a business, be it a secretary, be it a MD, Sales Director, administrator – when we talk about succeeding or performing what are we actually talking about?

Joanne  Do you mean their characteristics?

Interviewer  We’ll come on to the characteristics.

MIKE  OK, if you look at British cycling, David Braithwaite’s created Team GB Cycling and it’s phenomenal, it kills everybody off, so the point is that you’ve not just got talented individuals within it but you’ve got the team framework which obviously works exceptionally well. So maybe toughness in their context doesn’t apply because if they’ve got this framework around them that cocoons them in them in this feeling of superiority and excellence all the time, then maybe toughness is not applicable in their case.

Interviewer  Again, that’s the sporting context …

MIKE  But that applies in some businesses as well.

Interviewer  OK.

MIKE  You look at some of the older companies like Kelloggs and Proctor & Gamble especially who’ve got this marketing excellence aura around them where they don’t seem to do any wrong and people who are recruited in believe that and creates that self-perpetuating sense that “we’re brilliant and we’re going to do well”.

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Interviewer: Those people might not be mentally tough.

MIKE: Might not be, no. They’re inspired to do better because of what’s happened in the past and the enthusiasm to do better in the future.

Interviewer: Do they perform better than others?

MIKE: Proctor & Gamble do, absolutely.

Interviewer: No, I don’t want to talk about company performance.

MIKE: Those individuals do possibly perform better than others because they’re in an environment where success has historically been there and wants to continue in the future.

Interviewer: How does that affect them individually?

MIKE: They’re inspired.

Interviewer: OK.

GRAHAM: It looks brilliant on the CV!

Joanne: It’s like going to a Grammar school, you go to a Grammar school you’re expected to do well so you go into an environment where people around you expect to do well and that Interviewerches into you, you expect to do well and that Interviewerches back into them. The whole ethos of the school is that you are better, you are cleverer than the people who’ve gone to another school so it’s that inspiration, it’s that expectation that you just will do better.

Interviewer: And do they all cope?

MIKE: Not everybody, no.

Interviewer: What about the people who don’t? What happens to them? What demonstrates that they don’t cope?

MIKE: Their exam results are probably poor, off ill more than most other people.
Joanne: Truancy.

MIKE: Their behaviours will be different.

GRAHAM: What makes that different to a state school?

Joanne: It was a state school, I went to a state Grammar school.

Interviewer: I need to bring you back, we're in danger of debating everything! I need to bring you back to what we're trying to look at really and I've tried to ask you about what performance means in a work environment for an individual and what poor performance might mean for the individual in the work environment so can I cope with the pressure of running a focus group or not cope! What do we mean by performance?

ALISON: I have an example of an individual, we have 70 international centres around the world and I have staff in a number of those centres – they're managed by me and the head of that centre so they have multiple demands placed on them round the clock but one individual vastly outperformed all the others, worked a 9-5 day, unlike any of the others, the quality of the output was absolutely exceptional on every occasion, she never missed a deadline and the defining factor in this particular scenario was that she had the courage to say "no" to demands that were placed on her that were not relevant to her task or objective and she said "no" where the others didn’t.

Interviewer: So that’s one of the characteristics of someone who’s mentally tough.

ALISON: Well, it is but it might be more than that as that is how she performs that she will turn away tasks that are irrelevant.

GRAHAM: That’s focus.

Interviewer: Yes, it could be focus and we’ll come on to that as we’re getting some traction now but her job, in a sense, is not to say “no”, is it?

ALISON: It isn’t but because she did that, she prioritised what she was doing to meet the objectives that she was set, she outperformed.

Interviewer: So she met her objectives?
ALISON    Exceeded them.

Interviewer    And how did she meet her objectives?

ALISON    Every single task I gave to her she achieved before deadline and at a vastly higher level than any of the others.

Interviewer    So what was she better at than the others?

ALISON    Well the example I’ve given you is that she was better at not doing the tasks that were not relevant.

Interviewer    So would you say she was better at making decisions?

ALISON    No, I think she was better at saying “no”!

Interviewer    But is that not a decision?

ALISON    Yes, everything might become a decision, I suppose.

Interviewer    What is the performance bit?

ALISON    It’s definitely a mental state.

Interviewer    In sport it’s about where you finish, there’s only going to be one No. 1 but if you’ve got a team of 10 people and 6 perform but 4 of them don’t and they’re all equally capable.

MIKE    It’s not quite that straightforward because Luke Donald has just become world money winner without actually winning a major championship, he’s not won anything but he’s become numero uno in golf.

Interviewer    But there’s a measurement system there is …

MIKE    Normally I would agree, winning is everything.

Interviewer    But it depends on how you define what winning is so if you think about business and I appreciate that at the corporate level we could talk about
profit but for an individual what does success or winning mean for that individual.

GRAHAM  At any age? It's just that it will vary – at 25 success is progress, moving upwards, at 65 years old, it isn't.

Interviewer  Relate this back to the business performance so how does the business perform in relation to that individual's performance.

GRAHAM  Tell me that one again.

ALISON  Yes, please.

Interviewer  So a business performs ultimately, the profit doesn't just magically appear – it appears through us doing things, we perform so how can I sustain your performance at a high level because then the company performs at a high level.

GRAHAM  That wasn't what we were meant to look at.

Interviewer  So in the sense of the pressure and stress of the workplace inhibits you from performing better, if I can't give you some mental toughness which enables you to cope with that stress and pressure, your level of perform won't rise but if you're performing better that means the business is performing better so if we can enable people to perform better by coping better with the stress and pressure of the work environment, the company (you would assume) would perform better if the company's performance is directly related to the people's performance what we want to be able to do is enable companies perform better because if we didn't ultimately do that, why would you want to do this? So we're not talking about the individual's personal goals, happiness – what I'm focused on how you improve the performance of the business to enable the people to cope with stress and pressure better.

MIKE  Well the processes can help a lot – if you look at the car industry and the Nissan car factory in Sunderland, it's actually the most productive plant worldwide so you've got English car workers who when they were in the West Midlands with "Red Robbo" and the other idiots, you got the impression they were useless and yet you've got the Nissan plant, the
Toyota plant in Derby, BMW Mini plant in Swindon, etc have shown that English car workers, given the right processes and everything else can be as good as, if not better, than anyone else in the world.

GRAHAM The stock answer to your question is let's not assume that we all have stress in the same way or respond to it in the same way or else we're all wasting our time. Wouldn't it make sense to identify first of all what you believe the stresses are in that company you're hypothetically talking about. Let's also try and recognise what those stresses and if we can remove some of the stresses maybe they'll perform better. So we need to be careful to identify what stresses are there in the first place and that some stresses actually help.

Interviewer I don't disagree …

GRAHAM If you take all stresses away nobody will achieve anything.

MIKE You need some stress, there's no doubt.

Interviewer I'm not advocating that we get rid of stress completely …

GRAHAM What you actually said was, unless you're playing mind games with us, what do we need to do – your example was your company, what do you need to perform better in some way and what you said was how can we, in this situation, take some of the stress out so we can perform better, the results are better and that's how you perform across the company, my comment earlier was fine, maybe you need to establish what stresses are.

Interviewer I'm not discounting that, what I want to know, back to the question …

GRAHAM Look, I'm wasting my time here, I think. You keep asking questions, I do listen very carefully to what you're saying, I then provide a comment or I find it easier to shut up, let the other 2 provide a comment and then there's never, ever a “yes” or “fair enough”, it's always “let's move it on”. Eventually, I'll decide it's time to have a cup of coffee and just might go because I'm not feeling that anything … you may have written your conclusions before you started.

Interviewer No, I'm just writing down the words you told me.
GRAHAM: I just feel that people are trying hard but every time it's just “let's go somewhere else”, eventually presumably we'll hit the target you'd like us to hit and then we'll have a conversation. At the moment it's just a bunch of comments. Comment, full stop. Comment, full stop. Personally, I find that frustrating.

Interviewer: That's fine, you're entitled to do so. Where we're still at is regards to the performance piece and what that actually means but I think it might be useful at this point that we move on and I will go and get people a coffee. What I would like you to think about is if we were to say there is a phenomena called business mental toughness and I actually don’t really want to say a lot, I'd rather you debate and talk amongst yourselves. If business mental toughness exists what do you think it is, I don’t mean the car's wheels, tyres and nuts but what does it enable you to do within a business context.

ALISON: Is another way of asking the question, what is the benefit of or what is the purpose of?

Interviewer: You can do.

ALISON: It's how it plays out in the actual moment to moment performance.

GRAHAM: It's the actual outcome, it doesn't say what do you get up to so we need to have words like cope, manage, achieve.

Interviewer: Take out the first sentence, just go with “business mental toughness is …” and I would be interested in your thoughts.

BREAK

MIKE: As far as I'm concerned you don't have to be mentally tough to succeed, however, it helps and helps you cope with success and disappointment. I can give you a personal example of that, as Interviewer knows, I've never considered myself a good salesman and when I started up a company in my spare time I sold £5K worth of sweatshirts in Lakeside in Windermere and I came back 4ft off the ground, I was so excited and yet other times I'd go and see shopkeepers in the Lakes and they were so horrible to me, I wanted to be 4ft under the road and I decided if I couldn't cope with disappointment as well as success, I shouldn’t do it. I think mental
toughness allows you to make difficult decisions and I think that’s what ALISON has alluded to in HR. I have my son work for me and sometimes I think “I really ought to sack him!” but I can’t bring myself to do it! I think mental toughness helps you overcome emotional baggage. I think mental toughness helps you stay focused and dispassionate so if you’re making a decision you have to take away all the emotional parts. It should help you exhibit continual determination, in other words, if you’ve embarked on a project you should stick with it, whatever it takes. And the final point is that mental toughness allows you to be able to let go so if you actually realise a project isn’t working out, even if you’ve got a lot involved in it, it’s your “baby”, you have to have the mental toughness to let go and say “sorry, it’s not going to happen”.

Interviewer: ALISON, do you want to read yours?

ALISON: I have a column which is the inner reaction and then a column of what happened as a result. Decide what needs to be done and then do it – it could be not doing something or choosing the winning direction or writing a great pricing strategy or whatever but they get on and do what they need to do quickly. The second one was that their inner reaction was to choose to remain positive and I absolutely think that’s a choice. They choose to remain positive and that plays out in that they persevere and do not stop, they persevere and find solutions. The third one which is linked to persevering and find solutions, is that their internal message is that they assume it can be done, whatever they need to do, they assume it can be done and therefore they persevere and find the solution. The 4th one is direct all mental energy into the task or the people implementation, in other words instead of worrying about things, they focus on what they’re doing whether that’s people action or a task which leads them to multi-task much more effectively than their colleagues and they are more efficient because they’re just getting on with it. Vast amounts of time are wasted on mental worry, it’s a vastly wasteful mental state to have. The last one is being open, approachable and being themselves – they choose to remain who they are, just be themselves which allows them to, in spite of all the mayhem, continue influence others, build relationships in a whole heap of horrid politics and stress. People can switch personality in a stress environment and I think the mental toughness here is that they think “I’m going to just be the person I am”.

Interviewer: Thank you.
Mental toughness is (the shorthand version) a serious determination to succeed. I think it’s the ability to maintain focus, drive and ambition to succeed, irrespective of market conditions. It doesn’t matter if the market is crap, it’s the ability to prioritise for yourself and arguably, the team. It’s the ability to encourage people to bring the best out of themselves – I don’t mean that you have to be a tree-hugging person and you don’t have to be nice and friendly but you do have to understand that if you’re in a team, you have make sure the team are doing well. You don’t have to be a natural counsellor but you do have to be able to look after your team colleagues. I think that mental toughness is recognising that things may not always go to plan, therefore, you’d better have a plan B.

Or C or D as well. The other end of serious determination is take tough decisions like the example of when you decide to stop investing in banking and the other end is getting rid of people, mentally tough people in business can take that. They might worry about it a bit, they might lose s

I really like that because there’s a humanity here that we mustn’t miss – people do worry about things but they get on and do it anyway. I think that’s a really important one.

Unfortunately, I had to make somebody redundant whom I knew quite well for 3 or 4 years, he was a great guy, a great salesman and he found himself in a managerial position and he’s not a good manager at all. Good at selling it, not good at managing it. I made him redundant, I did it properly, he lives about 8 doors away from me and we have a pint quite regularly and he said it got me out of an intolerable position, I wasn’t happy, I wasn’t s

You know there’s something else here that goes way beyond sporting and this is this exact point of dealing with people effectively and fairly because sports people don’t care if they’ve upset their coach or what the audiences
are thinking, they don’t care. The critical difference is how people deal with people.

MIKE Let’s take the example of Carlos Tevez, doesn’t care a monkey’s about anybody.

GRAHAM I think you’re about 85% right but there are some sporting bullies, individuals get sponsorship and lessons on how to be interviewed and not say daft things on TV – yes, I won but I’m a nice guy as well so you’ll pay to put clothing on my back.

MIKE As in Roger Federer.

GRAHAM As in a whole raft of people who are looking out for themselves to get themselves sponsorship.

Joanne But you get the feeling that sports people are inherently selfish and in business mental toughness you have to have an element of unselfishness because if you’re the CEO of M&S you’re dealing with the careers and livelihoods of literally tens of thousands of people. There’s an element of unselfishness as it’s not all about your bonus or how you’re perceived or look.

GRAHAM People who are mentally tough in business aren’t necessarily well-liked or popular, they just do what needs to be done legally and professionally and be very determined whilst they’re doing it.

Joanne Some are well-liked such as Richard Branson or Alan Sugar! He’s perceived as being really tough but people have a lot of respect for him.

GRAHAM I think he’s cultivated that.

Joanne Of course.

Interviewer Is that his personality is tough or is he mentally tough?

GRAHAM Did he start tough? He was a young man with no money aged 13 in the East End of London. If you talk about all things being equal, he started with an awful chip on his shoulder in an environment where you either succeeded and got out of your slum or you didn’t.
Joanne: So there must be an element of mental toughness there …

GRAHAM: He wasn’t educated – mentally tough, bloody devious, loads of things on the go, a wheeler and dealer but the establishment comes along and suddenly, he’s OK. For years he was a pirate, Amstrad was a pirate company who bumped things off for years.

Interviewer: If you’re taking him as an example in developing what he has developed and been successful – if you take when he was devious and mentally tough and now he’s got his empire, do you think he’s devious now or do you think he’s changed the way he behaves and do you think his mental toughness has changed?

GRAHAM: I wouldn’t know as I didn’t know him when he was a kid.

Interviewer: But you said he was devious.

GRAHAM: Well, read the books, talk to people who worked with him and people who competed with him but he’s still recognised as being very up-front, very self-opinionated, very selfish and still devious. It’s a bit like John Wayne – John Wayne was in 187 films, in 184 of them he was the same character! He didn’t change anything, ever, now and again he got to be Genghis Khan and not a cowboy or a soldier and not a cowboy. I think Sugar’s in the same mould.

ALISON: So are we saying here that there’s a difference between persona and mental toughness?

GRAHAM: I don’t know, if you got people from an affluent environment who weren’t desperately hungry in the physical sense and here’s a bunch of people who are desperately hungry, maybe one or 2 in that group will overtake. I just get the feeling that the more people are cossetted in their early years, the less determined you need to be to get anywhere, the more struggle they have early on …

MIKE: Doesn’t stop them being successful though.
GRAHAM  I didn't suggest success was the same thing as mental toughness – the ones who survive from the very, very poor, difficult backgrounds may have had to exhibit more toughness simply to survive than this other group.

MIKE  Look at Nat Rothscchild, absolute "silver spoon", didn't need anything …

Interviewer  There are very few billionaires’ children who become billionaires in their own right. It’s very interesting that we’ve talked about people’s experiences as they grow. You’ve all given me 3 definitions, some of it contains the components of the car, some of it contains what a car does. So if I read out some of the key points that you mentioned - success and disappointment, difficult decisions, overcoming emotional baggage, staying focused and dispassionate, continuous determination, can’t let go …

MIKE  No, I said ability to let go!

Interviewer  CAN let go!

Interviewer  From ALISON – how you make a decision, choose to remain positive, assume that it can be done, directing all mental energy into the task, multi-task more than colleagues, removing mental worry, be themselves, allow them to influence others. GRAHAM said determined to succeed, maintaining focus and drive, being able prioritise for yourself and teams, encourage others to bring the best out of others, have a plan B or C, take tough decisions. There seems to be a commonality around decision making?

GRAHAM  Yes, if you’re never called upon to make a decision, make a choice, I don’t know how you’re supposed to show toughness.

Interviewer  Or perform?

MIKE  Yes, perform.

GRAHAM  No, I don’t agree. Out of 10K people, only 8.5K follow orders, they don’t take decisions, they just get on with it.

Interviewer  That’s not actually true, they have a decision every time, do I follow the order or not?
GRAHAM  In the 1st World War if you didn’t follow orders you were shot!

Joanne  But you still had to make the decision.

GRAHAM  I think you’ll find that a command and control system and the real decisions (forget shall I tie my shoe laces or not) are taken here strategically. You have tactical freedom in that you can make a choice in a tight situation. I don’t think that performing necessarily follows, it might that someone else has made the decision, the decision might be press the button and now there’re umpteen airplanes fighting over the war.

Interviewer  But those guys made the decision to get in the plane or not.

GRAHAM  Yes, everyone chooses to stay in the military every time they get up every day.

Interviewer  So if we talk about mental toughness and business performance and succeeding, you’ve all described an ability to make decisions.

GRAHAM  Can I give you another example in exactly the same context. It wasn’t taking the decision that was mentally tough, it was carrying out what was required of you and what the consequences would be. Somebody said why don’t we go to Hiroshima and drop a bomb and somebody else went and dropped a bomb, all the guys on board the Enola Gay were mentally toughness, they were called upon to do what Uncle Sam said, they knew it would be devastating, they didn’t know quite how devastating.

Interviewer  Going over the top in WW1, was that not a tough decision? What you’ve all come towards with regards to your description and we’re going to look at the wheels, nuts, steering wheel, seats and everything else. When we talk about performance, the commonality between what you’ve described is this element of decision making if we talk about performing. The other things in there do they relate specifically to the business performance so it’s how you cope with success and disappointment.

GRAHAM  Prioritising still requires you to make judgement calls, presumably? Which is first, which is tenth? And if it got past 50, it probably never got done! I’ve decided which of these 3 people I encourage, I presume? Apparently if everything on this sheet of paper is a decision, I’ve written maintain focus
(there’s no decision called upon, by the way), ability to prioritise for yourself – decision, ability to prioritise for your team – decision, ability to encourage is actually also a decision, plan B is a whole bunch of decisions and then we finished off with make tough calls.

MIKE I don’t believe the ability to prioritise decisions is mental toughness at all, it’s about talent, ability and knowing what to do.

GRAHAM There’s a few options but they’re all pretty horrible …

MIKE You’ve put another parameter on it!

GRAHAM I’ve not! I’m just saying the ability to prioritise can be a tough call because you may not like any of the options but you really have to pick one because a non-decision might just be that you lose …

MIKE I hear what you’re saying but I just don’t think that’s mental toughness.

Joanne But some people go through life and business and never, ever make a decision and that’s mentally weak, isn’t it? So I think the ability to make a decision does demonstrate toughness but it might just be at different levels.

MIKE Well I call it ability.

Interviewer You call it ability and that’s your personal view so that’s GRAHAM’s view and that’s right because it’s your view and you have a different.

MIKE Because I think if you’re not careful, you’re going to put everything in the pot and ability has no parameters attached to it because it’s all been brought into this.

GRAHAM But that’s why I finished it off by saying “take the tough ones” – go into a market, pull out of a market, hire somebody, fire somebody. To me that’s this biggest, stressful issues.

MIKE I agree with that.

Interviewer But isn’t the toughness and the decision relative to the individual?
GRAHAM: The consequences for someone or something or you. The tough call could be actually going to your boss and saying “are you absolutely sure this is what you want to happen because …” and in some circumstances, that might be very career threatening.

Interviewer: So someone decides to go their boss and tell them that this might be the wrong decision, if that was a characteristic, how would you describe that? What we want to try and move on to now are what are the characteristics of mental toughness?

MIKE: That is a point that ALISON brought about being truthful to yourself and if that person believes that decision is inappropriate or wrong then if they are truthful to themselves, then they go and tell the person. That’s not necessarily mental toughness.

Interviewer: So that in itself might not be, what we trying to do now …

MIKE: Unless you know the boss is a complete shite and he’s going to give you a lot of trouble.

Interviewer: OK, we’ve looked at some of the definitions and the underlying thing that sits across all 3 is this ability to make decisions.

GRAHAM: Tough ones, not any old, tough ones.

Interviewer: What is tough and I know you’ve given us a context for tough which is relative.

GRAHAM: Having milk and sugar is a decision but not tough, tough is when it affects somebody’s future – either yours …

MIKE: Or has a significant consequence.

GRAHAM: Yes, it doesn’t matter. My personal definition of tough is there are some serious consequences for somebody.

Interviewer: That’s brilliant, I really like that, it’s really good so we’re talking about decisions that can have a consequence be that for the whole company, for the individual, for other people. You’ve talked about some of the stuff we’re
going to do next already, I don’t want to lead you but I do feel that you’ve been able to come to a conclusion on the performance and success part of what mental toughness might mean. The purpose of this next piece is try and understand the characteristics so for example, prioritisation you class as ability, however, there isn’t one thing – we’re not going to put our finger on it and go “that’s it” because you’ve already said that age, situation, scenario, upbringing – all of these things might have an impact on whether somebody is or not. What I want to understand if what sort of characteristics, I’ll give you an explanation and then some time to think about it, then share those and give some examples. I’d like to understand the characteristics of the mentally tough performer, the person who can cope with stress and pressure of whatever the decisions are that have to be made, perhaps not as trivial as tea or coffee although for some people that might actually be a very difficult decision to make.

**GRAHAM**  
I don’t think that counts as business mental toughness.

**Interviewer**  
Exactly but if you were going to sell tea or coffee and you can only sell one or the other – do I put my promotion on tea or coffee?

**MIKE**  
You do your research first.

**Interviewer**  
But if you’re Tesco that could ultimately be so it’s all about context. So now we focus on the components of the car analogy – what are the components of mental toughness so if we were to break this down and I play a bit of golf so bear with me on this and I’ll continue on to business. I’m OK but I’m never going to be a professional but if I wanted to construct the ideal golfer I wouldn’t necessarily say it’s Tiger Woods or Luke Donald, there are things that people possess that I think are excellent but other things that I don’t think they’re so good at so if I could take the characteristics of certain golfers and bring them together and create the perfect golfer, the best golfer so for Tiger Woods it might be his power and physical prowess, for Phil Mickelson his tenacity, his stickability, he just doesn’t go away, he’s always there and his performance under pressure especially getting out of trouble. You might think about Greg Norman who has a charismatic personality, made more money out of marketing than he ever did out of golf.

**GRAHAM**  
If you remember he went for the big glory shots and he screwed up both of them, finished 2nd both times.
Interviewer: I suppose the question to him is that ultimately does he consider himself to have been successful and I suppose it’s how he measures himself – is he successful in the overall decisions he made or specifically just on the golf course and it comes back to what you measure and what you define as success.

GRAHAM: I don’t think it’s mentally tough going for the glory shot when there’s another way of doing it. Mentally tough people will take the percentage shots, deliver it to get the result and get the money.

Interviewer: Can I just bring you back to your original comment to the girl who was on the mountain bike and you said she went for it, she was mentally tough but actually on that analogy that you’ve given …

GRAHAM: She knew she might crash on that corner but she didn’t have any alternative, he did have an alternative. There wasn’t a percentage shot for her to take.

Interviewer: She could have got silver.

GRAHAM: That isn’t a percentage shot if you came to win gold.

MIKE: You could argue she was reckless.

GRAHAM: Yes, you can but I’ll suggest in her context, bearing in mind the speed she’s having to make her decisions compared to your golfer but looking at the timeframes (and you were talking about timescales earlier on) I don’t think she had too many choices – it’s either I’ll go for it or I’ll finish 2nd. He could have easily not gone the bunker route, he actually over hit it by about 20ft and went into the one bunker between him and the 3rd.

Interviewer: It’s interesting you use 2 analogies and what you’ve defined is the decisions that individuals made and also the outcome.

GRAHAM: They both came 2nd but one was all about winning and the other was “I’m going to do it with another eagle shot”.

MIKE: I’d like to put a parameter on that because I don’t believe mental toughness applies to one decision only, I think you’ve got to look at mental toughness
over a period of time and if she continues to make decisions which in the majority of cases comes out right, then maybe she is mentally tough but on one decision only, I'd argue it be considered reckless and that has nothing to do with mental toughness.

GRAHAM Fair point.

Interviewer But then you could say a mountaineer and a book has been written about mental toughness in the sporting context is the mountaineer who gets to the top but dies on the way down.

GRAHAM How about the man who was in the crevasse?

MIKE Touching the Void – Joe Simpson.

GRAHAM Joe Simpson, thank you. How about that as an example of mental toughness.

MIKE Oh he was mentally toughness, it spanned a length of time. What I'm talking about is that this girl given the decision “shall I go for it or not”, that could have been seen as reckless, I don’t consider it mentally tough.

Interviewer Do you consider it mental weakness?

GRAHAM I only gave it as an example as she can only win once every 4 years.

Interviewer That’s a big gamble as he has 4.

Joanne Plus Greg Norman from what you said had a glory shot or still could have won by playing the percentage shot whereas Shanaze had glory or nothing.

GRAHAM Joe Simpson is a great example of mental toughness.

ALISON I’m interested in how somebody reacts when they lose, they may aim to be first but if they lose how do they then respond to that loss? I would say someone is mentally tough who can come back all guns firing and they go to win next time round.

MIKE So where would John McEnroe come in that then because he always had a tantrum every time he lost!
Joanne: But he came back and won, didn’t he.

ALISON: He threw his tantrum outside play.

MIKE: No, he didn’t, he got fined tons of times for throwing his racquet.

GRAHAM: You beat a really top class team, you go and thump Man Utd and watch what happens next time Man Utd go out on the pitch, whoever they were going to play next didn’t really stand a chance. I think your point here is the ability to recover from that serious set up is hugely … it’s certainly a factor. Is it a mental tough thing? Possibly.

MIKE: You could just call it pride or hubris.

GRAHAM: I can remember somebody being interviewed in a sports context and he was quite gentlemanly about it, what he said was “if I’d lost but felt I could have done better, I’d be really pissed off with myself. If I’ve lost doing the best I can, all I can do is go out and do it again and win next time.” The fact he gave his best, the fact he came second as someone was better on the day, I think he was just about prepared to accept it. Maybe that belting back is a sign.

MIKE: It’s resilience.

ALISON: There a little window when they’re not doing anything but they’re still mentally tough. Let’s imagine the lose scenario, there is a window between losing and trying to win again, isn’t there? In that window they need to be able to demonstrate mental toughness even to think about going on to win – to get focussed, get practicing, get into competition.

GRAHAM: The first example would be to get up the day after and get on with the normal training almost as though nothing has happened.

ALISON: And actually there are no demands on them at all yet their mental state then is pretty critical to how they will continue to go on.

MIKE: Andy Murray’s tough because he’s never won a major …

ALISON: Yes he is because he goes for it every time relentlessly.
GRAHAM: He's beaten all of them apart from at SW19!

MIKE: Never won a major.

Interviewer: It's all relative. Is he as mentally tough as Federer or Nadal?

MIKE: Yes, he is but he's not quite as talented.

Joanne: He's as talented as Djokovic, Djokovic is a great example as is Federer. When Federer started playing he was considered super flaky, ultra talented but flaky and something switched mentally and suddenly he had a winner's mentality and then he had the talent alongside the talent to win. Tim Henman had the perfect game for grass but could never get past the semis at Wimbledon.

GRAHAM: The Brits as tennis are very good at producing somebody who's an also-ran, they can beat all people on different surfaces but they can't beat the people at home because there's this great expectation so the excuses come out.

Interviewer: So they're not able to cope with stress and pressure.

Joanne: But Murray has been to the American and Australian finals where the surface is best suited to his game but never won whereas Djokovic knows he's not as good as Federer or Nadal but he made a conscious decision about 18 months ago that he was going to go for it. He went a whole year without getting beat because mentally he decided that he was going to win. Now what switched him over, I don't know.

GRAHAM: If you ask Federer he'll tell you that his switch was winning the first one. When he won the first one he said there wasn't any pressure on me anymore, now I can play. It was such a big hurdle for him. As it happens it doesn't matter that one or two people were injured, so what – you won a major, well played. Somewhere in the sports toughness definition there's a thing that says apart from being very focussed, determined and all the things we've collectively said over a period of time of what does winning look like. Now that Federer's done it, he can always recreate that picture, what it looks like to get hold of a trophy – feel it, touch it, smell it, draw a picture and he's in his own picture. A really, really good sportsman,
generally speaking, pictures himself winning – what it feels and looks like to win.

Interviewer We now need to bring that into the business context – that’s a very good example so I’ll finish off this little bit and then I’m going to ask you to do another task. So if we think about the ideal tennis player is it the determination to win that Djokavic has, is it the charisma of Federer, is it the back hand of Federer or the drop shot of Murray – what are the components, if we could take all these together you might have the ideal tennis player or the ideal golfer. If we were to look in the business world is it the tenacity of Alan Sugar, the intelligence of Bill Gates, the never say die attitude of Steve Jobs. All of these things would make the ultimate business performer and I’m talking about CEOs there but it could be lower down. What I’d like you to think about it is certain environments where you have demonstrated mental toughness and it’s more about the characteristics – we’ve talked about focus and determination and honesty.

MIKE Hold on, where did the honesty bit come from?

Joanne Being true to yourself.

MIKE Yes. Because Bill Gates is hugely successful but he’s dishonest in all sorts of things, as all of them have been.

Interviewer I’m not advocating that Bill Gates is mentally tough, I’ve actually met him but didn’t have a long enough conversation with him to say I think he is or he isn’t – I asked him a question, he gave me answer, that was about it! I can have a viewpoint but there will be people or situations that you’ve experienced or seen where mental toughness has been demonstrated, what do you think the characteristics of those individuals are.

GRAHAM Are you providing a context?

Interviewer Within a business environment with regards to making decisions, I’m not being specific – it could be dismissing somebody, accepting an award. It’s very general.

GRAHAM The more general it is, the less likely to get a result. Some contexts call for seriously tough decisions than others. They both may have decisions but the consequences may be quite big sometimes.
Interviewer: For you in your situation and what you believe mental toughness to be, that's fine. In those sort of environments I'd like you to tell me what you think mentally tough performers are.

Joanne: It's like your analogy of building the ideal golfer but building an ideal business performer.

Interviewer: Yes but for each of you, you'll build a different person.

GRAHAM: Andy Murray needs another 20 miles per hour on his serve, he's the only top player who's got a weak first serve and he usually struggles because he gets a lot less first serves in because he's going for it.

Interviewer: That's a physical thing.

GRAHAM: But all things are not equal, his backhand is as good as anybody's and better than most, his drop shot's great and his ability to read around the court fantastic but his serve's not really up to standard.

MIKE: Is this any different to what we did earlier?

Interviewer: What I was trying to get you to before was is what is it for and what does it do and the conclusion you're heading towards is that's decision making so people in a high pressure environment are people who can sustain performance and make decisions better than others, what are the characteristics of those people? Somebody you know who consistently makes good decisions and performs, what are the characteristics of those people and you did elicit some of it before. It's very difficult to talk about a car without talking about the seats and wheels.

GRAHAM: I think it's an interesting concept that you picked a car and told us it was to get from A to B because most of the research would tell us that's not really so. For me it's to get from A to B, for most it's a status thing, it's a penis extension, it's a …

Interviewer: Its fundamental purpose is to …

GRAHAM: Most people don't buy a car because it does 40 miles a gallon.
Interviewer: The fundamental function of a car is to take you from A to B.

GRAHAM: The reason why someone makes a choice of one car over another isn't generally "I'll get 3 miles more per gallon".

Interviewer: But it has to take you from A to B.

GRAHAM: That's a given.

Interviewer: No, no.

GRAHAM: Any new car for £15K will get you from A to B.

Interviewer: But its fundamental function is take someone or somebody somewhere.

GRAHAM: But it's not all about function, is it?

Interviewer: We could argue this for a long time, people you have observed sustain performance in pressured environments, what are the characteristics? It might be just certain times when you think they're mentally tough and times when you believe they're mentally weak – that's also fine.

Joanne: I think that's important to recognise, at different times in people's personal or business lives, they're much stronger or weaker depending on outside circumstances.

Interviewer: So Tiger Woods is or was mentally tough on a golf course but now he's a nightmare so he's not able to cope with the stress and pressure …

Joanne: That he put himself under!

Interviewer: But again the decisions he made on the golf course were exemplary but the decisions he made in his social life, not so.

Joanne: Whereas now the decisions he makes on the golf course have really been affected whereas Rooney when he had all that trouble with the prostitute, his performance on the field was fantastic but when his father was arrested just before the England match they reckon that had an effect and he got sent off so different things affect people differently.
Interviewer So when he kicked that guy, was that decision he made?

Joanne Yes, it was a decision, he didn’t have to do it did he?

BREAK

GRAHAM First characteristic I’ve wrote down is rapidly process information, we didn’t say that before and if we’re trying to break new ground, mentally tough people remain unemotional, process the information quickly and make a decision. I think the other one to assess and reassess because things change. I know we said earlier you need a Plan B but you have to know when to go to Plan B.

MIKE You should constantly reappraise.

Interviewer So you’re saying mentally tough people constantly reappraise.

MIKE Clever people, not necessarily mentally tough people.

GRAHAM But you’ve then got to do something with the answer you’ve got. You’ve got to keep reassessing and tough people then make a judgement call based on that reassessment because something moved. Lots of people won’t make the call and non-clever people won’t see the option.

Interviewer Can you give me an example of someone who did that?

MIKE A market analyst who sits there all day looking at shares going up and down, markets going up and down – he will make the trades based on the information, he doesn’t have to be mentally tough but he does have to be clever to spot what the markets from the information he’s given. That’s intelligence, not toughness.

GRAHAM OK, small example, not sport, a personal one so I won’t blow it out of proportion! Some while ago I looked after Dunlop’s sports division in the UK – golf, tennis, rugby and I looked at a situation where I believed the market in shell-suits was about to hit the skids – everybody had them and suddenly started to buy them from their local market as opposed to their local high street sports retailer so I decided I was going to job off the last 500K of these suits at a silly price and I went off to my parent company a plc which is not known for the charity and generosity! It so happened it was when we
were doing our annual budgeting and I went in and said “I’m not asking for your permission, this is what I’ve done because my market intelligence says the first jobbing off will be the cheapest, I won’t get cost this time, I’ll lose a bit – I might get £5 per suit but anyone who comes 6 months after me will lose their shirt! That killed my last 2 months of training and I projected that next year I would make a loss, nobody had ever gone in and said they were going to make a loss because it’s career threatening. 3 hours later I had a budget with the suggestion the next year I was going to make a £2M loss on a £50M T/O and they understood why I’d dumped all the stock, it was the right call, I got away with it. I lost just a few pounds per suit and made a loss of £750K so I was a hero! Because I chose to do it quickly and defend my actions against my not very sympathetic superiors and then did a bit better than I’d conditioned them to accept. I think that was quite tough because literally nobody had been to the parent company to say I want a budget to make a loss next year.

Joanne You exceeded their expectation, didn’t you?

GRAHAM I’m not stupid politically but I did make that call. That was actually about knowing what was going on in the marketplace.

Interviewer That demonstrates how you reassessed a situation. ALISON, have you got a characteristic you’d like to throw into the pot?

ALISON This is a personal experience where a professor of the school and I were leading a bid to the DWP which was the largest government department at the time. It was a £90M bid and we were working with 2 private sector partners – all 3 of us had put an enormous amount of work into this, we’d built up a relationship up with them and we wanted to win this bid and the school was largely unsupportive of this particular bid even though it was going to make a considerable amount of surplus and because of that lack of support, the professor dropped out with stress at the critical point when we were about to bid and win. Now the only person who could have lead this bid was me and I basically went home and had to make a decision which was either to throw the towel in, walk away and let the school deal with it or I’m going to pick up the pieces and we’re going to bid this. That was my decision at that moment and I knew I was on my own, never done it before and never led a bid of that size and complexity before. Anyway I decided I would do it and went on to win, the point that I see that I displayed at the time was – there is something around displaying absolute calmness
externally. We were talking about projecting calmness and around you when everyone else is falling apart, using resources effectively whatever that is – market intelligence, people, teams, information, doesn’t matter. I would also define that as getting help because it doesn’t matter how tough you are, you can’t do some things on your own and part of my view of mental toughness is that many of these things we’ve already talked but sometimes you need a group of people to achieve. The usual positive attitude, blah, blah! It’s also about creating a plan which is something I think you said is see a potential disaster, identifying and diverting that disaster and creating a plan that’s going to work. Going back to the disaster scenario, a huge amount of action on limiting damage which is exactly what you were doing. Operating with high energy all the time and making sure people don’t see the chinks in the armour!

Interviewer

Can I come back to you on some of things because there’s something that aligns with both of your stories or experiences around this limiting damage and I know that in your example, you made the decision and went in, they could have said “dream on!” so do you think they were mentally tough as well?

GRAHAM

Yes, I do because they quizzed me wonderfully, it really was an entertaining cross-examination! They were tough enough to recognise that I had done the research, I had figured out what was going, my ducks were all in a row – no, it wasn’t a good idea but under the circumstances, that was likely to be the most commercially sensible decision to make.

Interviewer

You mentioned the word “sensible” so do you think it was a tough decision but is it a characteristic of a mentally tough person is that they’re sensible?

GRAHAM

I’m not sure it has to be, I think it helps but if you’re saying what characteristics inhabit these people who display mental toughness and there’s been lots of work done what makes a leader and sometimes a leader in one environment is bloody useful doing something else. Churchill was brilliant in war but not really too good in peace. In this situation there are lots of people who may well have the capacity to be mentally tough but we don’t know because they’re not called upon to demonstrate toughness. People make decisions on the stock markets daily, they don’t have to be mentally tough to do it, that’s just what they do – they get it right, they get it wrong. The mental toughness bit is usually context driven and that’s why I asked you earlier are you going to give us a context in which to do our
thinking. Your context was massive bid, nobody's ever done anything quite like that before, they're the biggest players on the scene and I'm running out of my support base, do I give up or not, there's no problem if I do give up because it's explainable and I'm in the unchartered territory. There are quite a lot of nice people around who'll tick all the boxes for leadership but because they've never been challenged, what happens if this happens?

ALISON Interviewer and I have talked about this in the past, there are people who are mentally tough who may not even realise it themselves because they haven't been in a scenario which calls upon it and it's a stress environment which brings it out.

Interviewer It's us that defines the stress so if you take the examples of the traders, you said you don't need to be mentally tough to be a trader and that's fine, however, there may well be people who find themselves (because that's considered quite a stressful job) in that job and can't cope.

Joanne Well, they have a high burn out rate.

GRAHAM Well, take an air traffic controller – my son who has very good spacial awareness and is very good at keeping planes apart! He has no problem with it but he knows that by the time he's 45, he'll have to find something else. Maybe in an environment that's an underlying accepted level of stress anyway, toughness comes when there's suddenly more stress than normal – different or more urgent. I think teachers face a lot of stress and they've all got be in some way or other tough to go to school every day and take the shit the kids throw at them! They understand that and lots of traders understand it's going to be like that all the time, surgeons performing surgery know it's stressful. Real mental toughness doesn't get demonstrated if you normally work in a stressful environment all the time. You were talking about looking after sales teams, outbound telesales operations are, you could argue, high stress or high vibe depending on how you look at it.

Joanne That's about putting a round peg in a round hole, isn't it? I know teachers who absolutely love teaching and don't see it as stressful at all because it's a vocation to them. We all have days when we go home and think "OMG, why do I do this!?" but actually 99% of the time they enjoy teaching but if you put someone who's a square peg in a round teaching hole, they're going to hate it. It's like your son, most people couldn't be an air traffic
controller because they haven’t got the skills to cope with it so the stress comes with not having the skills to cope with it mentally with the job that you’re there to do because I’m intelligent but not book clever but for some jobs, you’d put an enormous amount of pressure on yourself if you weren’t book clever.

**GRAHAM**

I don’t think we’re actually trying to debate what people have to bring to be able to do their work, I think we were saying everyone’s capable but it’s who stands out as being mentally tough when the stress spikes.

**Interviewer**

Alternatively, those individuals – it can be one or two that fall by the wayside.

**GRAHAM**

Yes, possibly. What I was getting at was that some worlds simply have a lot more stress to start with and you have to know that when you walk into that world and you can’t say that’s stress, it’s simply the work environment. It’s when things become more stressful that’s when tough people have the demonstrate things that normally come out, it’s the abnormal that calls for tough.

**ALISON**

I think that’s when you notice it but I would add to that by saying they are mentally tough most of the time even in a normal level of stress or disturbance but they are noticed when the pebble hits the water.

**Interviewer**

OK, the way you’re talking about this is different to the way some of the other groups have talked but it’s really good because it’s bringing a different feel to the subject. You’ve talked about spikes in stress or moving from one environment to another and finding that it’s stressful, you talked earlier that people can’t be mentally tough all the time but then you talked about people who hadn’t succeeded and needed to be mentally tough before they performed again so you’ve started to give it 2 different contexts and mental toughness in performance that you might not have and lost but that’s an element of mental toughness in your ability to bounce back. Are there any other characteristics?

**MIKE**

I’ve got one that no-one’s touched upon but before I say it, I want to pick up on being calm. I don’t necessarily agree that you have to be calm to be mentally tough because you’ve only got to read the paper every day – read about Sir Fred Goodwin, he was an absolute manic idiot but he was mentally tough, he wasn’t calm.
ALISON: Was that in a business context?

MIKE: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think he's mentally tough?

MIKE: I do, yes but he was a psychopath and didn't listen to anybody.

Interviewer: Psychopaths lack empathy so my question would be as you talked about caring for people before.

Joanne: That's sort of good mental toughness and bad mental toughness, isn't it?

GRAHAM: Richard Branson was put on the table earlier as an example of somebody who was mentally tough, I'm not sure he is, he's unbelievably emotional. You say make calm decisions, rationalise – no he doesn't, that's another guy in the company.

Joanne: So he's the PR face.

MIKE: I think the danger is that you might bring in what you think are ideal attributes of a good business man which is not necessarily the same as being mentally tough.

Interviewer: What do you mean by a “good businessman”?

MIKE: People like people to be calm, however, not everybody is calm.

ALISON: Can I put it a different way that might perhaps sit more comfortably? People tend to have a general state when they're not stressed and then they have a stressed state and what I would say is that a person who is mentally tough can stay in their de-stressed state rather than their stressed state.

MIKE: If you go back to the surgeons, they're all loony! I can tell you that in the barn there's a lot of shouting, screaming and swearing – they are mentally tough but they are not calm.

ALISON: No, I don’t mean that – take calm away. Let's just say the difference between how they behave and act when they are just normal and how they
behave and act when they’re stressed. The surgeons’ normal state is to be loud and crazy, I’m interested in what they do when they become stressed and I’m saying if they’re mentally tough, they remain in their normal state. Does that make sense?

MIKE Well, yes – I’m saying that I’m not sure that there’s a correlation between calmness and mental toughness.

GRAHAM You don’t have to be calm to be focused – some business leaders work better when they’re angry, it just so happens when they’re angry their real toughness comes out. Ironically, some people if they remain calm won’t get tough. They need to be angry to perform. If you’re making a presentation and you don’t get nervous, watch out!

Joanne Adrenalin kicks in.

Interviewer Positive anxiety.

GRAHAM You may argue that some really tough people make really tough decisions when they’re under supreme stress.

MIKE When I worked at B&Q we had a MD called Bill Hodgkinson who was notorious for chucking his toys out of the pram regularly. He was very mentally tough but rarely calm.

Interviewer But could he have performed to a higher level?

I can’t say. It was his style and some people’s style is not a calm and collected style, it’s manic. I saw Alan Sugar at the Hilton last year and he was quite rude and aggressive to people who he thought asked stupid questions.

Joanne He’s always rude and aggressive!

ALISON That’s his normal state.

Interviewer If you take Jeff Ramsbottom, the guy from Harvard who lectures on strategy, his performance in front of a class is fabulous, unbelievable but when he walks around the building, he wouldn’t say boo to a goose! That
guy is a performer so when we use the Richard Branson, Alan Sugar, etc – I haven’t got enough information to develop the right theory.

Joanne: Well they say that most slapstick comedians are really quiet and often miserable in real life.

GRAHAM: The archetype is Tony Hancock but John Bishop is just the same bouncy character if he’s walking down the street.

Interviewer: So we make these assumptions and you will have experienced these people where you think they’re mentally tough because the decisions they make under a high pressure situation are much better than other people’s.

Joanne: I worked for a chap called Gerry Cook at JD Williams, he was a proper shouter! He was brilliant, he knew a line so when the buyers would come in to see him, they’d be shivering jellies! The trouble was that he thought he had to be so mentally tough (and appear that way) that he didn’t have the ability to listen to someone who might just be able to take him to a more profitable line and he was so fixed on keeping this persona of Mr Angry …

GRAHAM: The irony is that the view from some of the tougher people who presented to him was that his shouting was because he felt inadequate, to cover up his own insecurities.

Joanne: He wouldn’t be like that with people further up the chain.

MIKE: A coward!

Joanne: No, to be fair to him, he was damn good at his job and when you got to know him he was a thoroughly decent bloke but he had this fixed idea of what being tough was.

GRAHAM: I think there’s a piece of inadequacy and self-preservation which says I’ve got to be good because if I let on I’m not then I’m struggling in this environment. At JD Williams you’ve got some really good people at the top who’ve pushed hard.

Joanne: And Gerry was one of those people what I’m saying is that he felt he had to have this persona of being seen as tough.
GRAHAM Being seen as tough isn’t the same being tough.

Joanne That’s what I’m saying. The other thing on my list is being impervious to bullying.

ALISON I think this brings us back to the beginning. MIKE, you described somebody who was quite regularly angry but was also mentally tough. My personal understanding of mental toughness is that person isn’t mentally tough because they got angry and lost it due the reasons we’ve just been discussing – loss of confidence, fear.

MIKE But they’ve done a high pressure job for a long time and that’s the way they coped with it.

GRAHAM We wouldn’t see that person Joanne’s talking about as being mentally tough frankly.

Interviewer On the people who got angry and shouted, did that have an effect on other people?

Joanne Yes!

Interviewer Was that positive and negative?

MIKE I would argue it was both, he obviously made his point clearly by chucking his toys out of the pram, however, people didn’t necessarily have any respect for that way of doing it.

Interviewer Then do you think his way of working had a positive or negative effect on the performance of others?

MIKE It had a positive effect but wasn’t an ideal way of doing things in my view but it worked.

Interviewer So if you were to describe him and aspects of that person you believe relate to mental toughness but there are aspects that would demonstrate mental weakness?

MIKE This point about being inadequate.
Graham: The person we described before - Churchill – war leader, brilliant but peace leader, rubbish – he wasn’t a calm person, he very frequently hectored people, bullied people (knew which ones to bully, backing off one or two). He didn’t bully Harris because he said “I know about flying planes and you know about talking – so I’ll do my bit and you do your bit – when I’m not doing it properly, talk to me”. Churchill was a real hectoring bully but he’s the archetypal figure of a great leader. The interesting part is that we’ve talked about loads of things this person can or can’t do – analyse, be fair, make the judgement calls, etc and most of those are in the basket for what makes a good leader with one exception, we haven’t mentioned innovation at all this afternoon. By and large, mentally tough people need persuading to innovate. Mentally tough people are not great innovators.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Mike: Where does Steve Jobs come into that?

Alison: I would challenge that.

Graham: I don’t think Steve Jobs was innovative, he was a worker – a workaholic.

Mike: Massively innovative, no-one will agree with you on that one.

Graham: Nobody has talked about innovation.

Alison: Well I talked about finding solutions.

Graham: No, I mean real innovation.

Mike: Can I mention a point that’s not been mentioned – one of the characteristics of somebody who’s mentally tough is that they are prepared to go to the edge of legality and morality.

Interviewer: Are they prepared to go to the edge or do they know where the edge is?

Mike: They probably know where the edge is and they’ll go to it, they might even go slightly over the edge.

Alison: I agree completely. Bend the rules.
Interviewer: So would you say Ben Johnson is mentally tough?

MIKE: No, he’s a cheat – simple.

Interviewer: He just went over the edge.

MIKE: He’s a cheat. Anyway I’m not prepared to discuss sporting people, this is business. Ben Johnson was a cheat – period and I’m not prepared to accept any other label on him.

Interviewer: OK, the people at Enron – the decisions they made and Fred Goodwin.

MIKE: He was a psychopath. The one I bring in mine is that I talk about a sustainable and successful businessperson. Fred Goodwin was patently mentally tough but he wasn’t sustainable because his method of working wouldn’t last. I said someone who has mental toughness is prepared to go to the edge of legality and morality.

Interviewer: If I go over the edge of legality, am I cheating?

MIKE: Possibly, yes.

Interviewer: I’m not saying you’re right or wrong.

MIKE: If you look at the wars between Microsoft and Apple, they’ve all gone beyond what they really should have been doing and Bill Gates is probably (I wouldn’t say a criminal) but he’s a “soft” criminal, he’s been doing a lot of dodgy things.

ALISON: I’d like to define go to the edges of legal and moral side as being extremely creative.

MIKE: Well it is creative in a negative way.

Interviewer: Only if you go over.

GRAHAM: Or only if you get caught! Was Nixon any worse than other presidents except that he got caught?
MIKE

I’m in the process of writing 2 patents at the moment and I’ve come across that there’s a massive court case at the moment between Samsung and Apple over the iPad and all these companies are applying for thousands of patents every year purely to stop someone else getting into it and the immorality of some of these patents is outrageous. I read that in Texas there’s this place where 3K patent lawyers hanging out and in America there’s an ability to apply for a patent and restraints on the most stupid and spurious stuff. The point I’m trying to make is that the person who’s mentally tough will, if necessary, push the boundaries up to and possibly beyond what is legal and moral.

Interviewer

My question here is and it comes back to the mountaineer who’s prepared at all costs to get to the top and that’s only half the job but are prepared to kill themselves.

MIKE

I don’t think that’s mentally tough, that’s a bad decision.

Interviewer

Yes. I can go to the edge, I can everything creative and at this point here, I’ll stay out of prison but if I make an additional decision and I’m caught, I’ll go to prison. Or I’ll make that trade and it might make £10B or it might bring down the bank.

MIKE

I’ve read enough about Berlusconi to realise that guy is as bent as anybody in this world but because of his money and he understands that the Italian legal system is so long-winded, he knows that he can get away with it all which is why he behaves the way he does. Although the threat of going to jail is there, it’s so far away from reality, it’s not worth bothering with.

Interviewer

Do people who are mentally tough demonstrate the point where they go “no more”, I stop at this point because actually if I carry on it’ll be immoral?

MIKE

I think they go on to a point when they get caught so they might go over the edge and carry on going over the edge because they think they’re going to get away with it. The point they stop is when they think I’m going to jail if I don’t.

Interviewer

The risk is about being illegal, breaking the laws of the land or being immoral so Tiger Woods thinks “I’ll slinterviewerp with that girl, it won’t really matter, I won’t get caught”.

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MIKE: I’m not on about that morality, I mean ethical morality.

Interviewer: But that’s morality depending on the context, it doesn’t really matter.

GRAHAM: But what has that got to with mental toughness?

Interviewer: If you talk about decision making – Jerome Caval in France and Nick Interviewerson, the decisions that they made ultimately brought down a bank and severely hampered another. You look at the decisions of Fred Goodwin and some of his people, like Fisher in the corporate elements of those banks were, on the face of it, illegal.

MIKE: That’s not quite true.

Joanne: Fred Goodwin’s weren’t illegal.

Interviewer: They are threatening to take him to court.

MIKE: The FSA have said that if they thought they would have had a tangible case against them, they would have done but they couldn’t prove it, they were at the edges of morality.

GRAHAM: It’s about like taking Al Capone for tax evasion, isn’t it?

Interviewer: Do mentally tough people lie?

MIKE: Yes, they do.

ALISON: I would challenge that, I think it’s the moral code of the mentally tough person. I think a mentally tough person may or may not take that route of going to the edge, crossing the edge or breaking the law but it’s down to their own moral code whether they would do that or not. I think you can be mentally tough and not break the rules.

Interviewer: That’s right but you think you can be mentally tough and break the rules.

MIKE: Yes.

ALISON: Not always, not all mentally tough people will break the rules, I’m saying that some may do.
MIKE: Here’s an example – I’ve never gone overdrawn but I manipulate my PAYE so I don’t always pay it on time so strictly I’m breaking the rules by not paying my PAYE on the due date but if I hang about for 10 days, it stops me going overdrawn, I know that HMRC aren’t going to kick me that hard, they’ll just send me a nasty letter and I haven’t paid any excess banking charges – I’ve covered it all but strictly I’ve been illegal.

GRAHAM: What’s that got to do with toughness?

MIKE: I’ve made a decision.

GRAHAM: I don’t think that’s got anything to do with mental toughness at all, that’s just being devious financially! If we’re trying to distil out of our own murky pasts or people we’ve heard of to try and describe what mental toughness is and then to try and move on and describe the characteristics, the issue wasn’t do I muck about with my PAYE, the issue was do mentally tough people cheat and lie – you’re saying “yes, they do” and you’re saying “no, they don’t” and I’m saying that generally mentally tough people don’t need to, they know where the rules are and they play within the rules, whether that’s sport or a commercial game. They will know exactly where the boundaries are and they’ll play it as hard as they can within the boundaries. The really tough people don’t cheat because they don’t need to, the ones who cheat are the ones who needed to because they couldn’t get it done the right way. Then you’re back to Ben Johnson. We’re talking about breaking the law or immoral – what else would you call it?

ALISON: Doesn’t this prove that you can be mentally tough and break the rules or not – it’s irrelevant to mental toughness, you can make the decision inside or outside the boundaries.

GRAHAM: I think mentally tough people do work within the rules as prescribed by that society and are very good at it.

Interviewer: I really do appreciate the fact that you’ve given me 3 hours and I think this could go on for a while! I would like to come back to you individually to ask you some further questions at some point. What’s fascinating is that you’re bringing out things that haven’t been touched in sport and the premise of this research is about saying that there are companies out there who are...
going around telling us what mental toughness is in business because it’s the same as in sport.

MIKE

It’s not.

Interviewer

I don’t believe it is and that’s the underlying premise of my research and what you’ve been able to identify are a number of key facets to that such as this edge of legality and morality and what that actually means, understanding boundaries.

Joanne

Don’t you think you have to be mentally tough to whistle-blow sometimes because you’re totally paddling against the tide.

Interviewer

If you look at Fred Goodwin who up to a point may have performed very well and the people were happy. You’ve brought in this interaction with other people, do mentally tough people have a positive or negative effect on other people and is that an aspect of mental toughness so it’s one of the things you introduced, GRAHAM, how mentally tough people have a positive effect on other people whereas what you introduced, MIKE, was that some people you considered to be mentally tough actually can have a negative impact on people and I’m not sure what’s right or wrong.

GRAHAM

I think they’re both right, I think the real point is that mentally tough people can lead other people and it’s positive or kick the shit out of people when they get angry and that’s negative. The point is that they make a difference to the people around them whether it’s good news or not – if you have a situation where someone needs to demonstrate mental toughness and someone rises to that challenge and is, it makes a difference. It may not always be a popular decision, it was a good judgement call in the circumstances. We’re not arguing, in both ways mentally tough people have a lasting impression perhaps on the people around them – good or bad because they’re actually in some way, different. They’re the ones you can rely on in a serious crisis is one way to describe a mentally tough person. The person you would look to help you when the chips are really down. At the other end, it’s the person who fires you!

MIKE

The point is you can be inspirational by being positive or negative. If I see that 1K kids have died in Kenya, it makes me question why I consider there’s a God, however, you can learn by the negative, we shouldn’t do that. The guy who chucks his toys out of the pram inspires you to do better
because you think to yourself that I wouldn't do it like that but at least I'm going to do it.

Joanne

I don't think that's inspiring you though, it's kind of making you do it.

MIKE

Is there a difference between inspiring and making?

Joanne

Absolutely.

ALISON

Yes.

Joanne

Inspiring makes you want to do really well for a person. With Gerry I used to see people come out and say “I've worked so hard and he's knocked this back and that back and I'll go and put it right” but they didn't trip out of the office inspired.

Interviewer

I think where we starting to overlap now is between mental toughness and an individual's ability to perform in an environment of high stress and pressure and then their impact on others be it through the impact of the observation of that performance or their leadership.

GRAHAM

It would be nice if good quality leaders were mentally tough.

ALISON

If you're looking at this in a business context, you have to look at the impact of mentally tough people on others because businesses are a group of people and you cannot consider mental toughness on its own because it is immediately and directly impacting everyone around them. I really need to go!

Interviewer

I would like to thank you all and it's good that we finished with that point because the professor I'm working with is really interested in that point.
**APPENDIX E - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (GRAEHAM)**

**Topic:** Business Mental Toughness

**Date:** 12/04/13

**Interviewee:** Graeham

**Interviewer**

It'll be fine. So purpose of the exercise is to try and understand what you think about ... hello, it is working ... what you think about mental toughness, so what ... if you consider the phrase ‘mental toughness’ and within business, what does it stimulate? What does it mean to you?

**GRAEHAM**

Resilience. Having mental flexibility.

**Interviewer**

OK.

**GRAEHAM**

Being able to juggle many balls at the same time. Being able to deal with issues on various levels, i.e. one moment you achieve some success somewhere in some business, the next moment you’re having to deal with somebody suing you.

**Interviewer**

Deal with issues at many levels.

**GRAEHAM**

Being able to deal with different stakeholders, similar point I suspect, i.e. one minute you’ve got a customer screaming at you, the next minute you’ve got an employee that you need to -

**Interviewer**

Yeah.

**GRAEHAM**

- re-motivate. Being able to not get bogged down in the detail -

**Interviewer**

OK.

**GRAEHAM**

- and keep your view on the bigger picture of where you’re trying to get to. You know, get rid ... sort out what do you call it? The chaff from the wheat or the wheat from the chaff or whatever. And being able to ... especially if you’re in leadership type position/management, being able to remain positive even if it’s only outwardly facing positiveness.
Interviewer: OK. What do you think the benefits are of being mentally tough?

GRAEHAM: From a leadership perspective if you’re dealing with people it probably benefits their … i.e. if you weren’t and you were … probably starting to define what isn’t mentally tough, but I’m sure we’ll get onto that, but if you were leading people and you were seen as, you know, collapsing in the corner and crying or being emotionally stressed out or whatever then that probably isn’t good leadership thing to be doing if you’re dealing with whatever, so … and from a leadership side … from managing stakeholders, managing the business, i.e. that you can cope with all the different variables or issues, people, different agendas etc, so you’ve got that ability to deal with all the confliction that you see in business -

Interviewer: Yeah, OK.

GRAEHAM: - being employed in all sorts of different directions.

Interviewer: Conflict. OK. So what sort of situations within business would you think you need to be mentally tough that you’ve … you know, you’ve perceived or experienced?

GRAEHAM: General or …?

Interviewer: Yeah, so you’ve mentioned some already, so …

GRAEHAM: When things go wrong or when issues arise.

Interviewer: OK. Can you give me some examples when things go wrong? What do you mean?

GRAEHAM: Somebody sues you for £2.8 million. How do you deal with that? You put business plans on the table to the board three months ago that said you’re going to deliver a million pound profit, then you find a big hole in them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: You receive a big PI claim in the business that could sink the business.

Interviewer: Yeah.
GRAEHAM: Some employee resigns that’s about to deliver an important project and you’ve got to re-staff it, so things that you know, whether it’s an employee related you’re not delivering your numbers, somebody’s having a go... some customer or supplier or whatever’s having a go at you from a company perspective...

Interviewer: So dealing with customers?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, yeah, but being a bit more general than that, i.e. where issues arise, you know, certainly from obviously being an accountant – you haven’t got the cash to pay the salaries on Friday and it’s on Thursday. So what are you going to do about it? You can’t just stick your head in the sand.

Interviewer: OK. What about sort of general day to day sort of activities of sort the roles you’ve fulfilled or seen others fulfil? Are there any particular activities that you think, “Actually that’s quite stressful.”

GRAEHAM: I think it again depends on... more -

Interviewer: Or could be.

GRAEHAM: - on specifics or... because the roles I’ve had are generally quite broad and the people I’ve been dealing with are generally quite broad, so again it could be one instance of you’re trying to raise finance for a business because you’ve only got two months of finance left or your most important customer’s just rung up and complained about something or as I say business plans you’ve put on the table to the board you’re not hitting (inaudible 00:05:28) or you find a big hole in one of the subsidiaries that you’ve got, so what are you going to do about it?

Interviewer: What about things like presenting to the board?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, I don’t... personally, I don’t think that’s particularly mental toughness. That’s more a skill that you should have, certainly at senior management level, and be relatively comfortable with.

Interviewer: OK. What about people lower down who might have to present?
GRAEHAM: I think it's ... personally, again with presentation I ... you know, the majority of the population I'm presuming will be quite anxious about presentation and cause them a lot of anxiety, but personally, it's something that I've found with people that I've worked with if you can train them on it largely and give them more comfort about how to present and you give them structure, give them a bit of training, feedback, videos and all that sort of stuff ... presentation training courses.

Interviewer: So training can give people confidence?

GRAEHAM: On that presentational side, yeah. Because again it's relatively structured -

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: - and you're in control. It's you that's putting the content up there, it's you that's talking about it, so you give them that structure about what people want and whatnot it gives them more ... whereas the mental toughness more to me is things that you don't always see. It's the nasty shock or something goes wrong and you're not anticipating it to go wrong.

Interviewer: Right, OK.

GRAEHAM: But presentations to me aren't ...

Interviewer: Right, what about sort of disciplining people?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, well if you push that one step further and if you're having to downsize people I think that needs a certain mentality because I would like to think that to most people that's an uncomfortable situation to be in – to be the person who's downsizing people, especially if you're sat across somebody who's got a mortgage and kids and, you know, is 50 years old and what have you, i.e. people it's going to be difficult to get other jobs and whatnot, so to be able to put a business hat on as opposed to whatever your personal beliefs are, you know, you need to be able to divide your thought process that way. Is that mental toughness? It's the ability to be able to ... as I say deliver what the business needs even if you don't agree with it or you have differing views.
Interviewer: OK, so focus on the business need. OK, any other situations that you think you’ve experienced and you’ve thought ... you know, that you get anxious about or that stress you out?

GRAEHAM: Stress me out? Well from a finance perspective have I got enough cash in the bank to pay people, to pay PAYE, pay (Inaudible 00:08:28), all that sort of stuff?

Interviewer: Does that happen every month then?

GRAEHAM: No, no, but it's happened.

Interviewer: At certain times -

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

Interviewer: - and therefore you’ve got to be able to cope and continue to perform under those ...?

GRAEHAM: Well specifically from a ... cash kills a business, so you’ve got to make sure you’ve got that sort of cash in the bank. Are we hitting the business plan numbers again? From being finance it’s when, you know, we put ... we’re going to do a million pound profit, are we on target? Are we off target? What are we doing about it?

Interviewer: And is that sort of pressure constant or is it happening in certain scenarios such as then presenting to the board, discussing it with the board, meeting the venture capital people or whoever it is? Does it come in pockets of ... or is it constant?

GRAEHAM: Probably just constant. Going back to the presentation point ... the presentation is ... it’s still there – the information – you’re just putting that into a different audience. I suspect with other people that would be a higher stress point (inaudible 00:09:27) how they’re presenting. But, no, I mean so not to me, no, but there’s just that constant pressure of being conscious of having to deliver numbers that you put on the table.

Interviewer: I mean have you seen people succumb to that pressure in those environments?
GRAEHAM: Not at the level I’ve been dealing because typically the boards I’ve been involved with or the senior management they’re used to dealing with such and it’s probably a point just to flesh around a bit. Why? Because maybe it’s because they’ve got the skills to deal with such stakeholders, so it’s part of mental toughness having the skill base to deal with different scenarios.

Interviewer: Is that mental skills or technical skills or technical knowledge?

GRAEHAM: Well if you’re in a type of meeting and presentation that contains a lot of challenges to be able to deal with the challenges arguably could require to take on some mental toughness type traits and by that I mean, one, you’ve got to be able to deal with the challenges when they come and, two, how to respond to the challenges and that takes skill and knowledge and experience, so does that add into a person’s mental toughness because again you’ve got a framework within which to respond to.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK. I imagine there are times when you’ve got to deal with ... or you may require mental toughness, do you think there are times when you don’t need to be mentally tough?

GRAEHAM: I think within ... well when you walk through the door at 9:00 and then you go home at 5:00 I think in that period of time when you’re at work ... yeah, I think overall you need to have a certain level of ... I was going to call it experience, but a certain level of knowing how to deal with situations that are thrown at you.

Interviewer: So do you think ... so I’m getting the impression for you knowledge is a key component of mental toughness.

GRAEHAM: Knowledge, experience ... I think experience helps a lot of people because you’ve seen it before, so you’ve got half an idea of what to do and so, you know, when you get your first PI claim for 2.8 million quid it would freak a lot of people out, but when you’ve seen three of them or when you’re raising your first lot of VC cash and you’ve done it five times and it’s ... so I think experience comes into it. Is there a natural mental toughness underneath people who ...? Probably as well (inaudible 00:12:14) natured or nurtured or whatever the thing is. Probably is a bit of nature in there as well.

Interviewer: So it’s a balance between sort of some people have a natural level of mental toughness ...
GRAEHAM: Yeah, but I think probably not could just be mentally tough – (inaudible 00:12:30) define as is – we’ve not defined that yet – but being able to apply it certainly in a business context.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. OK.

GRAEHAM: And again how to apply it back to experience, failures, when it’s gone right, when it’s gone wrong.

INTERVIEWER: So failures can be positive.

GRAEHAM: As long as people learn from them. Again, it’s that ability to deal with different situations when it’s going right and when it’s going wrong and different stakeholders because businesses are people.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think when things are going well you need mental toughness?

GRAEHAM: I think you need the discipline to think that … or be conscious that things can change, so if you’re hitting business plan numbers or you’ve got the cash in the bank to pay salaries and … but then the next month or the next six months or the next year don’t rest on your laurels. You’ve got to have that discipline.

INTERVIEWER: So you say complacency or a lack of complacency … so people who are mentally tough aren’t complacent?

GRAEHAM: I would say so, yeah. So they’re conscious that things can change and you can’t rest on your laurels and you need to be conscious of, “Well what’s next? We might be OK now, we might deliver the numbers now, but what’s next?”

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so if someone who lacked mental toughness was complacent what would attribute and the trait was?

GRAEHAM: Focus.

INTERVIEWER: Focus?
Determined. Have foresight. Got that energy and drive and what have you. Got that ability to ... “We set out to do A. We’ve just done A. And now we’re going to do B,” and B’s lifting the bar or B’s moving in a different direction. “Alright, we’ve just done B as well, so now we’ll do C,” so it’s that mental toughness to keep moving things forward.

OK. So we sort of moved from sort of understanding situations and part of the reason we used the situation examples really is to try and elicit from you what you’ve experienced, so the background to this sort of personal construct psychology is around your view on mental toughness is, it’s your view, it’s not like it’s right. It’s not wrong because it’s your view, so there’s no sort of right or wrong answers in that sense, there’s only your answers. Part of the questionnaire was to think about people who are mentally tough and those who perhaps aren’t mentally tough. Thinking about the people who are mentally tough that you’ve experienced, you’ve mentioned sort of focused and determined and sort of energy and drive, what might be some of the other characteristics? And so to give you an example, if you think about the world’s best golfer, you wouldn’t necessarily say ... someone might say Tiger Woods is, but he might have some failings in certain areas, so there may be people who drive better than he does and someone who’s got more charisma in front of the press and for example and someone might have more ideas such as Phil Mickelson and his sort of tenacity to get out of difficult situations, so actually if you wanted to describe the world’s best golfer you’d take components of different people, so with that sort of thought what sort of characteristics do you perceive sort of mentally tough people have?

Mentally flexible like I mentioned before.

Yeah.

Creative to an extent, so they ... or lateral thinking is probably a better way to describe it.

Yeah.

Resilience. I think I mentioned that before. (Inaudible 00:16:41-00:16:43). Determination.

Yeah.
GRAEHAM: Got that there?

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: Unwavering is probably a bit strong, but having a view that they’re prepared to follow.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK.

GRAEHAM: So...

Interviewer: Dogmatic is that, or...?

GRAEHAM: Yeah. In a balanced sense and by that I mean if... obviously if you’re the CEO then you need a view about strategy and even if it everybody says it’s the wrong strategy... like Steve Jobs is a classic example, Apple Stores (inaudible 00:17:19) fail and he just did it and it’s a huge success blah blah.

Interviewer: Any other sort of characteristics that spring to mind? I just want to see if you mentioned any earlier.

GRAEHAM: Depending on the situation technically strong people can help and by that I mean if you’re an accountant or an engineer or, you know, whatever where you need a technical base to understand something.

Interviewer: What do you think... what sort of... what does that... what underpins that? So what does that give you if you’re technically strong?

GRAEHAM: I think back to the confidence and experience to be able to... if you’re in a mentally tough position of having to push your point through or whatever it gives you that ability to do that.

Interviewer: You also mentioned focused as well. (Inaudible 00:18:17-00:18:19). So if we go through these I just want to ask you a couple of questions around sort of focus. So just give me a bit of a description. What... so we talked about people being focused or complacent. Can you sort of give me an example of perhaps when you or you’ve seen somebody who’s focused and they’ve been successful?
GRAEHAM: There was a partner in the Sydney office at Deloittes, worst people manager you every year and he'd do anything to hit that revenue target. Didn't give a damn that he upset people, but he was seen as a star performing partner within the business. Why? Because it drove his bottom line ... his personal bottom line. So he was mentally tough -

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: - (inaudible 00:19:04) mentally tough my way in that he's going to achieve that at all odds.

Interviewer: Yeah, so he achieved his goals. How do you think the people who worked with him sort of found him?

GRAEHAM: Difficult.

Interviewer: Difficult. OK.

GRAEHAM: Is that a bad example?

Interviewer: No, no. No, no, no. There's no sort of bad examples. So from your mind somebody who was focused you've used that individual as being mentally tough because they did ... they weren't complacent, but ...

GRAEHAM: Well if ... you've read Steve Jobs, haven't you? Have you read it? In a similar vein that guy I just described was like a Steve Jobs, different (inaudible 00:19:43-00:19:45), but, i.e. the same sort of ... because you get the sense if you read that Jobs biography he was a bit of a ... he could turn it on with people whenever he wanted, but he was like (inaudible 00:19:53) and he was just focused. And he was just, “This is what you're doing. If you're with me you're with me, if you're not, you're not.” And he could take people with him. This guy was similar. He was an absolute pain in the fucking ass, but for some reason he was alright, but he was a knob.

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: But you knew what he was about.

Interviewer: And he achieved what he needed to achieve. And did others not succeed?
GRAEHAM: Well, again, there was another partner in that Deloittes group that I was in. He was a lovely guy and he liked people and he just got trampled on and he failed after about 12 months, they binned him.

Interviewer: Right, so do you think being nice is not a trait within mental toughness?

GRAEHAM: No, I wouldn’t go that far.

Interviewer: OK.

GRAEHAM: I think you can still be nice, but you’ve got to be able to be nice, but firm at the same time.

Interviewer: OK.

GRAEHAM: And firm being … certainly business you’ve got to not be trampled on.

Interviewer: OK. So …

GRAEHAM: You’ve got to be mentally tough enough to be able to … whether you’re a people person or, you’re a … you know, a black and white person, by that I mean (inaudible 00:21:11-00:21:14) don’t give a shit about people you’ve got to have that ability in my mind to manipulate the relevant parts to get done what you need to be done.

Interviewer: OK, so manipulating relevant parts.

GRAEHAM: And by that I mean like this Sydney (inaudible 00:21:35) I’ve just talked about – wanted you do something.

Interviewer: Right, so he could be charming if he needed to be?

GRAEHAM: Oh absolutely. He was probably a corporate psychopath (inaudible 00:21:45-00:21:49).

Interviewer: Oh that’s interesting.

GRAEHAM: But the ability to – yeah – play people off, manipulate … is that mentally tough? I can say something to Lee, “You’re the best thing since sliced
bread,” then I walk into the door next door to the CEO and say, “That Lee (Inaudible 00:22:16) is a right knobber.” It’s that manipulation. Is that mentally tough? Because a lot of people I would like to think with half-decent values wouldn’t be so two-faced, but is that part of being mentally tough?

Interviewer: So do people need to have values to be mentally tough?

GRAEHAM: I think ... what do I think? I think people need to be able to disengage their personal values from what they need to be done with business. Put it that way round. So you might have personal values that I would never sack anybody who was 50 years old and got a mortgage, but when I’m in the business environment with a role that ... you hope that if you accept the role with it comes responsibility, so you need to be mentally tough in order to deliver the responsibility.

Interviewer: What if your personal value was, “I won’t steal.” But in the business environment ... would you let that one go as well and ...?

GRAEHAM: Well that ... my personal view is that then you’re being mentally tough to say, “What are you stealing for?” If somebody’s asking you to steal, are you mentally tough enough to say no?

Interviewer: So there are different ... there’s a sort of almost a personal set of rights and wrongs and then the sort of business set of rights and wrongs.

GRAEHAM: Yeah, they’re not ... I don’t think they’re independently exclusive or whatever. I mean clearly they will overlap in areas, but ... 

Interviewer: But do you think mentally tough people ... because you mentioned at all costs.

GRAEHAM: It’s the ability to pick up and deal with things that aren’t necessarily naturally comfortable for you to deal with – I think that’s a better way to say it. So like your stealing point is different than ... I mean nobody likes sacking people, nobody likes presenting – your example – but it’s one of the traits of mentally tough is being able to get off your feet and deal with it whether it’s an employee who, you know, couldn’t come in because they hadn’t bathed the cat this morning or some 50 year old bloke you’ve got to get rid of because you need to cut costs or a presentation that you need ... you know
is going to be hostile because you haven’t delivered your numbers or ... but ... being able to front up and deal with it.

Interviewer OK. So if we look ... we talked about focused and sort of black and white and we said that the sort of contrast or the opposite of that would be people who were complacent and sort of lack focus, if we move onto the next one where we sort of said ... you said determined was a characteristic, what might be the contrast of that?

GRAEHAM (Inaudible 00:24:55) somebody who wasn’t mentally tough?

Interviewer Mmm. Or wasn’t demonstrating determination.

GRAEHAM I was going to say flaky, you’ll have to think of a better word afterwards, but ... i.e. somebody that ... it doesn’t take much to challenge them or knock them off course or change their view or ... you know, they’ve stood up and they’ve said, “This is the strategic direction we should be taking,” but within five minutes you’ve knocked it to pieces and they won’t sit behind what they’ve ...

Interviewer So on the determined side aren’t knocked off course.

GRAEHAM Well ... yes, the focus ... well that overlaps with focus. They’re determined to achieve what their vision is, what they believe in, what they’re trying to do, what goals and objectives they’ve set themselves.

Interviewer So there’s a bit of belief as well within that?

GRAEHAM Definitely.

Interviewer So they have sort of beliefs.

GRAEHAM Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer So can you give me an example of someone who’s ... a situation where you’ve seen people who are determined, who ... perhaps when people have been successful and other people haven’t ...

GRAEHAM Well (inaudible 00:26:01) metrics, (inaudible 00:26:03) finance, (inaudible 00:26:04-00:26:07) CEO. It took us 18 months to raise the finance. You get
a lot of rejections. You’ve got to kiss a lot of frogs to get your prince as they used to say. You know this, you’ve got sales (inaudible 00:26:18). Got that determination to ... a bit like me trying to get a job now. You’ve just got to keep picking yourself up and ...

Interviewer Yeah. And so ... that’s really good. So energy and drive, you know, just done A, move onto B, so the determination that we talked about just was about necessarily dealing with negative instances, knockbacks in a sense. The energy drive and bit, what would ... and again that was like people being knocked off course, but you mentioned then energy and drive. What might be the contrast and the opposite to sort of energy and drive?

GRAEHAM People who can’t pick themselves up and re- ... either re-get the motivation or keep going with the motivation in whatever they’re trying to do.

Interviewer Yeah.

GRAEHAM And by that I mean ... let me give you an example. This dicker partner in Deloittes that I mentioned in Sydney, I think this is the best example I’ve ever seen – this. He was dragged into the senior partner or partners ... I think he was virtually told, “You’re out the door,” because of whatever, I can’t remember now, and I heard this on sort of snippets (inaudible 00:27:35-00:27:38) part of. I listened to this conversation and this feedback at this meeting he’d just been in and I thought, “Christ almighty,” he was just slapped around buh-buh-buh-buh, that was at 4:00pm one Thursday. Friday morning he was back in as though nothing had happened, fully behind the Deloittes pump, ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra. It’s that ability to ...

Interviewer To bounce back, is it or ...?

GRAEHAM Bounce back and, “Alright, I’ve got this problem, but this what I’m still going to achieve.” Compartamentalise. Or maybe Watkin ... Watkin at Montpelier is the most mentally tough person I’ve seen. Maybe I should have thought of that nearer the start. I mean what are the characteristics there? But maybe that compartmentalising one of the things (inaudible 00:28:21) not stressed, so you’ve got an issue or you’ve got a problem – whatever – you know you’ve got to deal with it or you’ve got to put that over there and deal with it later or whatever, but that ability to not get swamped with it. Not knock you off track and ...
Interviewer: So people who can compartmentalise and put things to one side and those who obviously can’t do that, you get swamped, sort of by word, by issues, by pressure.

GRAEHAM: Maybe logic. Maybe logic is one of the mentally tough traits. So logically ... can you logically link through what you’re facing and rank them and deal with them and prioritise them? Maybe logic’s ...

Interviewer: So the ability to prioritise -

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

Interviewer: - logically against somebody who can’t prioritise.

GRAEHAM: Can only focus on one thing at once or they can’t deal with multiple balls at the mentally tough.

Interviewer: What the ...?

GRAEHAM: Not being able to deal with multiple issues at the same time and prioritise and all the mess that goes with it.

Interviewer: But it could be a component or a characteristic of those people who are mentally tough – the ability to prioritise.

GRAEHAM: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So those who can’t would potentially feel the stress and pressure of not being able to ...

GRAEHAM: Yeah, I would ... yeah.

Interviewer: OK. So we talked about mental flexibility which was I suppose part of ... or is that linked to the ability to prioritise or did you mean something else? What did you mean by ‘mental flexibility’?

GRAEHAM: Probably (inaudible 00:30:21) three things wrong. Yeah, being able to juggle levels, so i.e. one minute you’re dealing with being sued for 2.8 million quid that could kill the company and the next minute you’re dealing with an employee that’s mother’s died.
Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: And the third point probably tirelessly creative, but lateral thinking is having that ability to think laterally, so the mental flexibility is just not singly tracked into one thought process. You’ve got the ability to deal with different points of views or different situations or you’ve got that flexible approach in mind that even though your personal view might be, “Well we need to go left,” you’ve got that flexibility that, “Well actually maybe we do go straight on,” or, “we do go right,” or, you know, whatever.

Interviewer: So those who ... there were those people who can juggle things, but the sort of contrast would be somebody who can only focus on one thing at a time we’re saying?

GRAEHAM: (Inaudible 00:31:29), yeah. It’s people that can move the jigsaw pieces about in you know that piece is going to change there, so that mental flexibility. It’s like a game of chess if you like.

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: So people can see going forward, not just what you’re doing at the moment.

Interviewer: Yeah, so understand how things impact on other things. That was sort of ... like a vision and an understanding of broader ...

GRAEHAM: Being able to move all the bits around so, you know, just so bit one moves and so ... or it changes from what you’re anticipating, so, “OK, I’ve got to now change bit four, five and six out of the twenty that I’m dealing with because of whatever – priority or ...”

Interviewer: And what sort of skill would you call that? Trait/characteristic?

GRAEHAM: That’s what I was calling mental flexibility.

Interviewer: Mental flexibility. Yeah.

GRAEHAM: And probably overlaps with lateral thinking.
Interviewer: OK, and therefore what ... people who don’t have that, what sort of traits do they have? What are they like?

GRAEHAM: Black is black and white is white. My view is the right view.

Interviewer: But you described that earlier on as being focused.

GRAEHAM: Well mental flexibility and ... certainly mental flexibility to me is people with ... it’s right rather than ... well it might be right, but it might be left as well. Don’t know it’s right. So they haven’t got that ... the single tram track mindset (inaudible 00:33:09) or if ...

Interviewer: So is this more once they know it’s right?

GRAEHAM: No, focus to me is focused on ... at a strategic level if I do it like that, so we’re going from A and we’re going to B and along the way you might be doing that, but you know you’re still going to get to B. Whereas the ... what did I say? The flexible mindset. What did I call it?

Interviewer: Yeah, mental flexibility.

GRAEHAM: To get from A to B your flexibility might be that you thought, “Well we might turn a bit left there, but actually we’ve got to turn right because there’s a roadblock, so let’s go right then, but we’re still going to get to B,” so maybe it’s more of a tactical thing.

Interviewer: So the mental flexibility is the ability to switch and change whereas somebody who’s sort of almost dogmatic, but with ... you know, it’s almost this is the only way it can be done because I can’t think of any other way.

GRAEHAM: Or I’ve not got the experience or the knowledge to do it any other way, whereas a mental toughness to me as well comes in people who aren’t afraid of, “Oh I’ve not experienced this before,” or, “I’ve not dealt with this before, but I will deal with it.”

Interviewer: So trying ... so mentally tough people try new things to gain knowledge?

GRAEHAM: Well they’re not afraid of new experiences, put it that way.
Interviewer: As opposed to people who may lack mental toughness and then would avoid new experiences, stick to the same as.

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

Interviewer: OK. So mental flexibility, lateral thinking, deal at multiple levels – so people who are mentally tough have the ability to deal strategically, deal tactically, deal with people, deal with complex things as opposed to people who weren’t mentally tough, they would not be able to prioritise -

GRAEHAM: Yeah, they would get swamped I would guess. I can only think of one. I can only deal with things at narrow levels of ... you know, verticalness. I can only absorb so much at one point in time, it’s quite narrow range of what I need to absorb as opposed to deal with I can deal with a lot of different stakeholders, different situations, different levels of dealing with it.

Interviewer: So do you think intelligence has a link into mental toughness? Do you think people who aren’t necessarily say university graduates aren’t then mentally tough?

GRAEHAM: No, I would not say that that’s the case because I suspect there’s ... like, you know, (inaudible 00:36:03) play rugby league, there’s a lot of mentally tough rugby league players.

Interviewer: Yeah, as opposed to physical toughness.

GRAEHAM: Yeah, absolutely, because to get out on the rugby pitch and beat yourself up for 80 minutes and injure yourself and then get yourself back from injury and go out again on the field on all that sort of stuff, there’s obviously mental toughness there. I appreciate we’re going down sportsman which are not quite right, but to an extent ... better example? I don’t know. East End gangsters. Not that I know any. I suspect a lot of them are mentally tough.

Interviewer: OK. What psychopathic?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: OK. So you mentioned resilience. Do you just want to sort of expand on ... what do you mean by resilience?
GRAEHAM: Probably ties into the focus and determination point that we’re talking about, so again when things don’t go right, it’s to keep going. When things don’t go as well as they could have done to keep going rather than to be knocked off course or pick yourself up from something hasn’t quite worked out.

Interviewer: So people who lack resilience or lack mental toughness could be knocked off course, could – what? Give up?

GRAEHAM: Yeah. Yeah, change their view. “Alright, well we won’t go from A to B, we’ll go from A to D instead then because it’s ... I’ve got too many hurdles.”

Interviewer: They change their minds. But that sort of ... if we go back to the ... sort of frequently and don’t maintain the level of ...

GRAEHAM: Well I don’t think there’s an issue with changing your mind per se. I think it’s not having the stamina to achieve what you need to achieve.

Interviewer: Right. See things through.

GRAEHAM: I don’t think mentally tough is, “It’s my way and it’s the only way and I’m not to do. “OK, I’m trying to get from A to B and I’m going to be resilient to get there.” If it transpires on the journey that we actually should be going to C not B, change your mind – if you see what I mean.

Interviewer: So people who are mentally tough are prepared to compromise.

GRAEHAM: Well I was going to say prepared to accept they're wrong as well. Compromise, yeah. Accept they're wrong. Listen to their subordinates. Listen to their peers. Listen to whoever they report into it – I think that comes into it. So you’ve got that – what do you call it? Humbling. Probably not, but you know what I mean.

Interviewer: They're humble?

GRAEHAM: Not quite the right word, but you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Mmm, is that too soft? Humble?

GRAEHAM: Their ego doesn’t get in the way.
Interviewer  OK. Mmm, good.

GRAEHAM  Whereas then you’re getting into are mentally tough people political or not in the workplace?

Interviewer  Mmm. Do you think they are?

GRAEHAM  I think they have to be, to be honest.

Interviewer  Can you give us an ...?

GRAEHAM  But I suspect from a view that they know how to play the game, that they can disengage themselves from that game, so you see very political people in work, but they don’t really know why they’re doing it, they’re just doing it because everybody else is doing it and they think they’re going to do it to get themselves ahead of the game, whereas you see other people who are political ... how best to explain? You’ll have seen people like this. Like your boss, he’s probably political, but he’s probably too fucking stupid to ...

Interviewer  He won’t listen to it.

GRAEHAM  Whereas there’ll be other people in your organisation that are playing the game. You can see they’re playing the game and they’re doing it because it’s playing the game, because it’s just part of being at work, and so again it’s that ... it’s not being able to just say, “Oh OK, I’ll play the political game, but ...”

Interviewer  Well they understand that they have to rather than them fight it.

GRAEHAM  Yeah. Well you could get people fight it, but typically in the business environment it’s politics or ... 

Interviewer  Yeah. OK. So they sort of understand the ... how to survive within the business arena.

GRAEHAM  And manipulate it back to their advantage.

Interviewer  So they can be quite manipulative mentally tough people?
GRAEHAM Absolutely. Because again going back to some of the areas we’ve touched on I mean, you know, you manipulate the situation to achieve what you want to achieve.

Interviewer And what about those that aren’t manipulative then? What ... how would you describe them?

GRAEHAM I wouldn’t say that they’re not mentally tough per se, but ... I’m just splitting hairs. What I’m trying to ... what am I trying to say? I’m trying to say that mentally tough people can play the manipulative political game, but sort of distance themselves from it in their own heads at the same time.

Interviewer Right.

GRAEHAM Whereas you can see other people that play the game, but they’re too bogged down in it all.

Interviewer Is this linking to the ego bit, or not?

GRAEHAM I don’t think so.

Interviewer OK.

GRAEHAM My general experience of people with egos ... that are overly egos, is that they’ve got a front that they’ve got mental toughness and what have you, but they really haven’t. Confidence is confidence (inaudible 00:41:48) thing about mental toughness.

Interviewer Because we mentioned that earlier – confidence. So you’d say that their ego doesn’t get in the way, you say ... what you’re really saying is those people are confident or you’re saying that the people ... so mentally tough people are confident.

GRAEHAM Yes. What did I say about the ego? Doesn’t get in the way?

Interviewer Yeah. Their ego doesn’t ...

GRAEHAM Everybody’s got an ego of some description.

Interviewer Mmm, yeah.
GRAEHAM: But I would say that my experience is that people who’ve got overly large egos are typically hiding behind it.

Interviewer: Right.

GRAEHAM: And then therefore is that lack of confidence? And then therefore is that lack of mental toughness? I.e. because then are you hiding behind the ego because you don’t want to admit that your subordinate’s got a better suggestion than you, you know, whatever, the thing (inaudible 00:43:02).

Interviewer: OK. Right.

GRAEHAM: So again is a lack of mental toughness reflecting in that you fall back on your ego? God, don’t get psychologists to analyse this.

Interviewer: Well I’m going to have to. Just going back to sort of the confidence, so you said ‘technically strong’, so, you know, when you say technically strong is that about people’s knowledge of their ability to do things? Their knowledge of things?

GRAEHAM: I think it helps the mental toughness because it gives you the knowledge, the framework, the technical basis to ...

Interviewer: Is it about doubt then or lack of self-doubt? Do you think the people ...

GRAEHAM: Not self-doubt, but it ... lack of knowledge, so to be mentally tough whether you’re set in a strategic direction or you’re going into new markets or, you know, it’s being mentally tough over an accounting standard.

Interviewer: What about those that aren’t technically strong? Is that the contrast or ...? What’s the characteristic? Lack confidence?

GRAEHAM: No, arguably you could have mentally tough people who haven’t got the technical knowledge. Or are they mentally tough or they back to the ego and all that? being mentally tough. Is it the be all and end all? I think you need to know ... you need to have a knowledge and arguably the experience of whatever the situation you’re dealing with that feed into being mentally tough, so, i.e. back to the resilience and the focus and determination and the ... so for you to get those type of traits, you know,
“We’re going from A to B.” “How do you know how you’re going to get to B and why have you got that thought process?” Well you must have some knowledge, whether it’s technical knowledge about the market or an accounting standard or whatever, how do you get there? Or is it all intuition? Doubt it.

Interviewer: OK.

GRAEHAM: That’s why we get educated.

Interviewer: Yeah, so education plays a role depending upon what technical knowledge you need.

GRAEHAM: I think it’s one of the pieces – don’t ask me what the other pieces are – of the base of helping you become mentally tough, so something that you can fall back on, something you can use ...

Interviewer: It gives you confidence. The knowledge ... technical ... what did we call it? You’re technically strong because you’ve got the knowledge and therefore that gives you confidence.

GRAEHAM: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: OK. So then we talked about manipulating the relevant parts, so people are able to manipulate things. Is that other people?

GRAEHAM: Other people. Situations.

Interviewer: Situations.

GRAEHAM: (Inaudible 00:45:58) people in business, so, yeah.

Interviewer: And therefore those who perhaps lack mental toughness don’t have the ability to manipulate.

GRAEHAM: No, the ... they’ve got ... so mental toughness. I think that point was more that the people with mental toughness can manipulate, but distance themselves from it, so back to the point that I might not like sacking a 50 year old bloke, but I’ll do it because I need to -
Interviewer: Right.

GRAEHAM: For the business, so therefore I'll manipulate the situation in that I'll get the 50 year old guy out of the business or I've worked with a bloke for three years and he's been the best thing since sliced bread, but for whatever reason he's (inaudible 00:46:52) about 50% of the time I manipulate the situation to move him into ...

Interviewer: Does this relate to sort of making decisions then? Are you saying that, you know, manipulating the relevant parts you can make that decision to sack the 50 year old as opposed to people ...

GRAEHAM: It's to manipulate whatever the constituent parts of that decision making process are to get to what you're trying to get to.

Interviewer: Yeah, and the mentally weak or those that don't have mental toughness couldn't do that?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, I ... again keeping on the making people redundant point, if you can't deal with being uncomfortable ... you've got your personal beliefs and your personal comfort levels and if you only manipulate situations within those boundaries ... so I'm not going to manipulate getting rid of somebody because I don't believe in it whereas mentally tough people in my view you get that ... you can work outside those boundaries to manipulate the situation to achieve what the business needs even if you don't ...

Interviewer: So mentally tough people can work outside of the boundaries and their personal beliefs, whereas those who don't have mental toughness are constricted by their personal beliefs.

GRAEHAM: I wouldn't say 'constricted', but they probably ... they don't then back into the mental flexibility and being able to lateral think and being able to deal with different stress levels are probably a lot higher because of, yeah, they're constrained or they've got ... they place more values on their personal values and they can't ... maybe they can't differentiate or divide as much the personal values from the business values.

Interviewer: Yeah. Makes sense. Talked about prioritisation and ability to prioritise and this sort of mental dexterity, how these impact on each other and so this
logical flow of events or activities and therefore people who are mentally weak have the inability to be able to see how A impacts B and C and D.

**GRAEHAM**

Maybe a lot of mental toughness – just thinking about it – is having the capacity for a big workload.

**Interviewer**

Capacity for workload. OK. Capacity for workload. OK.

**GRAEHAM**

And may again ramble around there, but maybe it’s also a work ethic. Is that mental toughness as well?

**Interviewer**

A work ethic. OK. So can you give me an example of someone, you know, perhaps, you know, you’ve seen who you think, “They’re mentally tough, they’ve got a good ethic.” Are they able to just consume more work, do more work?

**GRAEHAM**

Yeah, probably.

**Interviewer**

Is it longer hours or volume?

**GRAEHAM**

I mean longer hours (inaudible 00:49:49) if you’re productive or not (inaudible 00:49:51), but it’s more the capacity work point is ... what did I say there?

**Interviewer**

Work ethic. Capacity for work.

**GRAEHAM**

I mean even having a good work ethic probably doesn’t mean naturally that you’ve got ... or also ticks the boxes you’ve got a high capacity for work. You can have a good work ethic, but you’re shit at your job, but the capacity work one is that you can deal with a lot of things at the same time. Again, the work ethic point was typically you’re not constrained with a mindset that I’ve got to work 9:00 to 5:00 and I get an hour’s lunch. You don’t mind picking your iPad up at 8:00pm or, you know, at the weekends or whatever. Not ... and that’s not to say that mentally tough people need to be prepared to do long hours, it’s more the mentally tough people ... people who aren’t constrained by the western working week.

**Interviewer**

So would you say in your experience that the mentally tough people that you’ve observed and seen and experienced tend to work longer hours?
GRAEHAM: Well they get the job done, if I put it that way. Whether it takes an hour or ten hours they'll do the job.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And just a couple of other things before we move onto the last couple of questions then, prepared to ... you said they're 'prepared to accept that they're wrong', so is it ... do you think sort of ... we talked before about the sort of dogmatism and this, you know, “I'm going to do this.” Do you think there's a balance there between sort of that determination and the ability to sort of accept that perhaps it's not the right thing to do?

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And therefore mentally tough people are able to sort of balance those two things?

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Cool. Right. Now we might repeat some of the things that we've already looked at, so this might not take very long, but I'd like you to think of somebody you know who you would consider to be mentally tough and what do you think he or she would consider the characteristics or the attributes of a mentally tough person would be? So if you thought about somebody and you said, “Right, they're mentally tough.” What do you think they would say were the characteristics of a mentally tough person?

GRAEHAM: Well ... do you want me to name the names or ...?

INTERVIEWER: No, don't need to name who the people are, but what ... so if you thought say for example Bernard, what do you think ... Bernard might not be the right example – but if you sort of ... if you asked Bernard what he would ... what do you think he would say or ... or Watkins. If you picked Watkins for example, if you said to him, “What do you think mental toughness is?” I hope it's still recording. So if you said to Watkins ...

GRAEHAM: Is it back on?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. What do you think he might say the characteristics of a mentally tough person are?

GRAEHAM: What would he say? Intelligence.
Interviewer  Intelligence.

GRAEHAM  Being bright.

Interviewer  Is that different to being intelligent?

GRAEHAM  Yeah. Being resilient.

Interviewer  Yeah.

GRAEHAM  Having the ability to switch on and off ... different issues.

Interviewer  Yeah.

GRAEHAM  What else would he say? Being able to deal with different stakeholders, different situations, complexity.

Interviewer  Deal with complexity.

GRAEHAM  The matrix of issues. Repeating some of the points that I made.

Interviewer  Yeah, yeah. And so are there any others? Do you think he's got a similar view to you on mental toughness?

GRAEHAM  Here’s an interesting one. Is there any autistic traits in mental toughness?

Interviewer  That’s a good point, good question. Well autism’s about not really understanding the human emotion, isn’t it?

GRAEHAM  Yes. And so to an extent ... yes. But is Watkin autistic? That’s crossed my mind more than once.

Interviewer  Right.

GRAEHAM  Why do I say that? Because again with business you’re dealing with people’s emotions a lot of the time and so to be able to chop and change and prioritise and deal with different ... compartmentalise. Have you got autistic traits in there? There you go. There’s one for you.
Interviewer  Autism and mental toughness. It's interesting because in sport invariably
the work that's being done is around having a negative impact on others.
"I'm going to beat you up on a rugby pitch. I'm going to outplay you on the
tennis court, you know, you are my enemy, I'm going to beat you," almost is
the way that other people are ... or the people you interact with ... it's
invariably a negative competitive environment and obviously that's different
within business. One of the things that's come out has been the impact on
others, be it from a leadership perspective, be it in dealing with other
people's emotions and then not necessarily embracing other people's
emotions as baggage and autistic people don't understand and don't get
involved with other people's emotions because emotions is something that
they don't recognise and therefore that might be an easy benefit to being
mentally tough in that you don't have that baggage to deal with. It's an
interesting one. So if we looked at these characteristics, what do you think
you'd say the purpose of intelligence is then in relation to mental
toughness?

GRAEHAM  Being able to deal with the raft and wide ranging different
scenarios/situations.

Interviewer  And do you think that links into ... when you say 'deal with' is that sort of
about coping with it or is it about making decisions? Is it about ...?

GRAEHAM  All of the above. Having if you like sharpness of mind if that's the right
phrase and the ability to absorb, analyse, prioritise, compartmentalise.

Interviewer  Yeah, and you mentioned brightness ...

GRAEHAM  Being bright means different than being intelligent. Being bright and being
able to apply yourself to the situation.

Interviewer  OK.

GRAEHAM  I've come across intelligent people that ... chartered accountants and tax
advisers and worked at the (Inaudible 00:57:03) and MBAs from Harvard
and they still don't understand what the difference between P&L and
cashflow is. That's being intelligent, but not very bright in my book.

Interviewer  Right. We talked about resilience. What do you think Watkin would say
about resilience?
GRAEHAM: Again, being able to deal with a number of issues, not being knocked off course by them, keep going, dogmatic I think was the word we used before. Sticking to your principles, your beliefs, whatever.

Interviewer: OK, yeah, yeah. Stick to principles. What do you think his principles and beliefs are?

GRAEHAM: Especially if he’s autistic.

Interviewer: Yeah, but what do you think his are? His principles and beliefs?

GRAEHAM: (Inaudible 00:57:57) change by ...

Interviewer: He just ... he manipulates them?

GRAEHAM: ‘Am I making profit?’ in Watkin’s case.

Interviewer: Mmm, so he’s got a bit of a one track ...?

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

Interviewer: One track mind. OK, and would he make profit over anything?

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would he sell his grandmother to make ...?

GRAEHAM: Yeah.

Interviewer: OK. So do you think he’s amoral?

GRAEHAM: That’s a can of worms question of is making profit ...

Interviewer: Would he make profit illegally?

GRAEHAM: Not to my knowledge.

Interviewer: No. So does he have boundaries then? That’s the question.
Yeah, of course he does. Everybody has boundaries.

Because I suppose the question is do you think if people ... if people go beyond those boundaries are they still mentally tough?

Yes, I would say so.

OK.

Because if you’re put into a situation where you have to go past your boundaries ... not from is it legal or illegal sense, but ... or even so ... have you got the mental toughness to be able to go past your boundaries? Yeah, absolutely.

But if you for example knew that you’d been asked to do something and you knew that it was illegal or you had an opportunity to make a quick buck ... or not you personally, but say somebody who was ... you know, who’s mentally tough, who’s driven and you have two individuals and one of them says, “I know that that’s wrong. I will stop,” as opposed to somebody who’s just completely driven and will just say, “Well, I don’t really care about society.”

I think the difference is somebody who’s mentally tough can do either, so be prepared to work outside their boundaries for ... if the situation requires it.

Depending upon what their boundaries are.

But they’re also prepared to turn round to who’s asking them to work outside the boundaries and say, “I’m not doing that.”

Right, OK.

Because then you’re down to maybe a bit of self-centredness about, “Well I know if I do that these are the risks and consequences and benefits and we’ll do that the same,” but ... so it’s a person that won’t get pushed outside of the boundaries automatically, but they can operate outside the boundaries if they choose to.

Yeah, OK. You ... Watkin would sort of suggest that one of the characteristics would be to switch on and off, what do you mean by that? What do you think he would mean by that?
GRAEHAM: I suspect he has eight hours sleep every night.

Interviewer: So they can sort of switch the pressure on or off.

GRAEHAM: Well it's back to the compartmentalised point.

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: Rather than just being (inaudible 01:01:09) in your mind you've got one compartment over there, one compartment over there, one compartment over there and you've got in your mind that you're dealing with it and you're sleeping eight hours a night. Maybe that's (inaudible 01:01:21-01:01:23).

Interviewer: That's cool. Deal with complexity. Is that linking to the ... what you've just described?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, brightness and all that sort of stuff. Can't read your writing.

Interviewer: Neither can I. I think that's compartmentalise. OK. Nearly done. Nearly there. You're doing well.

GRAEHAM: How many of these have you done?

Interviewer: This is my first.

GRAEHAM: Is it?

Interviewer: You're my ...

GRAEHAM: Guinea pig.

Interviewer: Yeah. If I can get through one with you, I can get through one with anyone. That's my view on life. So mental toughness may not be required in all situations and some characteristics or attributes may not be required all the time, so we switch them on and off potentially. Considering what we've described with the way ... with regards to business situations and some of the deep characteristics that we've described, do you think there are any particular characteristics that are needed in certain roles? So do you need to be determined, focused, or do you think they're generic?
GRAEHAM: I think the higher you go ... general point, the higher you go in a business or organisation ... so if you're the CEO at the top you probably need the range of skills, abilities, or have characteristics that (inaudible 01:02:49) talking about, whereas people lower down the organisation ... it's not to say that – I don't know – somebody who puts purchase ledger invoices into the accounting system isn't mentally tough. They could be.

Interviewer: They need to be focused.

GRAEHAM: Yeah, absolutely, because they need to get their purchase invoices into the system.

Interviewer: But does everybody need to be focused? Are there any that you sort of think ... so if we look ... we went back and sort of said, you know, are there any particular roles that you've experienced where focused, determined, motivated, mental sort of flexibility, lateral thinking ... does a management accountant need to be a lateral thinker ... all that?

GRAEHAM: They do in my book. I think it's ... so whether the person is ... let me think through while I'm answering the question (inaudible 01:03:51) question. So are mentally tough people ... have they got one or a number of the points we've been talking about? Where do ... if you sit at the top ...

Interviewer: No, sorry, any of the characteristics you've (inaudible 01:04:03), anything that you've described you think that's ... is there anything you've thought that's just specific to certain situations or are there certain situations requiring sort of specific characteristics that you think ... anything that's unique within this?

GRAEHAM: From a ... the person being mentally tough or not I would think that whether it be bottom of the rung or the top of the rung or somewhere in between the characteristics we've been going through I would have thought that the person has traits of all of them because if you're putting purchase invoices into the system you need to be focused to get them in, you need to be dogmatic to ... you know, whatever. Lateral thinking – probably not so much, but ...

Interviewer: If you came across a problem you might need to demonstrate that.
GRAEHAM: So I’ve just missed a payment for the suppliers, so what am I going to do about it? Well I’ll write a cheque for somebody rather than (inaudible 01:05:03). I mean it’s different levels of lateral thinking rather than the business unit just tanks and so what the hell am I going to do about it? CEO level lateral thinking. But is it still mental toughness them characteristics? Probably.

Interviewer: Right.

GRAEHAM: So it’s that ... again, but it’s different ... varying degrees of ... which one out of your tool bag do you ...

Interviewer: Need at that present moment in that situation.

GRAEHAM: Yeah, and what are you relying on.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s fine. That’s fine. That’s one of the ways that I’ve described it in the past to people – is that, you know, it’s like a graphic equaliser. People call upon the skills or the traits or the characteristics within their personality at various times depending upon the situation. I suppose if you’re constantly having to deliver negative messages then you’re going to need quite a bit of resilience I would guess, but certainly some of the other traits. Final question then. Do you think everything about mental toughness is positive? We’ve talked about dealing with lots of negative things and therefore creating sort of a positive outlook, being able to deal with negative situations such as the things we described, the redundancy and failings and issues. We haven’t talked very much about coping with say things like promotions and success. You did mention earlier the success side. Do you think that mental toughness has ... is required when you’re successful?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: Can you give me some examples perhaps where you’ve seen people who’ve been ... who’ve demonstrated mental toughness or perhaps been mentally weak when they’ve been successful?

GRAEHAM: We talked about the point before about you know you’ve achieved something ... raised cash or (inaudible 01:07:14) profits or whatever, but then always being conscious of let’s not get carried away with the now – what’s next and having that mental discipline to ...
And have you seen people sort of struggle with that?

Yeah, yes, absolutely. Even business unit MDs ... we’ve just hit our numbers, that’s great, but we’re going to go off the edge of a cliff next week.

Yeah, so mentally tough people are the ones that sort of go, “Great, but move on.” Part of the success (inaudible 01:07:46) ...

I think it’s whether it’s a success or a failure or something in between mentally tough people in my view can separate themselves from it. You can get involved with it, so if it’s success, great, get the champagne out. If it’s a failure, great, what are we going to do about it? So you get involved with it, but at the same time you can distance yourself from it or you can separate yourself from it in that you don’t get caught up ... you don’t ... have a glass of champagne, but you don’t get overly caught up in it because you’re moving into the next thing of you’ve ... you know, well we’re going to tank next week.

Now is that ... would you describe that as perhaps seeing the bigger picture? Sitting above it? Or ...

Well I’ve said discipline ... I don’t know if it’s mental discipline rather than mental toughness, but define the difference – I don’t really know.

OK. Do you think everything about mental toughness is positive? Do you think everything’s a positive contributor or are there any negative aspects? Or can you perceive any?

If somebody who’s perceived as being mentally tough ... yeah, I’m probably trying to define things that are not really defined that we’ve talked about, but i.e. that they are determined, dogmatic and they’re not going to change their view and blah blah blah blah blah. That can be negative.

So you think sometimes some of these characteristics have a point beyond which they’re practically useful and then become detrimental?

Yes, if ... using your graphic equaliser as an example, the person is resilient and dogmatic and focused, but hasn’t got the ability to accept that they’re wrong.
Interviewer: Right. Yeah. So there’s ...

GRAEHAM: Because that can be damaging if you’ve got somebody that’s on course A to B irrespective of everything else. Is that mentally tough or is that just stupidity?

Interviewer: Yeah.

GRAEHAM: But the question was obviously mentally tough ... is it always positive? Given the way that I’ve described what I think mentally toughness equates to I think it is because then if you’ve got that tool bag you can turn it on and do your graphic equaliser thing ...

Interviewer: So there’s almost a self-control valve within mental toughness?

GRAEHAM: I would say that.

Interviewer: So mentally tough people by definition are able to self-regulate?

GRAEHAM: Yeah, and something I’ve not said is there emotional intelligence in there? I’ve not said that point, but maybe that’s ...

Interviewer: No.

GRAEHAM: And so you can be sat there ... you see because in my early days in business ... I’ve got quite a high emotional intelligence – not that people would imagine that. So I sense people quite well. And go back fifteen years at EY if somebody asked me to get rid of somebody I would have hated that, I wouldn’t have even done it, whereas now I’m ... I’ll do it because I can play on the emotional intelligence. I can sense it, so I can play on it, so I can manipulate and get things done, so ... but it’s having that wider tool bag, wider skill set, knowledge, experience, all the other bits and pieces that means I can ... well I can manipulate the situation or I can ... I’m not explaining it very well, am I?

Interviewer: No, no, no, you are actually. It’s really interesting because it’s ... you’re almost creating two scenarios where two individuals could do the same thing, but one of it’s intelligent and knowledgeable and the other lacks it, so what I was going to ask is you’re almost contradicting yourself a little bit, but
you're not in the sense of you saying emotional intelligence enables you to sense and understand and manipulate and make the right decisions or whatever it is, but then you also mentioned this concept of autistic people. Autistic people may be asked to do something and they'll just do it, but there might not be any emotional intelligence there because they lack the ability to understand human emotion, therefore they wouldn't sense it, but they'd just do it.

GRAEHAM Yeah, personally we’re going into areas that I don’t really know that much about, so the spectrum of autism ... you can have obviously very autistic people who’ve got ... they never mutter a word in their life or you can have autistic people that have just got OCD for instance, so you're in an area that I don’t ... can’t really ... I suspect you’ll be able to ... you'll be able to I suspect ... get people that have got autism, but they’ve got elements of emotional intelligence, i.e. they can sense things, this, that and ... they might not sense everything in people -

Interviewer Yeah.

GRAEHAM - so i.e. they can read facial expressions, but they don’t know what it means when you nod your head. Now I'm being silly, but I don't know.

Interviewer OK. It's interesting ...

GRAEHAM But what I was trying to highlight there was again the points where you've got your own personal boundaries, but maybe they're not the same boundaries when you're in a business environment or the experience and the knowledge is coming into it or manipulation is coming into it with mentally tough people. There's a point we've not talked about. Are you born with mental toughness or do you develop it on the way through? I suspect -

Interviewer What do you think?

GRAEHAM - develop it I would suspect. It's a classic leadership, you know, nature or nurture type questions. Are leaders born or made? I suspect there's elements of both in there, but certainly my experience from people who are more senior and got more experience of business world they've typically more traits of mental toughness. They can deal with different situations. They don't flap as much and ... especially if (inaudible 01:13:52).
Interviewer: Yeah, so the emotional intelligence ... the sense and they're manipulating is around how you deal with other people.

GRAEHAM: It's ... you use that to recognise the situation, but then think through, “Right,” how I’m going to use that for whatever you need to use it for.

Interviewer: Then you make some decisions on the back of that. OK. Is there anything that you think we’ve missed, you want to go back over or ...

GRAEHAM: No, well we’ve thrown in the odd curve ball like autism and all the other bits and pieces that ...

Interviewer: And ... OK, so thank you for completing the questionnaire. I might want to come back and ask you some more questions about it, but that’s it. Cheers. Stop this now. Hopefully it’s recorded. Hour and fifteen. Did it feel longer or shorter?

GRAEHAM: About right actually, that’s alright. Went by quite quickly.
We are going to progress through some questions which will help you through the process and each question is not mutually exclusive so we can go back or refer to certain things throughout. I will ask you to draw up a list of individuals that you think are mentally tough and those you think don’t necessarily possess mental toughness. You don’t need to tell me who they are, it’s just so you can see the names and reflect on what the characteristics of the individuals are. So firstly, I’d like you to consider what mental toughness means to you, how you would define it, to help you develop a definition. I like to use the analogy of a car, if we say "what is a car?", people would normally say it’s got an engine, 4 wheels and a door but what we want to refer to is, what does a car do for you? A car’s a vehicle and will transport you from A to B so what sort of benefit do you believe mental toughness provides, what does it do for individuals so in your words, what do you think mental toughness means with regards to performance in the workplace. Can you come up with some words, phrases about what it means?

I believe it’s a skill which can be developed over time and through training. I do believe that people are naturally born (like any other skill); some have an innate, stronger ability to do it than others, however, those who it doesn’t come naturally to can develop it. I believe it’s developed through your formative years and part of your pre-conditioning as a child and your upbringing does to some degree develop your mental toughness at an early age.

OK, what does it mean to you?

What does it mean to me? So mental toughness is someone who can remain focussed under pressure either through acute periods of time or over long periods of time, someone who is resilient, someone who can manage anxiety and stress, someone who retains self-belief, someone who is able to
confront difficult issues or their own demons and deal with them, someone who is able to compartmentalise and not get distracted (I suppose that’s going back to remain focussed). Someone who can recover from disasters or difficult situations quickly – recoverability, if there’s such a word!

Interviewer  Bouncebackability! In terms of performance, someone who’s mentally tough, how might that be manifest in the workplace, how would you define people’s performance, and what is it?

NICK  People who I deem to be mentally tough or who show the traits are typically high-performers.

Interviewer  When you say “high-performers”, what are they high in?

NICK  In delivering.

Interviewer  Is it presentations? Is it …

NICK  Outcomes - delivering the outcomes. Delivering a presentation is an acute experience I guess because it only lasts a matter of minutes. I wouldn’t say that’s mental toughness, I would say mental toughness is more over a longer period of time. I associate it with activities which last for weeks and months, not hours or days – albeit there can be acute cases when you’re under extreme pressure.

Interviewer  So would you say there’s almost a chronic requirement for stress and pressure and almost an acute requirement for …?

NICK  Yes, I would put it 2 ways – the acute is the intense pressure you can find yourself in the heat of the moment where you’ve got hours to resolve a problem before the proverbial hits the fan versus the war of attrition – an exercise or activity which will go on for weeks or months and you’ll be continually faced with set-backs and challenges day in, day out - your ability to continue and make progress and not to lose the focus, will and motivation.

Interviewer  Is it almost the stress, those who have a lower level of mental toughness or don’t have mental toughness would potentially give in to that sort of pressure, in that sort of environment, they wouldn’t be able to perform?
NICK  
I do think, in my view, certain people show strengths in those 2 situations – I think there are very few people who can handle both.

Interviewer  
OK. So with regard to the chronic side and the acute side, which is quite interesting, things which are acute from an illness perspective, are something that happens, is cured and they recover whereas the chronic illness is a build-up over a period of time and can be much more severe. Do you think with regard to stress and pressure, one’s worse than the other or …?

NICK  
Me personally or just generally?

Interviewer  
For you personally or potentially other people.

NICK  
I think one produces a high level of adrenalin so the acute exercises do give you a real adrenalin rush because you’re under intense pressure. My experience with people I work with are that some people really thrive in that environment and get huge kicks out of it and they perform at their best when they’re put under immense pressure over a very short period of time but in the chronic state, just get completely bored. It’s a bit like your marathon runner versus your sprinter – people who are good at sprinting don’t enjoy running marathons and people who run marathons can’t run any quicker so if you put them under pressure, they’re not going to move any quicker because they can’t change gear.

Interviewer  
But they can cope with that pressure and that pace …

NICK  
But they’re running at snail’s pace all the way through so you won’t necessarily get the performance so in terms of mental toughness, you won’t necessarily get them to break but you wouldn’t get the outcome, the performance you were looking for. There are some people who just naturally step into that environment and thrive – they’ll go looking for it. Dare I say, even create it.

Interviewer  
Do you think in creating it - that can actually be detrimental?

NICK  
It depends on who’s in the environment with you. If you’re creating the crisis for yourself and only yourself, that’s fine. The analogy would be that if you revising for an exam but you only start revising the night before
because you cram and you know that’s the best way for you to learn versus someone who will take weeks to learn.

Interviewer Good example. We’re now starting to pull out some of the key characteristics or traits of individuals and that’s what I’m interested in but before we get into the details of the individual, I would quite like to understand the situations that you think, that you’ve experienced through observing others, where you think “you need to be mentally tough there” or you’ve observed people who have been able to cope with the stress and pressure but others haven’t been able to so it’s obviously an environment where the ability to cope with stress and pressure for individuals is important and some are able to perform. I know we’ve talked about chronic and acute but probably put a “bit more meat on the bone” so what sort of situations do you think require mental toughness that you’ve observed?

NICK In my own workplace?

Interviewer Yes. You said delivering presentations, do people get stressed, feel pressure in delivering presentations?

NICK You get people who present really well but on the first question, fall apart.

Interviewer So I suppose the analogy going to back to sport is a swimmer who can do 48 seconds for 100 metres in training or low level competitions but when they make a final, they stutter on the blocks, they don’t get their breathing right – when they get put under pressure they’ll swim 48.5 (still a very good time) but there’s an edge been taken off their peak level of performance because – it’s not physical because they can swim 48 but from a performance perspective in the workplace there are those individuals who no matter what questions they get thrown at them, can cope with.

NICK It’s about coping mechanisms so either they know their material incredibly well in which case it’s easy to respond to the questions or when they get a particularly difficult question, they’ve developed the coping mechanisms on how to handle it which in various different situations, there are different ways to handle it. There are others … I guess it’s how you’ve conditioned yourself and prepared yourself for the performance and if you’ve prepared yourself thoroughly for all scenarios and you have a strategy to help you
respond in those different types of scenario plans, it'll bode well. Even then, you get people who know the material inside out, know how exactly to respond when the money shot comes in, they just fall apart and they can't deliver on the day or they can't deliver in that 15 minutes because either they've got a mental block in their ability to do it.

Interviewer: Do you think it's a knowledge thing or …

NICK: Self-confidence.

Interviewer: Lack of confidence? So those who are mentally tough are confident?

NICK: Yes.

Interviewer: So we talked about self-belief, do you think self-belief and confidence are the same thing?

NICK: No.

Interviewer: OK. So if we talk about confidence, what you’re saying is that those who are at the opposite end of confidence which is obviously lack of confidence so people who are mentally tough are confidence in what they are doing, those who display weakness or lack of mental toughness lack confidence in their ability. Could you give me an example of when you've seen someone perform because they're highly confident in their capability or perhaps someone who's potentially not? Any sort of professional example where you've seen someone continually perform because they're confident or perhaps someone who's failed because they've lacked a bit of confidence?

NICK: Well certainly on the confidence front, there's a certain individual board member at the bank who just oozes confidence and no matter how big the task, although they set themselves huge -what you would perceive to be unachievable, unrealistic goals, 2/3 years out, never in question, never in doubt whether they would achieve it and I guess that's where the self-belief, self-confidence comes in with the innate self-belief that they will get there. Their confidence goes up and down based on a point in time in terms of what's happening but they never stop believing that they'll eventually get there. So they'll have set-backs, confidence drops but the self-belief doesn't.
Interviewer: So based on those sorts of things, those who lack mental toughness wouldn’t necessarily set high goals or do you think people who are mentally weak can set high goals?

NICK: Personally, I don’t think it’s that black and white but I think the correlation is people who set audacious goals are more mentally tough than those who don’t.

Interviewer: OK so based on that assumption, people who don’t doubt themselves and what we’re looking for is polar opposites here where people who lack mental toughness don’t necessarily set themselves such challenging goals as those who are mentally tough?

NICK: Yes.

Interviewer: And then you talked about that they never doubt themselves so is this a sign of mental weakness those who do doubt themselves or do mentally tough people doubt themselves?

NICK: I think human nature is that you will always question your own ability and that’s not a weakness, I don’t think. I think your ability to reason why that’s not an issue is the mental toughness. Actually, I think it’s quite a strength to be able to question yourself, your own ability but you need to be able to do to understand why this is a positive construct, why you can achieve it rather than why you can’t and that would be the difference between a mentally tough person and not when they ask themselves a question, it’s when they come back with a positive response rather than talk themselves into the gutter.

Interviewer: OK. So just going back to the situations, you gave me an example there where people question themselves, what areas of the business, what activity do you think, situations where you’ve observed people actually suffer performance wise and therefore you’ve seen other people perform and they might be business situations where you think toughness might be required.

NICK: Around the board table you can be put on the spot and under pressure in that moment in time and people who have that strength of character to deal with that situation and can respond positively when either questioned or put under pressure and challenged.
Interviewer: Can you give me some examples of situation or where you get put under pressure in the work environment, dealing with people, dealing with other departments, dealing with customers?

NICK: Yes, I guess being put under pressure about costs and productivity. The ability to come up with answers to problems.

Interviewer: OK. These are sort of almost innate things – so there’s a cost challenge – you’ve given a problem to solve and probably a time period to resolve that in so it’s a time bound problem. What about situations where you think “I need to be mentally tough here, I need to be focussed, I need to be determined, resilient, etc.” but we talked about delivering presentations, appraisals – appraising people – do you find out that easy? Say for example, you think you don’t need to be mentally tough doing an appraisal or do people find it pressurised?

NICK: Yes, I guess it’s all about preparation again so if you’ve leaving it to a 1 hour meeting in 6 months to tell someone they’ve not been performing, that’s going to be quite a difficult conversation to have whether you find that difficult or not ...

Interviewer: But it’s really about understanding situations that you might perform in perfectly but then you’re more prepared, resilient or any of the characteristics you might describe and assign to a mentally tough individual but others you know or might have experienced in, for example, we’ve all seen people crumble in presentations and we’ve seen people deliver great presentations but when cross-examined, they fall apart whereas others just appear to be bullet-proof. What other situations and I appreciated that everyone has goals and challenges set upon them in terms of delivery but do some people find writing a paper instead of presenting, does that require mental toughness? What do you think are the areas in the business that you work in where you think …?

NICK: I think one of the best examples I can give in my line of business is where you’re trying to get the business to sign off to changing something, now it can manifest itself at the very end of the process where you’re trying to change a system or a process and you’re asking them to sign off so that you can change it there and then or within a weekend or it can be much further back in a process when you’re just asking them to sign a set of
requirements, is one of the best examples where you can see people really demonstrate their mental toughness because they could be trying to get 30 different individuals to agree to an outcome and they've all got 30 different opinions and they've all got 30 different things that they personally want versus a compromise agreement to get an outcome and I've seen a certain individual just excel in that environment where you just think they're under enormous pressure to just try and get this thing closed down and implemented and never once lost focus on what they needed to do despite just continual bombardment of why you can't rather than why you can and just pick them off one by one and gradually just wrestle every single one down to the ground to get them to say yes only to get them collectively round the table for one of them to wobble and all 30 to fall in behind them and to pull out and you think “shit, I'm back where I started again”.

Interviewer Can you just give me the initials of that individual?

NICK Yes, SE.

Interviewer I'd like to pick up on SE and there's 2 things there – would you consider SE to be mentally tough?

NICK Yes.

Interviewer And what sort of characteristics …

NICK She's a cold, hard bitch! But she's a lovely person actually but she would come over as cold, hard…

Interviewer Is she almost schizophrenic then in terms of a professional SE and there's a person who sits behind that? Does she almost have 2 personas?

NICK No, she doesn't actually. She's a relatively junior person as well, someone 2 or 3 levels below myself, she's quite young – probably just turned 30. She's just very determined and focussed about what she wanted to achieve and she doesn't let anything get in the way of her goal and she never gives up despite what goes on around her, she just continues to focus and fixate on what she needs to do. She's able to switch off from it. There's a great quote I heard the other week (I can't remember what it was now) but it wasn't in my workplace, it might have even been on TV but it was very
applicable when someone said “50% of this job is ability and 50% is thick-skin” and that sums her up quite well.

Interviewer  So you think a thick-skin is a key aspect of mental toughness?

NICK  Yes.

Interviewer  And if we say someone with mental toughness has a thick-skin, does that mean the polar opposite is that someone who’s mentally weak has thin-skin? What would the opposite of that be?

NICK  Someone who takes it personally, takes criticism personally.

Interviewer  So they will take criticism personally but this person doesn’t.

NICK  No. Someone’s who’s not mentally tough would make the situation personal which makes the criticism personal.

Interviewer  Someone who’s mentally weak?

NICK  Yes. Whereas this individual has the ability to step out of it …

Interviewer  And sees it as a situation …

NICK  And sees it as a situation, deals with it and therefore doesn’t see the criticism as directly at her, she sees it at the situation so she’s able to disassociate herself from the situation and not take it personally and impartially look at it for what it is and agree with the criticism and say “yes, you’re right, it’s not working as it is but I’ll fix it”.

Interviewer  Right, so they can agree with the criticism whereas …

NICK  Whereas as a mentally weak person would try to defend the situation because they would feel like it’s an attack on them.

Interviewer  And therefore, the mentally weaker associate themselves with the problem rather than disassociate themselves?

NICK  Yes, they almost become the problem because to sort out the underlying issue, you’ve almost got to get past the individual then.
OK. So again one of the situations when you need to be mentally tough is when people are criticising something that you’ve done or something that you’re working on. Just thinking about SE again and you talked about this situation of sign off and one of things I’m interested in is the impact on others and do you think you can pass it on? Does she pass mental toughness on or does she pass something onto these individuals that when she’s gaining their agreement when they come together what she’s trying to get them to try and do is to avoid someone caving in and do you think she has an impact on the others that almost stops them from caving in?

Yes, I think the strength of her own mental state and position on it gave confidence to other people.

So almost passing that confidence onto others?

Yes and I guess confidence to the people she was working with and to people she was working for.

So across the board?

Yes. She wasn’t working for me directly, she was working for someone else who was working for me but I guess initially I was quite concerned for the amount of pressure she was under and the spotlight she was in and I was concerned that she would break under that.

She didn’t?

No, she loved it!

So you think that mentally tough people enjoy and I think you referred to it earlier – they seek it out. They don’t necessarily seek it out because they enjoy it, they seek it out because it enables them to perform in the sense of those people who wait for the very last minute to do cramming for an exam but you said she loved it, she loved the pressure …

She thrived on it.

So mentally tough people thrive on pressure.
NICK I think mentally tough people can cope with it whether they thrive on it; I’m not sure because there are 2 ends of the spectrum as I was saying the marathon runner versus the sprinter. It’s about the mind-set you need to have for that certain situation so there’s an element of you couldn’t operate at the pace she did for 2 years, you’d just burn yourself out so it’s about having the mind-set of saying that I’ve got to do this for a 2 year period.

Interviewer Does she have the ability and you said she doesn’t give up, she’s determined and focussed – does she have the ability to switch off or will she have to be told to switch off?

NICK Yes, to some degree, to a level. I’m not entirely sure.

Interviewer Because if she cracked at some point and became mentally weak or lacked mental toughness, is there an on and off switch in the sense that people know that no-one’s indestructible and no-one can go on for ever. Have you seen people where you’ve observed, where you’ve thought “that’s a brave thing to do to say I need to stop for a moment here”, people who can acknowledge they need a bit of time out as opposed to others who perhaps in a destructive way hit the wall?

NICK Yes, it’s a great strength to be able to admit what your weaknesses are or when you’re in a moment of weakness.

Interviewer And do you think mentally tough people have that as a trait over those who aren’t?

NICK Yes.

Interviewer Have you observed that with anyone in your team or other people?

NICK I guess there’s a very public one where the Group Chief Exec had to take a leave of absence through exhaustion.

Interviewer And would you say that (anonymously, of course) …

NICK Well it’s on public record.

Interviewer No, in your opinion is he a mentally tough individual?
NICK        Yes, for sure.

Interviewer  I don’t need to write that down it’s just your perception.

NICK        That’s interesting but there’s nothing I’m going to say that I wouldn’t say to him. It’s interesting because he did sort of have a chronic failure so was he able to take himself out of the situation? Based on what I understand, the answer was no, the doctor did. He had to be told to take it out and so he did have that situation where the chronic failure did occur, however, he was able to come back from it stronger than he left.

Interviewer  So he bounced back?

NICK        Yes and very humble with it and very open to admit where things had got out of control or out of hand in terms of what he was doing.

Interviewer  It’s interesting you mention humility, do you think humility is a trait of people who are mentally tough or do you think that’s just a trait of people you think are generally nice or do you think the people you know who are mentally tough are humble?

NICK        No, no – I’d say some people who are mentally tough are not humble at all.

Interviewer  Right, can you give me an example of someone who is mentally tough but not humble? What would you say the opposite of humility is then? Are they arrogant or …

NICK        Yes, they’re quite arrogant and they’re quite socially inept – they don’t like talking to people, they don’t like talking to people other than what they need to get the job done.

Interviewer  And you think overall that’s a characteristic, if we were looking … I’ll come back to that because I think we’re getting into some interesting characteristics. So the situations we’ll pick up through the conversations so I was going to ask you to come up with some people who are mentally tough and are mentally weak – I think you’ve already got a number in your mind because you’ve already mentioned some of those so we’ll move past that question to the distinguishing characteristics and attributes that perhaps differentiate that we’ve started to pull out now – those that are mentally tough and mentally weak and we’ve talked about chronic situations. We
mentioned the person who had the chronic failure but had that “bouncebackability” – able to admit their weaknesses but he didn’t necessarily identify that he had a weakness but then we talked about him being to come back and obviously, being able to admit your weaknesses is almost a sign of humility but on the flip side the opposite of humility is arrogance but people can both be humble and arrogant but still be mentally tough and do you think that’s a situational thing or is it personal thing? Are there situations where you think arrogance and toughness work against situations where you think actually …?

NICK Yes, there’s a fine line between confidence and arrogance. To use another quote, when people talk to you about what you do sometimes you can come across as an arrogant prick, 20% of that is probably true but 80% is because what you do is actually difficult so when you talk about what you do on a day to day basis it is difficult but people sometimes just take that you’re an arrogant prick.

Interviewer So do you think actually depending upon the situation there’s almost a continuum between humility and arrogance? You said the opposite of humility is arrogance but that’s almost going beyond confidence but what’s the opposite of confidence? It’s not humility, is it? If you say someone’s confident, those who aren’t would then be what? How would their behaviour be manifest?

NICK You correlated 3 different words there.

Interviewer Let me rephrase it then. We talked about the opposite of humility where someone can have that trait and be mentally tough, also there are times or situations where people are arrogant or develop a level of arrogance so is that almost a destructive level of confidence and did you mean people are confident or did you mean people are arrogant …

NICK Yes, my comment that there’s a fine line between confidence and arrogance is the perception, the impression that gives to people so you can come across as a person who is highly confident but yet show humility about what it is that you are doing whereas you can also come across as someone who’s highly confident in what they are doing and not give a shit – that’s where the arrogant bit comes in, you don’t really care what happens so long as you achieve what you need to achieve.
Interviewer So in that there are people who are able to perform in that work environment and have a positive impact, have a sort of care for others or …

NICK I think care is a great word – you do need to care, it’s a question of what you care about and confident, mentally tough people care about more than just themselves.

Interviewer So they care about others?

NICK They care about others or what it means to others or the impact on others or impact to the business, impact to colleagues, customers, etc.

Interviewer And therefore, those who are mentally weak don’t care?

NICK I think they care but maybe not just broader than themselves so if you go back to the situation where someone gets defensive about being criticised, what they care about is themselves, what people are thinking about them. They don’t care about the situation because what they’re defending is themselves and what their part was in what’s being criticised. Mentally tough people will step away from it and care about the situation as well as themselves so they remain concerned about the perception of them but they have a broader concern about the actual situation.

Interviewer Yes and what about in terms of performance, we talked about the lady who was a bit cold and hard, do you think she’d do almost anything to succeed? Does that individual have a level of humility or does she …

NICK Is she completely ruthless?

Interviewer Yes, that's a good word.

NICK I think we’ve all got a ruthless streak within our characteristics, I would say her level of ruthlessness was in terms of a positive construct, she would drive to make decisions and she wasn’t afraid of conflict and she would drive the process hard and wasn’t fearful to ask people to do things that they wouldn’t normally do. Was she reckless in terms of ruthlessness, in terms of would she take things into a space which would cause a failure? No.

Interviewer So there’s this drive and determination?
NICK  Yes.

Interviewer  Against recklessness?

NICK  Yes.

Interviewer  That's a good point.

NICK  I think another characteristic of mentally tough people is that they are astute risk takers.

Interviewer  Astute as opposed to?

NICK  They know when to take risk and to what degree, mentally weak people don't take risks.

Interviewer  They don't take risks or they take inappropriate risks?

NICK  Either.

Interviewer  So there are times when they don't take risks, is that because they're conservative?

NICK  Yes, for me it boils back down to that self-belief and self-confidence.

Interviewer  Right, OK. So they don't take risks because perhaps, they lack confidence?

NICK  Yes.

Interviewer  And do you think those who inappropriate risks it's because they're over-confident or …

NICK  Yes, I guess there's another aspect to mental toughness which is always keeping your feet on the ground.

Interviewer  OK then.

NICK  You've got to keep reality in context so it's very easy thinking in both the scenarios we've talked about – acute and chronic – to lose perception of
reality. You can blow things completely out of scale or context or you can find yourself in a complete paradox.

Interviewer Are they almost dreamers then or the opposite, people who are mentally tough having their feet on the ground?

NICK I think people who are mentally tough keep reality in context with what they’re doing. It’s a bit like Emperor’s clothes, isn’t it? You start to believe your own shit and you start to fuel it.

Interviewer So it’s almost that they start to believe their own bullshit?

NICK And surround themselves with people who start to feed them their own bullshit. Goodwin is a great example. There is a man who I describe as showing all the characteristics of being mentally tough but if any one of these characteristics gets out of control can cause a catastrophic failure so if you’re over-confident, you can fail. If your self-belief is such that you think you can do anything, you’re going to fail. If you’re so fixated on one thing and lose the perspective of everything else that’s going on, you’re going to fail. It’s a bit like over-training, you can become so fixated on training on one particular aspect that you may be able to swim 100,000 yards a week that you forget you’ve also got to dive in correctly and turn correctly and I guess, that’s keeping reality in the balance which is another characteristic I would have that a mentally tough person is well-balanced or at least is able to create or retain the equilibrium when it’s put out of balance.

Interviewer That’s brilliant. What you’re almost describing there is in all these characteristics, a mentally tough individual is able to balance them …

NICK Balance them but any one of them can actually be destructive.

Interviewer So be able to keep them in control and they may well change depending on the situation but they are able to control them as such that nothing at any point – you look at sport where certain athletes have gone beyond what’s acceptable in taking drugs, going beyond what’s acceptable in biting opposition players so describing someone as well-balanced could almost be describing them as mentally tough and then on the flip side, people who are naturally imbalanced would naturally be mentally weak and have the inability to pull themselves back if you talk about the equilibrium. So perhaps, those aren’t mentally tough are the ones who step over the line.
NICK: Yes and you can step over the line as long as you step back.

Interviewer: And what's the implications and how do you define that line, what's right and what's wrong?

NICK: Like I said, there are many different ways of defining the line, I think in Goodwin's case, he stepped over it but didn't realise.

Interviewer: He didn't realise so he didn't do it consciously? Do you put that down to a lack of intelligence, a lack of knowledge, a particular weakness in any way, shape or form or was he misled, misinformed. Was it something about his character that put him there or was it purely the situation?

NICK: I think from my assessment he's just someone who had too much confidence, self-belief, he was indestructible and the problem was he kept surrounding himself with people who kept telling him that. Was he focussed – absolutely. Was he knowledgeable – clearly.

Interviewer: So would you say then that those who are mentally tough know their limits or do they know the boundaries, what's acceptable? You talked about being indestructible …

NICK: The belief of …

Interviewer: The belief that they're indestructible, now is that different to the belief that they're always right? There is no wrong or …

NICK: I guess their morals are.

Interviewer: OK so how do morals fit into mental toughness?

NICK: Well it's your belief system – it depends on what you believe is right or wrong. I don't know if that particular person thought what he was doing was right or wrong.

Interviewer: So can someone be mentally tough but do the right thing. Take Lance Armstrong, mentally tough but are they mentally tough in certain situations but also have moments of weakness.
NICK: Well you would have to say that those 2 individuals had moments of weakness.

Interviewer: Do you think that they perceived them as moments of weaknesses – after the fact or at the time did they think “I’m being weak” or is it always afterwards on reflection in the broader public domain?

NICK: Yes I suppose so. You can take Armstrong as a great example; he crossed the line with both feet. Did he know he was crossing the line? Yes, he did.

Interviewer: So is he different to Goodwin, did he know he was crossing the line?

NICK: I think the difference would be that what Armstrong did he knew the moment he did it that it was wrong. He made a conscious decision to say “if I do this, I know it’s wrong”. With Goodwin, my assessment of the situation is that I’m not sure he knew when he was making decisions that it was the wrong thing.

Interviewer: It was almost a compounding effect, almost mismanagement.

NICK: Goodwin’s failure wasn’t made in one decision.

Interviewer: It was a series of things.

NICK: Armstrong’s was, he made that decision that he was going to cheat. That’s the moment of weakness for Armstrong, there’s then that continuation of journey when he continues to do it, live with it and be able to cope.

Interviewer: It’s the stress and pressure of that environment mean that he is being mentally tough but is he perfectly mentally tough?

NICK: Well up until that time, the point when it could no longer continue so he didn’t step back over the line. It was almost that the line was redrawn again in front of him.

Interviewer: So if we were to go to SE and ask her the question, what would she think the characteristics of mentally tough individual are? What do you think she might say?
NICK: I think you would have to explain to her what you think mental toughness might be.

Interviewer: So she might not know what mental toughness is in that sort of context, she might not rationalise it but if we were to say to her the characteristics of someone who can cope with the stress and pressure, someone who’s doing her sort of role, what are the characteristics of those individuals, what do you think she might say to that then? To do her job, what are the characteristics an individual needs? What are the core skills and I’m not talking be able to present? Would she say resilience and focussed?

NICK: I think she would say focussed, someone who’s structured.

Interviewer: Structured? Structured is something is not something we’ve mentioned before, does structured relate to someone who’s able to compartmentalise?

NICK: No, compartmentalise is more being able to ring-fence situations or emotional states and not allow one situation to affect another. Structured is someone who is structured about the way they go about their work, will do it in a logical, and planned out way rather than just getting to an answer.

Interviewer: OK, you said focussed. What sort of purpose …

NICK: Why would you say that? Because the nature of the role is that it’s easy to get distracted with things that don’t matter. It’s easy to get distracted with things you can’t control so control the “controllables” and don’t worry about the others.

Interviewer: So those individuals who perhaps don’t perform as well in those sorts of roles are individuals who can get distracted.

NICK: Oh yes and they’re worrying themselves to death over things they can do nothing about.

Interviewer: Does that mean that mentally tough people don’t worry?

NICK: No, not at all. I think, again it’s about putting it into context.

Interviewer: Yes, so they’re almost able to manage the stress and anxiety in that situation.
NICK: Yes, I guess it’s the turn of phrase “I’m worried about that but there’s not a lot I can do about it so I’m not going to waste my time or energy trying to do something about it”.

INTERVIEWER: So they understand it’s a concern but don’t waste time or energy.

NICK: Yes and rationalise it to the point that there’s nothing I can do about that so I will focus on the things I can control and will deal with the outcome over that I’m worried out if it happens. A great example is media leaks – you can put yourself into an early grave worrying about if you’re working on a NDA project that it gets leaked into the media but there’s nothing you can do about it in terms of it happening. If it happens then you need to be able to react so what you can control is how you respond if the media find out that you’re planning to shut down 10 sites and make 10,000 people redundant, what you can’t control is if someone decides to go and tell the media that but people worry about it all the time and sit there festering over it saying what if they tell them this and what if they tell them that. Well, fine – it’s not what we’re going to tell them, it’s how you’re going to respond. That’s an example of where people can get hugely distracted by something they can’t control.

INTERVIEWER: So it’s almost – you talked early about conditioning and preparing but it’s almost prepared for things as well. It’s almost that sort of future event …

NICK: Yes, it’s thinking clearly under pressure. It’s Woodward’s adage – you play out all the little scenarios and permutations that you can think of and work out solutions and answers to them.

INTERVIEWER: It’s almost thinking ahead.

NICK: Yes. Work out all the scenarios that you think, work out the solutions and answers to it, practice it so that if it happens, you know exactly what you’re going to do but by doing that you learn the process of how to resolve so that if something happens that you’ve not prepared for, you don’t panic in terms of “shit, what am I going to do”, you know that you’ve got a process to go back to, of how you can identify the problem and resolve the problem.
Interviewer: So those who obviously suffer in those situations, panic and don’t have a mechanism or process to cope, is that getting back to having these coping mechanisms that you talked about earlier on?

NICK: Yes, that’s a coping mechanism, a strategy of how to cope in that particular situation. You’ve got scenarios that you can plan and rehearse it. You’ve then got people who think about the process and don’t worry about the outcome. If you have the right process and focus on the process and have the right inputs, you will get the right outcome, so a lot of people worry about the outcome but actually what they should worry about and focus on is the process and what they put into it. So you get a lot of people who say “what if this happens or that happens”, well if you follow the process, it won’t.

Interviewer: And get the right inputs?

NICK: Yes, it’s a bit like a golfer playing a round of golf. “What if my shot goes over there or over there?” but if you follow the same process when you hit the ball, you won’t hit over there!

Interviewer: If we were to ask SE, she’d talk about being focussed and structured. Are there any other things she would say are the characteristics?

NICK: Determined.

Interviewer: And what purpose or benefit because you’ve talked about avoiding being distracted from a focussed perspective but is determined different in that sort of sense?

NICK: Yes, for me determination is more about pace than focus so focus is more about remaining focussed on what you need to do, not being distracted so you can remain working on what you should do so you taking a long time to do what you need to do.

Interviewer: But determination is almost this sort of energy, push against something so taking time, people are slow …

NICK: I guess it all boils down to time so your determination, for me, determines time so if someone’s got a lack of determination, they will take longer. If there’s nothing in front of you and you’ve just got a process to go through,
then it could take you 5 days, someone who’s determined may take 3 days. Now if you hit a problem, that 5 days could become 10 days but someone who’s determined – 3 days may go to 5 days and it’s all about time so if you have a path of least resistance, you’ll get there quicker but so will someone who’s not determined but the more obstacles you put in the way, the more barriers they come through, the more determination becomes important.

Interviewer They can get through or around obstacles …

NICK Yes but ultimately it’s all about time but your determination (by definition) determines what time you’ll get there and as I say, the more difficult the journey and the more obstacles you have, the more important determination becomes.

Interviewer If there are not a lot of obstacles …

NICK You don’t need to be that determined to do it because what’s difference between 3 and 5 days? Not a lot but if you’ve got 10 obstacles in front of you, those 5 days become 50 days.

Interviewer Any other – would she say being resilient for example? Would she identify resilience as a characteristic?

NICK Would she recognise that within herself? I would certainly say she’s one of the most resilient people I’ve met but how self-aware of that she is, I’m not sure.

Interviewer What might she say is needed, the characteristics of someone who can cope with stress and pressure in the work environment. Is there anything here that she might say that we’ve not come up with? What about knowledge, do you think she would say “you need to be knowledgeable” or wouldn’t that be something she would address? Do you think knowledge plays a role in mental toughness? Does it relate to confidence?

NICK I guess there’s more than one way to look at it so I don’t think you need to be knowledgeable to be mentally tough in fact, maybe quite the opposite which is (without sounding like Donald Rumsfeld!) it’s the unknown knowing, some people get fazed by not knowing all the answers and I guess the
opposite to this is ambiguity so she was very good at dealing with ambiguity which is you don’t have all the answers and there are some things you don’t know, people who can deal with ambiguity I think are mentally tough. You’ll get other people who will try to resolve all the variables in the equation and it’s an unsolvable equation so they just lose focus on what they’re trying to do. You’ll get some people who just get fixated on one of the variables and they’ll go down a path that just loses all reality of what they were trying to do in the first place. They end up solving a fraction of the overall problem! Then you get others who can appreciate there are half a dozen cards on the table with no answers on them but they’re able to move forwards either making assumptions or they’re able to break it down and say if there are 5 things I don’t know I don’t need to worry about that because 3 of them I’ll never know so I’m not going to worry about them. I’ll only know the answers to those 3 things after the event so what’s going to be the media response to this, well I can keep hypothesising over this but I’m not really going to know until I do it. If you think about the big mortgage migration I did 6 weeks ago, one of the biggest concerns about it was what will the customer reaction be and will we end up in the media? It was very ambiguous what that would be ranging from nothing to front page Daily Mail depending on how well it went and that was the whole point – there was no point worrying about that because the one way to be sure to be in the papers on the Monday morning was to fuck it up on the weekend! There’s no point worrying about it now because if you follow the process and you execute the process well, you won’t be but if you get distracted and don’t follow the process, there’s a high chance you will be! You can use up a lot of emotional energy worrying about those things and continue playing over in your mind so the scenario planning skill is a great skill to have but some people actually get distracted by it because they try and pre-empt every single possible outcome.

Interviewer  Again, it’s about knowing when to control, that balance. Again you mentioned coping with people’s own demons so mentally tough people can have demons as others have but they’re able to (back to that compartmentalise) park them and move forwards whereas the demon of worrying you might be in the press almost overcomes you.

NICK  I guess where things have gone badly for you before that’s sort of sat on your right shoulder because it never goes away and you can worry that may occur again and it’s how you respond in the situation. When you’re trying to change things the one thing you can be sure of is that you will make
mistakes and making mistakes is not a bad thing, it’s how you respond to them which make it good or bad.

Interviewer: You think that mentally tough people accept that mistakes can happen and therefore it’s almost (I’ve asked this question of other people) that mentally tough people aren’t perfectionists. Perfectionism is a trait of a mentally weak person or are mentally tough people perfectionists?

NICK: Again, I don’t think it’s a black and white answer, in some ways it depends on the task in hand. I’m sure when they were painting the Sistine Chapel they were mentally tough people who started the process and never thought they would finish it and they were perfectionists so I think it depends on the nature of the task at hand where there are certain traits of mental toughness that would make that apply or not. So quite often the 80% is good enough.

Interviewer: Yes, you want the neurosurgeon who’s working on you to be a perfectionist ...

NICK: Yes, absolutely!

Interviewer: As opposed to the guy who’s painting your house where you want him spending a week rather than 20 years!

NICK: Yes, exactly!

Interviewer: So that’s almost a continuum depending on the situation and the context ...

NICK: Yes, depending on the task and the goal.

Interviewer: You could almost be too determined, over-focussed and be too much of a perfectionist to be fit for purpose.

NICK: Yes but even the brain surgeon has to draw the line at some point where they may be removing a growth, a tumour from the brain where they’ve only got a certain period of time to do it and sometimes you have to say “I’ve got 95% out” – there’s no point trying to get the last 5% if the person dies on the table.
Interviewer: Just 2 more questions but these are relatively quick ones, hopefully! Do you think there are any business situations which require any particular key trait? I know we talked about this particular business situation needs that certain skill and I know we've talked about quite a number of those. Is there anything that you think SE needs in order to – she needs to be determined, structured, focussed or is it a case of having that balance (almost a sort of graphic equaliser effect) dependent on that situation. Is there anything that stands out?

NICK: I certainly think … is it mental toughness that differentiates it? I don’t know. You see certain common traits in individuals who are doing similar jobs.

Interviewer: So these are what I would call common characteristics and you have put different twists on them which are great. One of the ones which I think stands out to me in talking to you is this ruthlessness comment. If you take ruthlessness and people not being afraid of conflict, is that something you think everyone needs in every situation – you need to be ruthless or are there certain situations where you need a level of pragmatism?

NICK: I think the ruthlessness is the willingness to draw things to a conclusion quickly.

Interviewer: Can you perhaps relate that to making and taking difficult decisions?

NICK: Yes, absolutely, you can dance around the handbags for a week or so over a particular issue or you can cut to the chase and make the decision and you can be ruthless in your decision making and make that decision to move forwards – whatever that decision may be, around people or a business decision to start/stop doing something.

Interviewer: I had a situation today where we’ve got a contractual discussion with an individual and we need to put the individual on to standard hours and for this individual it will effectively mean they will earn the same amount of money as they did before but they’ll have to work an extra hour every day. Part of that is that they should be taking an hour for lunch instead of half an hour so it’s effectively that they’re going to work an extra 2½ hours per week for no additional pay – a 7% increase in work or a 7% drop in salary. I’ve had to stay on task and say “this is the situation, this is what we’ve got to do”, now
would you describe that as ruthless or how would you describe that? Would you say that’s ruthlessness or …

NICK How long have you been discussing it?

Interviewer A day or 2.

NICK No, not really then. I think there’s a time element to the ruthlessness that can’t allow things to fester either in your mind or in the situation. You’ve got to deal with it quickly and move on.

Interviewer So would you say on the ruthless element that it’s perhaps how people perceive quickly and (what’s the word, not dramatically) a decisive decision that’s made can be perceived by those where the impact is negative as a ruthless decision but perhaps by others it’s perceived as a bold or brave decision.

NICK Yes, I’d use a personal example. There are 3 key decisions I made over the last 12 months for the mortgage migration and they were all about people – some people could perceive those decisions as ruthless because I was quick when I had to make them. For one person, it meant they left, for another it was asking them to do something completely different to what they were doing normally so one person was asked and told to leave, one person who’s a big thinker was asked to go and do a very detailed job for 8 weeks but completely stop everything else they were doing.

Interviewer How did the big thinker cope?

NICK Really well.

Interviewer Would you say they’re mentally tough?

NICK Reasonably.

Interviewer Did they feel the stress and pressure?

NICK Yes.

Interviewer And therefore they could sustain it for 8 weeks but perhaps not much longer or were they battling it?
NICK I think this individual has got self-belief but lacks confidence in that so I could see something in him to say "John, you’re the right person to do this" and he would say “are you sure?” – “absolutely, you can do this”. When I did it, a lot of people looked at me “are you sure?” – “yes, absolutely” and I guess that was perceived in some people’s minds as quite ruthless because I said “I don’t care what you’re doing, John, you’re going to stop doing it and your team are going to live without you for 8 weeks and you’re going to go and do this”.

Interviewer I suppose it’s a fine line between brave/bold/ruthless?

NICK Yes and it was a brave decision.

Interviewer So I suppose it’s people’s perception of the decision that you took because it wasn’t necessarily a reckless decision, a ruthless decision – it was bold.

NICK It was bold but had it gone wrong, it would have been described as reckless! There’s a fine line!

Interviewer So I suppose it’s back to the input and the process?

NICK Yes, I guess there’re always examples of where you make decisions quickly to define scope and things or you’re quite clear that we will do this or we won’t do that and you know by saying you’re not, you’re going to create conflict.

Interviewer So you think decision making is a skill, a key trait of people who are mentally tough? Mentally tough people are able to make rapid decisions?

NICK Yes, I think people who fester over making decisions are not mentally tough. The adage of “the only bad decision you can make right now is not making one”.

Interviewer So do you see your role as an individual that makes decisions periodically through your day, through your week – it’s your job to make decisions. Your ability to perform, as you said earlier, is how you’re perceived. Your ability to make decisions is perceived as your ability to perform.

NICK Absolutely.
Interviewer: So you think in the workplace mental toughness, the measure, the manifestation of mental toughness is the ability of individuals to make the right decisions?

NICK: Yes and people quite often say “how do you know that’s the right decision?” and the answer is I don’t!

Interviewer: But you’re confident …

NICK: I’m confident; I have the belief that even if it’s the wrong decision, we’ll correct it.

Interviewer: And again, do you think in taking the decision you have to have the confidence, self-belief to embody that on others for them to believe it.

NICK: Yes, it does give confidence to other people. I guess it’s having the balance between all the characteristics which is having the humility to say making a quick decision and not coming across as arrogant …

Interviewer: Or flippant.

NICK: Or flippant which is “I’ve made the wrong decision, let’s get on with it” versus “I’ve made the wrong decision, let’s fix it”.

Interviewer: Finally, we have touched upon this and just wanted to clarify it, there’s this perception that mental toughness within sport is predominantly positive in the sense that it adds to the individual, however, there are a number of sporting individuals who are almost flag bearers for mental toughness and have had some form of weaknesses throughout their career be it professional performance in terms of Lance Armstrong or personal performance in terms of Tiger Woods. Within a business environment, do you think there are positive as well as negative attributes of mental toughness or is it always positive?

NICK: No, I think as we discussed earlier, my view on it is about balance.

Interviewer: So it can go out of kilter?
NICK I think if you lose balance in any of the characteristics, any one of those characteristics, it can cause a catastrophic failure.

Interviewer And just finally on that then, we’ve talked about resilience and we’ve talked about stress and pressure almost with a negative view but what about things like promotion? When you’re promoted there’s almost a level of pressure that’s put upon you or you’re given additional responsibilities. Perhaps you’re given a big bonus or asked to stage a “reward and recognise”, do you think those positive events also require mental toughness?

NICK Yes, to a degree, you talk about promotion and increased pressure but that’s a perception, isn’t it?

Interviewer Or you feel you’ve got to perform at a higher level now. It can be yourself, you can create it, are there positive aspects?

NICK It’s the challenge, isn’t it, in terms of taking on the new challenge so I’ve performed highly in this role, I’ve been given a different role to do now so it’s a different role because it has different characteristics. It may be bigger in one measure but smaller in another so I guess that’s the challenge you take on, now whether you perceive the challenge to be a positive or negative is within the individual’s own mind.

Interviewer And how you cope with that pressure if it does put pressure on you. OK, that sort of concludes the questions, is there anything you’d like to go over, is there anything you think we’ve missed. Things like “I thought we’d talk about that but we haven’t talked about it”.

NICK No, I guess it’s a subject you could talk for hours on!

Interviewer And as an elite performer from a swimming perspective, how do you think mental toughness with regards to sport, mental toughness with regards to competing at international sport and then operating at a very high level within one of the UK’s largest banks – is the pressure comparable, is the mental toughness the same, have you had to develop new skills? Would you describe yourself as mentally tough from a sport and a business perspective?
As I said I do think mental toughness is a skill that you can develop so I don’t think you ever stop developing it. I do believe from my own personal experience the conditioning you have as you grow up and the surroundings around you do form you. A lot of mental toughness is a conditioning of what I did in my formative years and for those who didn’t go through that level of elitism whatever it may be, what performance you decide to go through …

So in a sense, you think you were taught or you perhaps have a natural focus on things in comparison to being distracted so you focus on swimming rather than playing lots of football or rugby – you were focussed on something or you were determined and that’s almost an innate characteristic of you as an individual or do you think it’s something that perhaps success …

As children we learn more from what we see and observe than from what we’re told so I still believe that’s true for adults as well so if you surround yourself with people who are doing similar things you learn that from them as well. I think it is pre-conditioning from an early age, in your childhood so I think your parents have a role to play in how you’re brought up, what your belief systems are set up to be as a child but then the experiences you have through your adolescence do set yourself up to succeed in life much further beyond than your academia so like I said the experiences I had as a child being put through a process where you’re heavily focussed on one goal or one sport but then put under a series of experiences where no longer did you have only have the chronic mental toughness of having to do the same activity, day in, day out, 2 times a day but then you had the acute experience of having to compete and I was reflecting the other day that when I was Finn’s age I was already racing at 8 and if you think, racing from that age to 22/23 you’re continually going through this process.

Repetition?

It becomes second nature so to be put under this pressure …

To work hard?

To continually have to work hard and remain focussed on a goal which may be 12, 24 or 4 years away is not uncommon, it’s something I’m used to doing so even academic wise, just to go to university – it’s a 4 year journey, not just a 50 second journey I’m going to do.
Interviewer: So you have a vision, a foresight, and a plan. Do you think having a sporting career or competed at an elite level or put that dedication into something – a sport or even a pastime are the building blocks for developing mental toughness?

NICK: It’s the conditioning, you can do it through sport or you can do it through other things.

Interviewer: Music?

NICK: Music is a great example, how long would it take you to become a grade 8 piano player? Lots of people go through that.

Interviewer: Again given those characteristics you made there, you’d expect those individuals to demonstrate, to become …

NICK: Yes, absolutely but I think whichever avenue you go down gives you the framework, the structure to develop to skill and then that skill, should you choose to continue to practice it, will remain with you. I find it’s something that’s become second nature whereas people who’ve not been through that type of conditioning struggle with it and struggle with the balance between the 2 types of situations you could be in.

Interviewer: Yes because I look at some of these characteristics and if I was to measure myself, I wouldn’t necessarily say I was strong in all of them. In different situations would you say that you’ve lacked some of the core characteristics or do you think there’s almost a genetic bit or innate bit that you’ve developed from an early age so you’ve almost been mentally tough since the age of 7?

NICK: I think it’s an accumulation. Am I more mentally tough from when I was 24 and started work? Yes, absolutely and was I more mentally tough when I was 23 then when I was 16 – yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: And you expect to be more mentally tough when you’re 45 or 50 than you are today?

NICK: Yes and what’s interesting is that for those people who’ve not been conditioned in the early years and then they’ve struggled with those types of
experiences in the first 10 years of their career because they're conditioning themselves into something they've done before.

Interviewer  So it's almost as though there's a gap and it widens as you get older so the earlier you're exposed to some of these characteristics, the better off you are so almost somebody at 7, 8, 9, 10 who's starting to develop these characteristics is at a distinct advantage to somebody who's only exposed to having to these things at the age of 20, 21.

NICK  Yes, absolutely …

Interviewer  But it's not to say that they couldn't catch up.

NICK  That's the point, you get someone who’s never done anything in their lives before but incredibly skilled at developing it.

Interviewer  It may be that they've always had them there but they've never had to, their knowledge has got them through before. It’s only at university that they have to be more focussed, until that point they’ve been able to dilly and dally.

NICK  Yes, you see some of the most successful people in life who had nothing, the Bannantynes of this world but clearly he was conditioned in how he was brought up and developed the characteristics without the educational or sporting prowess but he certainly developed resilience and self-belief and confidence.

Interviewer  Almost that ability to fight against adversity be it the social situation that you’re in, be it other adversaries in the sporting perspective, tests and examinations from the music perspective but some form of goal to work towards and then about setting new goals as well.

NICK  And that's why, going back to balance, you take someone like Paula Radcliffe or people who've choked – in the moment of truth, are they mentally tough?

Interviewer  At the moment …

NICK  They had a moment of weakness.
Interviewer: Have they reached their limit? I suppose one interesting question is looking at Mo Farah running half a marathon, is that a sign of mental weakness or mental toughness?

NICK: It's all about preparation and conditioning.

Interviewer: So actually for him it's part of a journey.

NICK: And he could lose focus by thinking about the media attention about it. Was it about money; was it about media attention, blah, blah, blah? Well to him, it wasn't.

Interviewer: It was about winning the London Marathon.

NICK: Yes, his process is to win London next year and this was the middle part of it.

Interviewer: And again, it's all about people's perceptions.

NICK: Yes and he's resilient because of the number of inches written about him saying he's just doing it for the money.

Interviewer: Yes. Thank you very much. That was very useful, very insightful.
Right, so thank you for participating. Just to give you a sort of context there is growing interest within business relating to the performance enhancing qualities of this phenomenon called mental toughness, originally described within sports psychology as the ability to cope with the stress and anxiety of a competitive performance and training better than others. So individuals who are mentally tough can cope with the stress and pressure of performance environments, be that a sporting environment or a workplace environment. So what we would like to understand is what are the characteristics of individuals within the workplace who can out-perform others consistently and what are the characteristics and traits of those people. So people you have observed or experiences that you’ve had where you think you’ve performed and out-performed others and therefore what do you think enabled you to do that or what do you think enabled other people. I’m going to go through a number of questions and through that questioning process hope to sort of elicit what those characteristics are as well as ultimately what the potential context or the scenarios are where perhaps people need to be mentally tough or perhaps don’t need to be mentally tough. So in completing the questionnaire, it’s anonymous so if you did give me your name I would change the name to subject and again it’s completely anonymised and if at any point you want to exclude any of your comments we can do, so I will share the transcript with you. So firstly what I would like to do is to start off with, at the beginning, with regards to perhaps what mental toughness, when we use the phrase, would mean to you in a business context. What – and if I give you a sort of analogy, if we describe a car you could describe a car as having four wheels, a steering wheel, an engine and an exhaust etc, but actually what does a car deliver? What’s the benefit of a car, what service or solution does it provide? It takes you from A to B; so the basic thing of a car is that it takes you from A to B. So if we talk about mental toughness what would mental toughness – what does it mean to you and what does it offer?
Okay. Mental toughness is about the ability to cope with the peaks and troughs of business life. Business life is never a straight line, it goes up, it goes down and it’s no good just being able to cope with the ups, you’ve also got to cope with the downs and if you can’t cope with the downs then you don’t have the ability to run a business – it’s as simple as that.

Okay. So it’s coping with the ups and downs. Right, we’ll move on then.

That’s it in a simplistic form, obviously there’s a lot more to it than that, but is the basic definition.

That’s fine, sometimes simple is best. So if we said coping with the ups and downs, if we build on the ups and downs and just talk about perhaps what those down situations are. So that leads me perfectly on to question two, which is: in your experience what aspects of the work environment that you’ve been exposed to or have experienced other people –

I can give you a very good example; in the early ‘80s I started up a company manufacturing ski hats. As the company progressed I then moved out of not just doing ski hats but also designing and selling T-shirts and sweatshirts. I went to see a company called Gaynors in Ambleside and the guy said to me, this is the Director, John Gaynor said to me Mike, I love your designs, come back next week and we’ll sort an order out. Now you have to bear in mind I’m running this company from Wigan and I’m driving, in my spare time, up to Ambleside. So I go up the week after to see John Gaynor and he gets the designs out, all over the shop floor, and he says Mike, you’re a pile of shit – piss off. You cannot imagine what I felt like, you cannot imagine. I drove home seriously – I won’t say depressed, but certainly demoralised.

Now two weeks after that I went to see the [s.l.] Winechair at Lakeside, which is on the west side of Lake Windermere and they bought £5,000 worth. I drove home four feet above the ground and what I’m talking about mental toughness is, you have to be able to take the knocks as well as the good bits. If all you can cope with is the good bits then you should not be running a business because there will be the bad bits. You can’t stop them.

So if we use – what sort of characteristics would individuals –
MIKE  Resilience. You’ve got to bounce back, you’ve got to say the guy’s a bastard, I don’t believe the next person I’m going to see will be the same as him – or her.

Interviewer  So people who are mentally tough have the ability to bounce back from disappointment?

MIKE  That’s it.

Interviewer  What would somebody do if they were perhaps not mentally tough?

MIKE  Well he’d probably pack it all in and say –

Interviewer  So they’d give up?

MIKE  Yes, give up – you can’t give up because, again, part of mental – now I’m going to elaborate slightly – mental toughness, amongst other things, is about belief. You have to believe in what you are doing is right and as part of that aspect of believing you’ve got to be pragmatic and you’ve got to be astute. In other words there is no point in believing that your idea for your business is brilliant if it’s actually built on sand and is totally stupid. So you’ve got to have the ability to analyse, you’ve got to have the ability to research, and then come up with an objective, as against subjective, an objective view that what you are doing has longevity, will provide solutions to some people in the marketplace, whether that’s the public or the businesses, will provide you the living and if you believe all those things then you have to believe that you will get there in the end by dint of hard work and innovative behaviour.

Interviewer  Okay. So do you think some of the mentally tough people then believe that they will get there?

MIKE  Absolutely; you have to. Without belief you’ve nothing, and that belief has to be based on substance, you can’t have a belief that it will all work out if you’ve never done any analysis, you’ve never done any research, you actually don’t know that what you are trying to do has a market.

Interviewer  So those people who don’t get there then, do they not have the belief or –
MIKE: They could have belief but the belief could be based on quicksand and therefore the product or service that they were basing their business on actually didn’t have a market.

Interviewer: But what about their mental capability? You’ve talked about –

MIKE: Well, they could be deluded; they could be so arrogant that failure doesn’t sort of even fit into their psyche but failure is available 24 hours a day to everybody.

Interviewer: Okay.

MIKE: Imagine Chris Huhne, up until six weeks ago he thought he had it all and then his wife comes along and takes the rug from under him.

Interviewer: So you look at Chris Huhne, is he somebody that you think then is mentally tough?

MIKE: I do, yes, because I think he’ll bounce back.

Interviewer: Right, but –

MIKE: I mean all the pundits said that whilst he’s in jail he’ll be constructing his next career move. So he won’t be a politician again, that’s patently gone, but he will try and be a success in something else.

Interviewer: And do you think that the decision that he took, ultimately resulting in him going to prison and his ex-wife going to prison, do you think when he took that decision he was mentally tough?

MIKE: No, stupid. I mean because he lied to the Court; he told everybody that he was not guilty and then changed his plea at the very last minute. Well, that showed him up to be very stupid and –

Interviewer: So that was like a moment of weakness.

MIKE: Well a moment of madness.

Interviewer: A moment of madness.
MIKE: Not weakness, madness because it was the wrong decision to make. He allowed his ego to overtake what he was doing.

Interviewer: So do you think that people who are mentally tough and therefore someone who is mentally tough at that point wouldn’t allow their ego to overtake?

MIKE: Maybe, maybe not; I think someone who is mentally tough would actually be able to sit down and objectively come to the right decision, but then again I don’t think Huhne is mentally weak either, I just think his arrogance has clouded his judgement.

Interviewer: Okay but at that moment, for that decision, so overall he may well be mentally tough but that’s not –

MIKE: Momentarily he allowed his arrogance –

Interviewer: - a moment of weakness, people who potentially decide –

MIKE: His arrogance was his weakness, and I think in business you can’t afford to be arrogant. Now yesterday Eric Schmidt made a really dumb comment and suggested that nobody was interested in how much tax Google paid and even Chris Evans, who is not known to make political banter, said that Schmidt was a prat, basically, and that actually sixty million people care how much tax Google pay.

Interviewer: Yes.

MIKE: Again, that’s an arrogance thing and arrogance does unfortunately bring down a lot of mentally tough people because although they might be mentally tough arrogance can undermine all of it, unfortunately.

Interviewer: So those who are mentally – those who are mentally tough, who don’t develop arrogance, so if arrogance is –

MIKE: I think everybody has to be arrogant to a certain extent –

Interviewer: Is it arrogance though that they are, you know –
MIKE: Yes, people can be too arrogant. I think to be successful you have to have a little bit of arrogance, I don’t think there’s any doubt about that; you have to believe in your own ability.

Interviewer: So do you think there’s almost – it’s interesting because that’s perhaps a slightly different perspective than some other people, and what you are saying is that almost that level of self belief –

MIKE: Can go too far.

Interviewer: - can go too far, so there’s a level of self belief which is positive, which you would say is almost positive arrogance –

MIKE: Then there’s destructive arrogance –

Interviewer: - and then almost this destructive arrogance where your self belief or the belief of the situation or the belief that you are right is almost – is wrong.

MIKE: Yes. To make a decision you have to take into account all the things that are floating around that particular decision, and there could be several things that are floating around. If you ignore those and you take your own view only, in other words I’m God, I can never make a mistake, then you’ll sink eventually.

Interviewer: So thinking that you can sort of can never make a mistake, as opposed to those people who are mentally tough, do you think then that they accept that they can make mistakes?

MIKE: Absolutely. I mean the person who is astute and as I say astuteness is part of being mentally tough, try and make sure that they don’t make the same mistake twice. So you accept that you can make mistakes, what you don’t want to make is the same one two times. That’s the point. You cannot – anyone that’s never made a mistake has never made a decision and that’s a very common idiom and mantra. If you make decisions you [s.l.] eventually get them wrong. I mean Maggie made two things that were patently wrong; she got the Poll Tax wrong, now I don’t know – even though I was there at the time, I don’t remember reading what her decision was based on to come up with the Poll Tax, but it patently didn’t work and she didn’t do any focus groups, she obviously just trusted her own judgement on that, which was wrong. She also tried to stop the unification of Germany, which was another
madness, which didn't work out and I can't understand why she did that either. However the vast majority of her decisions worked out, the fact that she took the Argies on and beat the pants off them was brilliant, the fact that she brought the Unions down almost single handed was awesome. I mean it had to happen and she did it and I admire her for that.

Interviewer  Okay so taking a decision actually, so that making a decision requires mental toughness.

MIKE  Exactly, because that’s why when you deal with people in local government and local councils it’s so frustrating; they won’t make a decision because they are so scared of getting something wrong and that the person above them kicks them for getting it wrong rather than applauding them for making serious decisions, the majority of which are right.

Interviewer  So mentally tough people make decisions.

MIKE  Well a mentally tough person probably wouldn’t work for the council anyway because they’d be bored brainless, because I think mental toughness breeds a slight, not only arrogance, but a sort of anarchy and if you are mentally tough you don’t want to work with a bunch of tossers basically.

Interviewer  Okay. Are there any other situations where you think you need to be mentally tough? People who do that –

MIKE  Well mentally tough people are people like doctors for instance –

Interviewer  Are they?

MIKE  Yes, because if you’ve got to tell somebody they’ve got cancer, that’s an awful thing to have to do, but they do it. I mean part of being a good manager is not only thanking people for doing a good job but it’s also telling them when they’ve not done a good job and also maybe I’m sorry, we’ll have to let you go – and that’s not nice to do either.

Interviewer  So the tough people, mentally tough people, can take tough decisions, because some of the decisions –

MIKE  Of course, yes.

Interviewer  - so they will make decisions but they’ll also take make tough decisions.
MIKE: Yes, and deliver tough news.

Interviewer: Any other sort of situations that spring to mind and you think you need to be tough to do that? Not as somebody in a full role, but you know -

MIKE: Well, one of the people I admired when I was growing up was a guy called Red Adair, which I've written down. Red Adair was a guy that went to sort out oil well fires and I believe – he was running a business and the beauty was he was damn good at what he did. He never appeared to fail; all right, some wells – I remember some of the ones that Saddam Hussein set alight in Iraq took weeks to get under control, but at the end of the day he did it. He always achieved, maybe not in the timeframe that some people who had ridiculous expectations of him, because like he became almost godlike, but he always delivered and I admire him for that.

Interviewer: We'll come back to him then. So you've given me some good examples there, I don't want to sort of labour the point through the situations because they come out through the conversation anyway; it's interesting. So on taking a decision, delivering difficult messages, dealing with disappointments and bounce backability and I'd actually just like to sort of focus on – identify some people who you think are mentally tough and it's about sort of almost, if we use the analogy of the golfer, which I think I've shared with you before, if we were to describe the perfect golfer then what we might say is –

MIKE: It's not McIlroy is it?

Interviewer: Well at the moment no –

MIKE: He walked off the course two weeks ago, which is pathetic.

Interviewer: He did, but if you look at – for example, if we take McIlroy and the fact that at that moment he probably used words around mental weakness or something along those lines; it was probably a poor decision I think he said, if we take that as an example then I don't know if you watched the marathon on Sunday with regards to Mo Farah, and his decision to sort of finish the race half way through.

MIKE: It was weak.

Interviewer: You think that was a weak decision?
MIKE: I do, I thought it was mercenary and pathetic.

Interviewer: That's interesting because I had a similar conversation –

MIKE: You know how much money he got paid?

Interviewer: Yes, I know how much money –

MIKE: A ship load.

Interviewer: He's getting paid a lot of money, however he's got a goal and an objective and the goal and the objective requires him to do certain things through that process.

MIKE: He could run a half marathon anywhere.

Interviewer: He could but running a half marathon somewhere else isn't running the London Marathon.

MIKE: No, I'm sorry, it's complete nonsense.

Interviewer: So you think – that's fine –

MIKE: Because if you are doing the half marathon then the drink stations, which he self confessed to making a mess of, are part and parcel of a half marathon and as for the pace, he's a professional runner – he did it for the money, I'm sorry I don't believe it any other way.

Interviewer: Okay.

MIKE: Which I think was bad for his image.

Interviewer: Okay, I'm interested in your views because other people see it in different ways, but again, this is why there are different perspectives of – and I'll come back because hopefully some of the things you identify I might refer back to that, just to see if you perhaps change your mind, I'd be interested in using it as the analogy. But if we were take this other, of the perfect golfer and probably think of Tiger Woods; I know a lot of people say he's almost perfect but there are some characteristics –
MIKE: He's tough because he's taken a lot of shit and he's come back.

Interviewer: - there are some character weaknesses that he's had –

MIKE: Of course, yes.

Interviewer: - but is he mentally tough, yes; is he mentally tough all the time –

MIKE: Look, if Tiger wants to shag ten women it's nothing to do with mental toughness, that's just being greedy and being sex mad.

Interviewer: But was he not weak, was he not mentally weak at that point?

MIKE: No I don't think so, I think this –

Interviewer: Does it almost go back to your point about arrogance?

MIKE: Oh he's arrogant to think he can get away with it.

Interviewer: Yes, but we talked about that being weak.

MIKE: Well again, his arrogance became overpowering and he thought he could get away with it, but I think he is mentally tough because he has come back from that and become world number one again; you can't take that away from him

Interviewer: So if we were to think about Tiger Woods in that sort of sense as being perhaps the best but then we might say I'll have some of his power and his physical prowess and those sorts of things. You might think then of Phil Mickelson and his tenacity, his sort of stickability, he stays with things, he holds himself –

MIKE: I don't know much about Mickelson, I'm sure he is probably mentally tough.

Interviewer: But then you've got people like Greg Norman, you might want some of his charisma and his character; you know he's more charismatic –

MIKE: That's an extra not an instead of.
Interviewer: Well exactly, so what I’m saying is we could build up components so there are a number of characteristics that not everybody has but you’ve already described.

MIKE: Alan Sugar, he’s mentally tough, but he’s a gobshite.

Interviewer: But if we are to describe the perfect business professional one of the characteristics, the perfectly sort of mentally tough, the optimum mentally tough business professional, what are the characteristics they—

MIKE: Okay, well there are a number of characteristics—I’ve no problem with that, if you are the consummate professional business manager then you have to be mentally tough but you also have to be a team builder, you have to be slightly consensual, I might take the view—I say to my lot I will listen to you, if your decision or your conclusion or your solution is better than mine then I will use it; if my solution or decision is equally as good as yours, then I’ll take mine.

Interviewer: So mentally tough people will ask other people for their input—

MIKE: Exactly.

Interviewer: - and not be afraid to take it—

MIKE: Of course.

Interviewer: - but those people who aren’t mentally tough, or don’t demonstrate that, what do they do?

MIKE: Well people who are mentally tough that are overly arrogant will eventually self destruct, and I know lots of examples.

Interviewer: No, no we’ve said that, but if someone in the workplace as you’ve described, you gain consensus from people, but people who lack some mental toughness, how would they behave? Would they—

MIKE: People that lack mental toughness—

Interviewer: - would they just think that they’re right all the time?
No, they would be scared of asking someone's opinion, because their opinion might be better than theirs, but more importantly their ego would be bruised in as much as they might think that asking other people's opinion is a sign of weakness, but I don't see it like that.

Yes, so asking for –

Opinion could be perceived by weak people as being a sign of weakness.

So they perceive that as a sign of weakness, so consensual is they're not –

Arrogant.

- they're not scared to ask others.

No because they have self – they have sufficient arrogance or self belief to not feel undermined by asking people questions.

Okay so their self belief. So this asking others for opinions is a sign of weakness and it's their ego –

No, they might think that, but I'm not saying that it is.

No, no, no –

I don't believe that, some might.

So you think some individuals won't ask others –

Because they're either too arrogant to think that anyone's got half a brain and can give them an answer, or they may perceive that asking undermines their own authority.

But then ultimately that would lead to a poor level of performance because they don't gain that input.

Well nobody can get it right all the time, that's why you ask.

Mentally tough people gain input from others, but then have the ability to recognise –
MIKE: Or analyse whether it's any good or not.

Interviewer: Yes, so they have the ability to sort of determine what the right answer is –

MIKE: In their view.

Interviewer: - in their view, but they'll also be prepared to either accept their own –

MIKE: Or somebody else's.

Interviewer: - or somebody else's. Okay. If you looked at [inaudible 00.25.28] Gail or some other people with mental strength, what sort of characteristics – we talked about team builder, so that's interesting, so to people who are mentally tough are able to build teams, does that mean that they are a leader, they've got followers or –

No, it covers a lot; there are a few things, I mean the importance about building a team is [a] the acceptance that you can't do everything yourself and [b] you're not the sole fount of every clever thought in the world. So by having a team behind you, you accept that others have a view, that others have innovative ideas and that by being consensual you will actually motivate and get the best out of your team. Whereas if you top down all the time, just tell them all what to do, that's not motivational.

Interviewer: So they can't do everything themselves, so they understand their limitations.

MIKE: No I wouldn't quite phrase it like that; they understand that they can't get it right all the time. Limitation is not the word, I wouldn't use that word, it's just that they realise that they are not perfect and that if they don't take on board other ideas and a consensual view to things it may well be that they will get it wrong.

Interviewer: And therefore their performance will be lowered. So those people who almost lack mental toughness in those situations would almost think that they're always right.

MIKE: Exactly, which can't be true, nobody can get it right all the time.

Interviewer: Right, so the team bit, you said there are a number of things that are sat within that and therefore other people can have values, what we've just
been talking about, the implication that do mentally tough people have an impact on others? Is that important, are they the –

MIKE No I don’t think they have to have an impact; I mean Ranulph Fiennes has plodded through Antarctica on his own, so he has highlighted that he has mental toughness but there wasn’t anyone else around him, he was on his todd.

Interviewer So there are times when actually other people are irrelevant and it’s an individual thing, but then there may well be times when being mentally tough –

MIKE I was reading about this guy who has gone and put himself on a desert island for a whole month without anything and the one thing that I found quite inspirational – he said that when he got a panic attack or a real zing of anxiety he built himself a stone circle, out of boulders, and he went and sat in that stone circle and that was his safe house. So because he didn’t have any drugs to calm him down, diazepam or God knows what else out there, zanax – his way of coping was to build this stone circle and say that is my safe house, if I get a panic attack I’m going to sit in it – and he said it worked.

Interviewer That’s interesting, so the mentally tough people have mechanisms for coping –

MIKE Yes exactly.

Interviewer - whereas those who perhaps are mentally tough have or lack certain mechanisms, don’t have –

MIKE My partner knows that more often than not I will go to bed at ten o’clock and the reason I go to bed at ten o’clock is because I realise that for my own toughness I have to get some rest and some sleep. Now I don’t expect to sleep all the time but at least if I’m in bed with my eyes closed that’s half the battle. So that’s my, if you like, that’s my safe sanctuary, that’s what I do.

Interviewer Okay.

MIKE Because I know that if I started staying up till twelve or one o’clock and daft things like that I’d burn out.
Interviewer: So within that you are sort of saying that understanding your – we’ve talked about limitations before, but almost understanding people’s – you understand your limitations, or the levels that you can –

MIKE: No, hang on, I’m not saying that. What I’m saying is to cope with what I have to cope with, I’ve developed a strategy to do that, which encompasses quite a lot of things. Yes?

Interviewer: Yes.

MIKE: I rarely, rarely get pissed, I try and go to bed relatively early, when I’m on my own in the week I do the crossword every night with a glass of wine and I sit and do that for an hour at least, I watch very little television, I sit and read the paper or two papers or even three, cover to cover, do the crossword, glass of wine and I find that very relaxing and I find it helps me switch off from everything.

Interviewer: Okay. I want to come back to two things now; one is the sort of switching off and the other is – you did say that if you did these other things they would cause you harm or you wouldn’t be able to perform at the level that you perform at.

MIKE: I believe that eventually I would burn out.

Interviewer: So if you did drink, if you stayed up late – so you know your limitations in the sense of –

MIKE: No, I didn’t say the word – no, I said that’s my survival strategy. I think to use the word limitation is not correct. I don’t see it as a limitation; it’s my sensibility to know –

Interviewer: It’s the limits of time you can spend awake in reference to –

MIKE: So if you want to twist it that way –

Interviewer: No, no sorry, I’m not trying to – what I’m trying to say is – let me turn it on its head. So people who are mentally tough don’t perhaps know when to switch off, don’t have –
MIKE: No, I haven’t – I’ve said they probably do.

Interviewer: People who are mentally weak?

MIKE: Yes.

Interviewer: Know how to switch off?

MIKE: Might not, no.

Interviewer: No they might not, so almost they have – one of the articles on mental toughness that I’ve read is around mountaineers and this particular mountaineer who wrote the article he said he believes he’s mentally tough because he will give up if he’s thirty feet from the top if he doesn’t believe that he can get back down. Because climbing the mountain is only half the job, getting back down and being able to tell everybody –

MIKE: They do cheat of course.

Interviewer: Well, they may well do, but what he was saying is that there were certain people who will push themselves beyond their limits in that they can get to the top –

MIKE: But that’s the arrogance bit.

Interviewer: Exactly, so it’s almost – I’m not trying to say that there were limitations about you as an individual –

MIKE: That’s common sense.

Interviewer: - but you have this ability to almost self regulate what you do to optimise your performance.

MIKE: Correct.

Interviewer: And that’s what I was trying to get to.

MIKE: Well you see I’m a climber myself and I was very disillusioned because I couldn’t get my head round how people could sleep at 26,000 feet on Everest, and I was very upset – I say upset, but that’s not the right word, but I was very disillusioned when I found out they take tranquilisers and stuff
because I’d put them as super human, I knew I couldn’t do it, even with my self belief and ability, I thought shit I couldn’t sleep at 26,000 feet, how do those buggers do it. When I found out they took drugs I was disappointed.

Interviewer  So for you in that sense them taking the drugs is almost cheating?

MIKE  It is cheating, yes. Well it’s not natural is it?

Interviewer  Well no, but then where’s the line for those individuals or why they don’t – the world anti doping agencies, don’t go out and test mountaineers and there’s no sort of –

MIKE  There’s no competition as such, is there?

Interviewer  Well no, there isn’t. So obviously if you are a cyclist, Lance Armstrong, then quite clearly you’ve overstepped the line –

MIKE  Again ego and arrogance. Ego to think that he should carry on winning and arrogance to think no one’s ever going to catch him.

Interviewer  Yes, yes. But in this instance with regards to the mountaineers and them taking tranquillisers to help them sleep, and your view that it’s cheating, is that because you –

MIKE  Well disappointed.

Interviewer  Well disappointed, is it that you’ve got all almost a moral code –

MIKE  Yes.

Interviewer  - that you operate – that you would expect to operate in and those that operate outside that moral code have almost broken rules that you wouldn’t break?

MIKE  I mean I actually bust a gut to pay all my bills on time, all of them, and yet every month the AA, who advertise on our DoshBox, I have to constantly chase them to pay up and yet they are a big company and I’m a little company and I find it really irritating, really irritating.
Interviewer: So do you think that mental – people who are mentally tough and perform operate within rules and those that perhaps who –

MIKE: No not necessarily because there a lot of criminals that are probably mentally tough.

Interviewer: Okay so somebody who steals you would say is mentally tough?

MIKE: Could be.

Interviewer: Could be?

MIKE: Yes. Mental toughness I think transcends everything and I think there are a lot of criminals – I mean you could argue that cynicism – it’s a bit like arrogance will bring down a lot of business people, then the reason people can get away being criminals is so cynical they don’t see that what they are doing has any affect on anybody else. Now I look out of my window of the office and some bastard has been and dumped a lorry load of rubbish, which they’ve obviously been paid for to take to the tip, but they thought we’ll make an extra £60 or £100 by going fly tipping it somewhere else. To me these people are low lifes but you could argue that they might be mentally tough because they are not scared of the consequences.

Interviewer: But if you take the work environment and you take people that make decisions that are perhaps fraudulent or detrimental to companies where they know that probably they are doing something wrong –

MIKE: Well take this guy that’s been – that’s made forty-five million pounds out of selling golf ball finders as bomb detectors – I mean I suspect he’s mentally tough but he’s a crook.

Interviewer: But then – okay, so I suppose it’s a matter of perspective. If you had somebody that works –

MIKE: He hasn’t got any morals, has he?

Interviewer: No and do morals play a role then in mental toughness?

MIKE: No –
Interviewer: In the work environment would you –

MIKE: No, they are part of somebody's destructive side, so that for instance we've already decided that Tiger Woods has probably little or no morals, but he's mentally tough because he's fought back from a divorce, from all the opprobrium that everybody gave him, to come back to number one.

Interviewer: But if you asked his wife if she thought he was mentally tough, what do you think she might say?

MIKE: Well I think she'd probably say he was. To be honest it's a question I wouldn't ask because unless we actually had access to her –

Interviewer: But it's your view, your view –

MIKE: Well, in my view she probably would say he is because – but then again she might use the word cynical and say well he's that cynical he didn't even care what I thought. Now cynicism isn't necessarily mental toughness, it's actually a weakness.

Interviewer: So would you say that, based on that that mentally tough people care and mentally weak people don't care?

MIKE: No you can't say that either because I mean – I'm sure the people in the Bolton Council, the National Trust and all these people in quangos, local government and the public sector, they might care – it doesn't make them weak.

Interviewer: No, no, no – sorry, I'm not saying –

MIKE: Or the fact that if they are weak that they don't care.

Interviewer: Well let me turn it around slightly then, so the decisions that we take in business can have ramifications on other people; the impact on other people, whether people care about it or not, do you think that has a role to play within mental toughness?

MIKE: No. I mean it might sound pompous, but I genuinely care about my staff and every decision I make I think about them, but there will be people out
there that would sooner sack somebody than worry about them – but that
doesn’t make them mentally weak either.

Interviewer  No, no, I’m not say that it does make them –

MIKE  They’re not empathetic are they?

Interviewer  Right, so not empathetic okay.

MIKE  I think the problem is with what you are doing is that you are actually
morphing really a lot of things together, you are trying to isolate mental
toughness, however it’s very difficult to isolate it because there are so many
things that are – it’s a bit like an atom or a DNA, there are so many things
attached to mental toughness that to actually isolate it is actually quite
difficult in my view.

Interviewer  Well I’m looking for the characteristics or trying to understand –

MIKE  Well I think we actually discussed them in the first – the ability to make a
decision, the ability to deliver bad news, those sorts of things, they are
mentally tough.

Interviewer  Okay and that’s great. So if we move on to then say Red Adair, because
we talked about making a decision and delivering bad news, then you
described Red Adair as being someone you considered –

MIKE  Yes, because he risked his life every time he went out and did it.

Interviewer  Not everybody risks their lives but perhaps understand the consequences of
the decisions –

MIKE  A lot of people risk their reputations and for a lot of people that is a lot.

Interviewer  Okay so do you think the mentally tough people are prepared to risk their
reputations on their decisions?

MIKE  Yes absolutely, this is why Alan Sugar went to Court against Stella English
because he was mentally tough and he was prepared to do it.

Interviewer  Okay so if we –
MIKE If he had lost just think what would have happened then.

Interviewer So is that more about taking risks then, so they risk their reputations –

MIKE Yes, mentally tough people will take risks.

Interviewer Broader than just on their reputations, they will take risks.

MIKE Absolutely because if you are running a business you can’t run it without taking risks.

Interviewer But then is there an impact of arrogance and –

MIKE Of course, that’s why if you build a team and you have some sort of consensus, then you try and minimise the risk by saying well this is what I’m thinking about, what do you think? And if say you’ve got ten guys working for you and they all say Mike, you’re mad, then you’ve got to be really, really arrogant to go against all of your staff saying that is the wrong decision.

Interviewer Well is it arrogance or is it determination or is it –

MIKE No, it’s stupidity.

Interviewer But what if all those ten are wrong, what if you are right –

MIKE Yes it may well –

Interviewer - the resolve then to say well I’m –

MIKE But you’ve minimised the risk by not doing it; in other words if you went out on a limb and did it, going against all of what everybody has told you to do, that in my view is silly because you are probably wrong – probably.

Interviewer Yes, so they are prepared to risk their reputation, they are prepared to take risks, people are prepared to take risks but they also look to minimise risk –

MIKE Exactly.

Interviewer People who aren’t necessarily mentally tough would not necessarily –
MIKE They’re not the people that made the decision in the first place, probably.

Interviewer - or alternatively could make the decision but not look to minimise the risk, therefore almost –

MIKE No, they would minimise the risk; they’ve asked so many people – I mean I lost a job in Huntingdon because the guy that wanted our [s.l.] e-toys in the system, for want of a better phrase, he wanted it; he then went to some crazy committee where there were zillions of them and in that scenario even if one person says no, then because in local government you are into the cover your arse syndrome, he decided he wouldn’t do.

Interviewer Right, so an instance where he wasn’t prepared to make –

MIKE He was weak.

Interviewer Do you think on the flip side of this minimising risk thought, do you think perhaps there’s the opposite of people who minimise it, almost that people are reckless?

MIKE Yes absolutely.

Interviewer So there’s almost a recklessness where people don’t ultimately – so mentally tough people look to minimise risk but those who are potentially not mentally tough would be more reckless. Okay. If were to ask Red Adair about mental toughness, what do you think he might say are the characteristics of a mentally tough person?

MIKE I never saw him interviewed, so I don’t know. If he was an arrogant bastard he would have said yes of course I am –

Interviewer No, no, no not whether he is but if you were to say – what do you think he would say are the attributes or the characteristics of a mentally tough person?

MIKE Jesus, I couldn’t possibly say.

Interviewer Somebody else perhaps –
MIKE: Because Americans think slightly differently from us, don’t they?

Interviewer: Perhaps, yes they may do.

MIKE: I mean, I'm always amused that Americans seem to take no holidays at all; the average American only takes ten days a year, which if you told anybody in England that they’d be mortified, wouldn't they?

Interviewer: But isn’t that about conditioning? People, once they accepted – the way they are conditioned?

MIKE: Well yes, the point is I really can’t answer that question; I have no idea.

Interviewer: So is there somebody else that you’ve experienced, that you’ve met, that you know, perhaps your partner?

MIKE: Well my partner, who I think is mentally tough because she’s a doctor and she has to dish out bad news –

Interviewer: So what do you think –

MIKE: She thinks I’m mentally tough.

Interviewer: So if we take your partner, for example, if you were to ask them the question, what characteristic – think of someone you know [s.l.] outside your partner, who you consider to be mentally tough. What do you think he or she would consider the characteristics –

MIKE: She’d say exactly what I said at the very start, that –

Interviewer: Well characteristics in the individual, not the actions –

MIKE: No, she thinks that my ability to take the ups and downs is admirable.

Interviewer: Yes but what are – but what would she say if she was to describe you then what are the characteristics? So she’d say you were resilient, she’d say you’ve got self belief –

MIKE: Laid back.
Interviewer: Laid back?

MIKE: I don't get upset easily.

Interviewer: Ah, right okay, so don’t get upset easily. These are the sorts of things that I’m interested in. So –

MIKE: I can’t ever recollect losing my temper.

Interviewer: Right, so don’t lose the temper; again people who aren’t mentally tough would –

MIKE: Lose it.

Interviewer: - would lose their temper, they’d lose it. Okay, what other attributes would you think she’d – or characteristics, if she had to describe yourself; you don’t lose your temper, you don’t get upset easily, you are laid back –

MIKE: Analyse a lot.

Interviewer: Would you say thoughtful or –

MIKE: Yes absolutely. I’m very empathetic, but then again – it’s not a sign of mental toughness you see.

Interviewer: Well no, but these things overlap. Let me just come back to this thoughtful – so you analyse a lot, so as a characteristic of somebody who is mentally tough then in the sense of you are thoughtful, you analyse a lot, what would the sort of contrast to that be with somebody who perhaps wasn’t mentally tough? What would they be – would they be thoughtless or –

MIKE: Irrational, they just do things off the top of their heads. You used the word reckless, it’s the same thing, reckless and irrationality are not dissimilar.

Interviewer: So you would say they take –

MIKE: They make decisions –

Interviewer: - people that are rational against people who are sort of almost reckless. Okay.
MIKE: Well probably. You could argue that Ranulph Fiennes trekking on his own to the South Pole is reckless.

Interviewer: Other people might find that, but do you think he thinks it is?

MIKE: No he didn’t, he never thought that, others might.

Interviewer: Why do you think he didn’t think it was reckless?

MIKE: Because he believed in his own ability, he thought he could do it.

Interviewer: So do you think he’s confident?

MIKE: Absolutely.

Interviewer: And do you think there’s a difference between confidence and self belief, or do you think it’s the same sort of thing?

MIKE: No, it’s one and the same thing.

Interviewer: Okay.

MIKE: Self belief is confidence, isn’t it? The same thing.

Interviewer: Okay. You talked about empathetic, so you think that people who are mentally tough are empathetic so –

MIKE: No I didn’t say that –

Interviewer: Okay.

MIKE: No, I never said that.

Interviewer: So do you think empathy plays a role in mental toughness?

MIKE: Not necessarily no.

Interviewer: So understanding of other people’s feelings –

MIKE: I think it’s a good trait for a leader, I don’t think you necessarily it to be mentally tough. You see Ranulph Fiennes may have completely dismissed
the amount of people it would have taken to rescue him if things had gone
tits up. The same as a lot of people that go climbing Snowdon in a pair of
plimsolls when there's snow on the ground, the have been careless and not
considered who's going to bail them out if things go wrong.

Interviewer So consideration of others, because empathy isn’t necessarily consideration
of others, it's more about – it's almost understanding the person’s situation.

MIKE All right, isn’t that what consideration is? I think the two are very
intertwined.

Interviewer Well I could understand that you are in a difficult position, but just
understanding it doesn’t mean that I have a positive or whether I’m
sympathetic or I’m empathetic, I might just understand it.

MIKE Well the word consideration could be used in two ways; it can be used as I
hae given you consideration, in other words I have been empathetic towards
you, but I might not have considered you significantly to do anything about
it. Okay, so consideration is a slightly ambiguous word in the English
language.

Interviewer Okay. So we’ll [s.l.] park empathy then, what are the characteristics – what
are the characteristics that, if we had asked your partner to say, what are
the things that make Mike mentally tough?

MIKE Well I told you, she admires the fact that I can take the kicks as well as the
plaudits; it's the same thing as saying taking the ups and downs.

Interviewer Yes, so we’ve talked about that and we’ve talked about your thoughtful,
consensual – are there any others? If we’ve explored them all –

MIKE Well as I said, I think the problem is with what you are doing is there is such
a lot of bolt-ons to that mental toughness, it's very difficult to isolate it on its
own.

Interviewer Okay.

MIKE As I say, I’m quite sure the Kray Twins were mentally tough, but they were
also psychotic –
Interviewer  But going round murdering people, do you think that’s mental toughness?

MIKE  Yes –

Interviewer  I would say they were extremely mentally weak. I would say that they were extremely weak, I would say they may well be tough individuals but mentally they couldn’t grasp the concept that murdering someone was wrong –

MIKE  No, that’s true because they were psychotic, but they were mentally tough enough to go and do it and continue to keep doing it.

Interviewer  But if –

MIKE  And not worry about the consequences.

Interviewer  So do you think mentally tough people don’t worry about the consequences?

MIKE  I think that’s a possible.

Interviewer  Okay.

Interviewer  I think mentally tough people who fall into the category of criminality, if you will, I’m happy that these people are mentally tough but they are cynical, have no empathy and have no morals.

Interviewer  So if we think about performing in the workplace, high performers, people who out perform others, do you think those individuals don’t worry about the consequences? Do you think –

MIKE  In a business sense I think somebody who is mentally tough will think about the consequences because that’s part of the decision making process, it’s all intertwined, so you minimise the risk, you actually listen to what other people say, you take the whole potpourri of everything and you then distil it in your head and think right, this is what I’m going to do.

Interviewer  And on the back of that do you also think then that perhaps they think about other people within those consequences and consider others?

MIKE  Not necessarily.
Interviewer  Okay, so give me an example perhaps of where people have or perhaps haven’t or where you have –

MIKE  Alan Sugar, if you read all the stories about Stella English etc, patently he gave her a job, £100,000 – that’s what the programme says; I suspect that she did have a bit of a gopher job that probably didn’t amount to much. So as far as the public was concerned he took her on, gave her a hundred grand bla, bla, bla; but it wasn’t that empathetic, because he probably didn’t care that much that she was bored shitless or wasn’t doing anything in particular. So I believe he’s mentally tough, bit time, but he’s not empathetic.

Interviewer  Okay, so Alan Sugar is someone you believe is mentally tough?

MIKE  I do, yes.

Interviewer  As an entrepreneur, in what he’s achieved, extremely successful, Lord Sugar etc. If we pop Alan Sugar into IBN –

MIKE  He wouldn’t last two days –

Interviewer  But he’s mentally tough –

MIKE  He could not exist in a bureaucracy.

Interviewer  So is it contextual for – so depending upon the situation, so if we took Ranulph Fiennes for example and put him into a day care nursery –

MIKE  He wouldn’t last either, he’s an anarchist.

Interviewer  So people’s mental toughness relates to their environment.

MIKE  To their context.

Interviewer  Their environment, their context. So certain people, mentally tough, in their environment, brilliant; the characteristics they have as an individual enable them to cope and perform, as Alan Sugar does, as Ranulph Fiennes does, in their own environment.
MIKE As I said, the Kray Twins were mentally tough in their context –

Interviewer Yes, so as a set of criminals they were better criminals and performed better as criminals –

MIKE Than other criminals.

Interviewer - because they were tougher, they could take tougher decisions than perhaps other criminals.

MIKE Exactly, that's why they got to where they were, victorious.

Interviewer That's an interesting perspective, yes; I see where you are coming from with regards to that one now.

MIKE Toughness transcends lots of things; in a business sense then you have to take the knocks, if you can't take the knocks you cannot be a good manager.

Interviewer Okay. Right I appreciate that –

MIKE It's just that I've got to pick a guy up at the airport, who is coming from Prague you see, so another quarter of an hour, is that all right?

Interviewer No, no, we won't even be that long. So do you think there are any particular attributes here that are specific to any situations or do you think – people need to be astute in these situations, we talked about taking decisions, delivering difficult messages; are there any specific sort of characteristics that we've described that you think in that situation you need this?

MIKE Well I come back to what we said right at the start; you have to take the knocks, you have to be able to listen, you have to be able to give bad news as and when it's appropriate.

Interviewer So listening –

MIKE You must not allow your arrogance or your ego to completely subsume your ability to run the company.
Interviewer: Right okay, so a final question then, and it’s probably in two parts – a little bit close in a sense, but do you – I’d like you to consider business men – do you think it’s a positive thing or –

MIKE: Sorry, what?

Interviewer: Do you think an individual being mentally tough within the work environment is it all positive or are there negative elements to it? You talked about this over arrogant – having a level of self belief but almost going too far, or if somebody is mentally tough –

MIKE: Well as I said to you, I’ve said it three of four times, mental toughness is like DNA, it’s like an atom, it has lots of things bolted onto it and those things that are bolted onto it can be destructive, so if you’ve got a bad gene then that eventually that bad gene will kill you. So if you are overly arrogant all the time inevitably you will fall off your perch.

Interviewer: But some things like being astute – can you be over astute?

MIKE: No, only to the point where if you are over – astuteness does require analysis and if you over analyse everything you can actually come to the point of paralysis. So if you analyse too much then you paralyse yourself and you don’t make a decision, so can do too much.

Interviewer: Again consensual, you can almost be too consensual and therefore you –

MIKE: You don’t come to a decision.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. So it’s almost there’s a negative and a positive end but almost there might be two negative ends in that you can almost go beyond the positive –

MIKE: A good analogy is drinking wine; if you listen to all the doctors they say that drinking two glasses of red wine a day is very good for you because you’ve got a lot of antioxidants, good for your health, bla, bla, bla. By the same token if you drink twenty glasses of wine you then get cirrhosis of the liver and you die like George Best. So it’s all about balance. If you’ve got a level of empathy, that’s good, if you’ve got a level of arrogance, that is good, if you’ve got too much you’ll kill yourself or you’ll kill the company.
Interviewer: Okay. Mike, thank you very much for that, it’s been very enlightening. Have you got any questions for me or anything we’ve not covered and you thought I thought he’d ask me about this, but he didn’t.

MIKE: No, I don’t think so. I’ve covered all the points I wanted to make.

Interviewer: So all the comments, people’s names if they are related directly to you, will be anonymised to –

MIKE: It’s not an issue; I’ve not got a problem, honestly.

Interviewer: And I will share the transcript with you.

MIKE: I just hope you get your DBA, mate.

Interviewer: Thank you, so do I, it’s been a long time coming. Hopefully it’s there.

MIKE: That’s why …
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (CRIS)

Topic: Business Mental Toughness

Date: 01/05/13

Interviewee: Cris

Interviewer: Okay, so the purpose of the research is that there's growing interest within business relating to the performance enhancing qualities of mental toughness. So originally described as the ability to cope with the stress and anxiety of competitive performance and trading better than others and it's widely considered the reason why certain athletes consistently outperform others, if not identical below sort of physical capabilities. So what we're interested in understanding is the characteristics of mentally tough business performers and does mental toughness exist within a work environment and if it does, what are the characteristics of those. So when we talk about mental toughness it's about those people that can cope with the, sort of, the stress and anxiety with the work place performance and the ones that sort of outperform others who are perhaps equally intelligent but it's the people who generally just cope better than others and, you know, what we would say is that those individuals are mentally tough and therefore what are the characteristics of those people, so people who you might describe as mentally tough. So first thing really is if I was to ask you the question around, so mental toughness, what does it mean to you? So if I use the analogy of a car, you know, you could describe a car having four wheels and an engine etc, etc or a car is something that takes you from A to B, so in a business perspective if we use the phrase mental toughness what would that, sort of elicit in your mind with regards to workplace performance?

CRIS: So mentally tough people –

Interviewer: Yeah.

CRIS: would be able to take a bit like you said, the stresses and the strains of everyday, kind of day to day stuff, as well as, I would have said there's probably two sides to it; normal day to day stuff, operational stuff plus the kind of managing your career and the witches politics, in my view. So mental toughness is, what are the different elements of it?
Interviewer: Rather than what the elements are, what does it mean?

CRIS: What is it?

Interviewer: Yeah, what’s the A to B bit, we’ll come on to the component?

CRIS: Mental toughness is the ability to outperform, to always get good results -

Interviewer: Okay.

CRIS: - in whatever situation is in front of you and to do that consistently and possibly against the odds I guess

Interviewer: Consistency, okay.

CRIS: Mental toughness is -

Interviewer: If we said they’re mentally tough, they can or they’re able to.

CRIS: Yeah, I would say mentally tough people would be able to kind of like meeting deadlines, so as in in that they could have some tough deadlines but they get there. Why do they get there, because they’re mentally tough, you know, other people could be incredibly clever and know exactly how to do things but because of the stresses and strains of people and all business is simple, it’s just people that get in the way, so maybe I’m coming round to mental toughness is the ability to manage people.

Interviewer: Okay.

CRIS: Just as personal view, business is simple, it really is, it really is simple; A+B=C but people get in the way and it’s the people you’ve got to manage and all the things that they fell up that you’ve got to be able to handle and still achieve your deadlines and your objectives.

Interviewer: Okay.

CRIS: I went off on one then, what was the original question?
Interviewer: No, so I mean it’s really to what you think mental toughness means in terms of the performance in the workplace and can you, sort of, give a definition phrase or quote to describe it, which you have done. And that’s great because within this there’s no right or wrong answer, so they’re using personal construct psychology it’s your view, you’re right in your view, I want to know what your opinion is.

CRIS: I think mental toughness is being able to take the knockbacks; mental toughness is being able to bounce back. Mental toughness is being able to keep on going when others would just say, do you know what, f**k this, I’m out of it. Mental toughness I think is being able to know where they want to get to and get there somehow, by hook or by crook and they get there. That’s kind of an element, a kind of belligerence in it but they get, it’s not just belligerent, it’s against the odds; they achieve things against the odds.


CRIS: Mentally tough is, I guess it’s kind of staying on message, as in staying on your path, not being pushed.

Interviewer: Focussed would you say?

CRIS: Yeah focussed; understanding the path that they want or the direction that they’re going or what this job in hand needs or what is his or her career needs or whatever the situation demands and not getting deflected.

Interviewer: So people who lack mental toughness get deflected, get side tracked.

CRIS: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Have you sort of, you know, experienced people doing that?

CRIS: Yeah, I think most of the public sector are deflected.

Interviewer: So you think the public sector is an environment where people aren’t particularly mentally tough as opposed to other parts of business?

CRIS: No, I would disagree, I would argue against myself there; I think there’s loads of people, I think to be successful in the public sector you don’t necessarily need to be mentally tough. However, there are people I can
think of where I am in Warrington where people are mentally tough in a
different way, maybe not on a business level but they’re mentally tough on
the political side of staying on they’re very good at, maybe it’s just pure
politics, as in small politics. But I guess there’s mental toughness in that,
being able to play that game, yeah.

Interviewer Okay, so that brings us on nicely to the next question and the next question
relates to situations that require mental toughness and we just mentioned
the politics piece and the, you know, individuals ability to, sort of, play the
game. In your experience, what aspects of the work environment that
you’ve sort of been exposed to or a result, you know, resulting in people
performing poorly and others perhaps performing well due to the way in
which those individuals have coped with the, sort of, stress and pressure of
the work environment. And where I’d like to focus on in, sort of, individuals
that you believe may be mentally tough and what situations within a work
environment require mental toughness. So, you know, are there certain
things that you’ve experienced people doing, you’ve done or you’ve thought,
you know, and you’ve described the political piece, the small but are there
other things that you think, you need to be tough to do that or you need the
level of mental toughness to do it? Doesn’t have to be -

CRIS I think the, it’s interesting because I think, I mean on my personal, on my
own personal experience you see I think I am mentally tough. Why;
because I have, I can take things that people just could not imagine
achieving and I can achieve it.

Interviewer Yeah.

CRIS I can go up against the odds and put in a beautiful piece of work. Working
within the public sector you need to, as a consultant in the public sector,
working with the bag of s**e that you need to and you can quote me in that,
that requires mental toughness otherwise you’ve just got to, you can’t, you
get dealt c**p and c**p and more c**p and you’ve got to be mentally tough
and maybe that’s where belligerence comes in or tenacity is one of the
elements of it, you’ve just got to keep going and you find a different way of
answering, asking the same question. And then if you need to you go to
their boss and if you need to you find other ways of getting to it, the
information if you then have to cut out that person because you’re getting
nothing, you have to find another way of getting what you needed to to get
to.
Interviewer So one of the aspects then would be, you know, mentally tough people who are able to get the things that they need and don’t give up.

CRIS Yeah and they don’t just stick to plan A, they’ll try all the different avenues. It’s almost like, well I’m getting the information and I’m going to the obvious source, if I’m not going to get that I’ll try something else. If I’m not going to get there I’ll go somewhere else; I’m not giving in.

Interviewer Yeah. So the opposite of that people, you know –

CRIS Classic public sector as well, you know, I did this and nobody, they wouldn’t give me the information, I’m just waiting for it. You know and you get nothing done.

Interviewer Is that not mostly, sort of, blame other people then, do you think, you know, there’s - ?

CRIS Yeah, no it’s abdication; just abdicate, they’re just not brought into the bigger picture of achieving something, they’re just into their little microcosm and they tried something, it didn’t work, that’s not their fault, they crack on with something else.

Interviewer So there is the level of persistency so –

CRIS Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer Which is different almost to tenacity would you say?

CRIS I think that me, for me they’re like, they’re the same thing.

Interviewer Right, so the opposite of persistent you would say is that –

CRIS The opposite of persistence is just giving in, easily giving in.

Interviewer Right, and is there a level of, you know, when you talk about persistence and tenacity, is there almost an energy there that you’ve talked about so this drive?
CRIS Yes because, yes absolutely, because and I'll come and talk about why and there are times where I think people would say well you're not mentally tough. But in these situations, yes I've been mentally tough; why am I mentally tough, because I just have this f*****g drive within me that says I'm not giving in. I'm not sure how the odds are against me but f**k them, you know, I'm not giving in, I'm going to deliver. And that could come from a perfectionism that I have and it could come from a big and I'm managing this a lot better but in my career up until a few years ago I truly, truly cared deeply about what people thought of me. And there was a big, massive thing and that is the source, that's where if you have a little star, an asterisk because that's the source of why in other situations I've had the most horrendous time in my life.

Interviewer Right.

CRIS So people might say, if they looked at me and heard about these things where, that well, like specifically Johnson and Johnson when they killed me and, you know, I had to take a year off from being f*****g depressed and having been on the sick etc, etc and then broken me to the extent that my memory went, why was that; it was because I had an inability to say no. Where does that come from; because I was, I didn't want to let people down. To turn that around, maybe part of mental toughness is the ability to say no, is the ability to see things clearly, maybe the mental toughness is having a very well balanced portfolio of skills and without one big gap, without any kind of dangerous gaps. I had, my dangerous gap was, as my dad says, the ability to say no; even when they're asking the impossible of me and I kind of, so you know they wanted me to do, to achieve the impossible launching a new product all by myself with no support and every time I achieved what they'd asked they'd just layer on again and again and I just couldn't say, woah, woah, stop; this is killing me. I can't do this, you've got to help me or –

Interviewer But is that also, within that sorry is that an element of self preservation, do you think at the time perhaps you lacked a bit of self preservation, it was almost -?

CRIS No absolutely, it's an awareness of, there was an awareness of, was there an awareness, you see it's happened to me before. This was the biggest one but, this was the biggest that damaged me physically and mentally at
the time but, what was your, say that point again. Rewind that back because it was good, rewind that back.

Interviewer   Hang on, let me just, I can’t remember how to wind it back. Hopefully, oh no. Sorry, self preservation –

CRIS          Yes, you lose, I lost –

Interviewer   Did you lose the perspective of self preservation?

CRIS          Absolutely, it absolutely went to fight of, it was almost, it went to almost kind and I’m going to say, exaggerate, primal kind of instincts and it was, but it was kind of lost, I just went almost day to day survive, day to day, it wasn’t, there was no ability to step back and see the bigger picture, I lost it completely. I also didn’t have anyone to, that supported me and I wonder whether mental toughness actually, an element of that is having somebody that watches you from outside, you know, a coach, a mentor or just a friend or a partner or a, you know, being I was single at the time, do you know what I mean? So it’s having a network around you maybe, mental toughness is having support yourself. Do you want to -?

Interviewer   No I’m alright.

CRIS          Did you want a kitchen towel?

Interviewer   I’ll use that pen. Okay so we’ve got quite a few things here, I’m just trying to put them into little groups of things to discuss as we move forward. I like the balance portfolio of skills without a dangerous gap and I suppose people who can, it’s almost are mentally tough. Take Tiger Woods, take Lance Armstrong, you know, mentally tough but there’s a bit where actually they lack something and they go and do something that is disastrous and very destructive. Not necessarily purposefully at the time and again, for some people it can be that they’re put into roles that they can’t cope with, you know, they can cope with lots of different roles, give them one that they can’t cope with and they crumble because actually they lack some of the skills. And what I’m trying to, all the characteristics within them, they don’t have some of those skills for that particular role and therefore it’s what drives that.
CRIS: I didn't have managing upwards, that’s what I didn’t have which was, that, in effect that’s my way of saying what my dad was saying about being able to say no. I didn’t know how to manage upwards.

Interviewer: So, you know, the ability to manage upwards is something that mentally tough people have.

CRIS: I think so.

Interviewer: And then obviously those who can’t manage upwards just say yes.

CRIS: They get, those that can’t manage upwards don’t control as much of their destiny as they should or could, not should, could. Might, might be better for them or maybe that’s what mentally tough people do do, they’re able to see the bigger picture and do the detail at the same time.

Interviewer: Yeah so is that perspective which you talked about earlier I think?

CRIS: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did we mention perspective? Oh no we didn’t, so that’s a new one.

CRIS: But it is, it’s having that outer, the bigger perspective.

Interviewer: So big to small –

CRIS: At the same time.

Interviewer: At the same time, so mentally weaker, they –

CRIS: Which is what other people can give, can make, when you get stuck in the detail –

Interviewer: Yeah, they can pull you out.

CRIS: Yeah. I’ve always said, when I was at Whitbread I even went to the marketing director and said, look it would make a lot more sense if we worked in partnerships. So if I had, in buddies and then because we all get stuck into things, really deep, passionately into things but sometimes we’re off in a slightly wrong direction or we just haven’t got our head up to be able
to see where we might, things have changed. And actually we've been swimming that way beautifully but actually things have changed and we need to go the other way. And partners who are in slightly different, in the marketing department, all the different sub departments, you have a partner in one that's slightly different, yeah.

Interviewer Okay. So you described some of the things before and you said in these situations I was mentally tough and I delivered these; what were those situations?

CRIS Where I was mentally tough?

Interviewer Yeah, you know, was it delivering a presentation, was it delivering a project, was it - ?

CRIS It's funny because at the same time as I was having a f*****g breakdown and being pushed to the nth degree and then having that breakdown, I delivered one of the best pieces of work I've ever delivered. And that was the, I call it the perfect plan and that's, its partly why I do business planning now, because I went up, I was launching a new product and I went in to the board at Janssen-Cilag; pharmaceutical division of Johnson and Johnson here in the UK and everybody, it was the annual business planning and everybody has to go in front of the board and they're important people like the finance people, present their plan. And it's typically a nasty experience and people, the MD would have his fun with you and then he would hand over to a worse experience which was the FD. I got in there and I did was what, well just sensible and that's what I do at the moment, I go out, find out what best practice is, come back and put it into action. And so I went out and talked to people about their experiences, put it all together, put my plan together, went in, delivered the plan, had handled all the objections that were likely to come. The MD's just said, great, John to the FD and the FD went, no, can't think of anything and it, totally unheard of. But f**k that was knackering to there, I mean it was the perfect plan so I was mentally tough to get there against all the odds but I delivered it, but it nearly broke me as well. So at the time, mentally tough to deliver but let's say that two month, three month period, but put me at the two years I was at Janssen-Cilag, mentally tough in the big picture, given that I'd joined and was hoping that I, you know, I was on the NBA, I'd joined as an NBA because I was on the fast track. You know, this happened the other, my vision was to be living in Spain in four years time as this, that or whatever, you know, the world was
my oyster; didn’t happen. Why didn’t it happen; because over the two to three year kind of timeframe I wasn’t mentally tough? Put me on a project, totally mentally tough; my definition, my words, yeah, you’ll come to –

Interviewer  Yeah, that’s fine.

CRIS Yeah so there’s, yeah, that’s why I truly believe I’m mentally tough but I totally get it that I have not achieved what I might have done. So am I mentally tough; I don’t know.

Interviewer  Just going back to the project, whilst you, is there a, sort of, almost an exhaustion at the end that you almost, do you think perhaps you, you were too tough, you pushed yourself too far so your brain worked further than perhaps the rest of your body could go and, or, sort of over confident in that sort of sense?

CRIS  No, not at all, it’s the opposite; it was like a lot of self doubt from me.

Interviewer  Was it neurotic then, were you almost, was there a lot of neuroticism in that and a lot of that self doubt drove you harder?

CRIS  No the self doubt I had, this is why I think, you know, I faced some impossible situations, it’s as simple as, it doesn’t sound impossible now when I say it but, you know, to go in thinking you’ve achieved something by you’ve achieved what people wanted on the Friday at a lunchtime meeting to be told, oh yeah but what we want as well is this, this and this. Why the f**k didn’t you tell me about that; oh and we need it for Monday. So you dig and your immediate thing is how the f**k do I do that, it’s impossible, so I’d just do it over the weekend and get it done, achieve the impossible. But that’s not, so I had self doubt to begin with you and you just put it to one side; I can’t cope with that feeling, I can’t, yes I’m anxious, yes I don’t know how I’m going to do this but f**k it, right I’ll just do it.

Interviewer  So mentally tough people can put self doubt to one side but there’s –

CRIS  You compartmentalise it, box it off.

Interviewer  That’s interesting; other people have used that word.

CRIS  I mean that’s NLP type thing, you just –
Interviewer: Yeah, the people who have mentioned it to be fair aren’t NLP people though so, you know, this concept of being able to, from a cognitive perspective, put things in different places and deal with them in perhaps different priorities.

CRIS: And I think you, also you can box it off, one of the abilities to box it off is to say, look it absolutely seems impossible but you know you’ve done this sort of thing before. So there’s a, you’ve got a disbelief in the situation but you actually got a fundamental belief in yourself; I know I can do this, I can do it.

Interviewer: So self belief.

CRIS: It is self belief, it’s hard born, you’ve done it before you can do it again.

Interviewer: So that comes out of experience –

CRIS: Absolutely, yeah.

Interviewer: What if you hadn’t had the experience, what about you, you know, you’re confident –

CRIS: No brilliant, going back to, you know, when I first started careers and my first career, yeah doing those things, what drove me then.

Interviewer: Is it a self belief in you can do anything?

CRIS: I’ve always believed I can do anything, just one of my phrases is I can do anything, just give me enough time.

Interviewer: Yeah and almost those who were, who you know, when you go into a situation where you’ve not done it before, those people who lack perhaps a bit of mental toughness, they would, you know, what would the opposite of I can do anything, it’s not so much that they can’t, I can’t do anything, perhaps –

CRIS: I can only do so much and then that’ll be.

Interviewer: Yeah is it about capability or, again self doubt, is that the omen of self doubt that would come out there?
CRIS  The opposite, yeah.

Interviewer  Okay. I'm going to move us on because we've got loads of stuff to, sort of, try and pull together, onto the next question. So the next question relates, I'd like you to think about people who you consider to be mentally tough.

CRIS  Yeah.

Interviewer  Now I know you've mentioned one in the previous focus group with Lindsay and what I'd like you to, sort of, think about in relation to people who are mentally tough, I'd like you to consider, you know, the analogy I would give is, you know, if I wanted to describe the perfect, the ideal golfer I wouldn't necessarily say it was Tiger Woods. There might be aspects in what Tiger Woods does but he's perhaps not the best; he's not always the best putter, he's not the best driver, you know, he might not be the best person in front of the press so I might someone with a bit of charisma. So there are things that you'd sort of say, yeah he's all round as an individual, he's got the best package but actually if I could take a bit from –

CRIS  Oh yeah, kind of an ideal.

Interviewer  Yeah, so what, so is the ideal business performer, what are the characteristics you think that individual might need?

CRIS  So an ideal business performer, not necessarily mentally tough?

Interviewer  Well someone who can cope with the stress and pressure so, you know, the ideal mentally tough business performer; what are the characteristics that you think that individual might need or might have, and again you can base it on people that you've seen and experienced. So, you know, you've described Lindsay so what are the characteristics that Lindsay had that you think, that's what makes him tough, he can do these things?

CRIS  I don't know if this, I think there are some basics and I think the basics, I think basically they have an intelligence, I think they have an academic intelligence. Let's see, I've never even (inaudible 31:14), let's see, I think they'll have an academic intelligence, I think they have social intelligence, I think they have then we call it corporate intelligence and I think they have self intelligence such as self awareness, yeah self awareness.
Interviewer: And that's almost sort of moving into emotional intelligence.

CRIS: Yeah, I mean I was thinking of emotional intelligence which I'm kind of putting that into my words of self intelligence and social intelligence; yeah, emotional intelligence, absolutely emotional intelligence, yeah.

Interviewer: Because one of the things you talked about here was this sort of care about and think about other, cared about what people think –

CRIS: No emotional intelligence is absolutely in there, yeah, it's absolutely critical. I think that, I think you can be a very good performer but to be performer plus, plus, plus takes emotional intelligence -

Interviewer: And is that, so what –

CRIS: - and if you rank, if you by performance you mean ability to go through an organisation which is a whole new thing is the ability to get promotions part of mental toughness or can you be mentally tough just without getting promotions.

Interviewer: People can sit at a –

CRIS: Exactly.

Interviewer: I think people who consistently perform quite often can be promoted and that maybe part of the problem in they're consistently performing, it's like taking a footballer and saying, you're a great footballer, go and play cricket; I can't play cricket. I'm a great footballer and I'm fit and can run around, you know, I can kick a ball but I might not be able to catch it. So when we say emotional intelligence, so if we, that's an interesting one to bring in because obviously it's been researched quite a bit but if we said that people who are mentally tough were emotionally intelligent, what's the opposite of emotional intelligence then in your view; how might it manifest?

CRIS: People who don't manage their emotions and they will react to the stimulus without thought, so they react very quickly, very kind of innately without having thought things through, without having considered options, without having thought through consequences.
Interviewer: So is, so thoughtfulness an element that you would associate then with people who are mentally tough? They think things through.

CRIS: I think so, yes, they’re absolutely thoughtful as in, but intelligently, they think things through intelligently.

Interviewer: Are they rational?

CRIS: What I was thinking about thoughtful there is analytically, not necessarily to fine degree but they’re able to break things up and understand the situation and the different ways that this situation might play out; if I do this then that, if I did this then that. Do you see what I mean?

Interviewer: Oh right, so they understand the consequence of things.

CRIS: Yes exactly and they’ve thought it through, yeah.

Interviewer: And those who –

CRIS: And people who, the classic thing these year, these days with email, the worst thing about email is getting stuck into, a bit like you were just saying earlier, getting into a situation by email, having an argument by email, reacting to emails quickly without thought. And it’s suddenly balloons, snowballs out of control and you’re all over the place and then you’re not, it’s just not being discussed about what the actual issues were, do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Yes.

CRIS: Mentally tough people can stop where they need to and draw back.

Interviewer: So we’ve, I’m trying to think of a word that might describe that, perhaps in a negative way rather than, so there’s almost a thoughtfulness but there’s also a, is it, it’s almost like a lack of care and attention, it’s a –

CRIS: What the opposite?

Interviewer: Yeah, people who –
It’s a lack of thought, it’s a lack of insight, it’s just a lack of thinking ahead, a lack of what the consequence is, a lack of boundaries, a lack of anything other than just reacting to their immediate emotional urges. Out of control in some ways.

So, you know, people who are mentally tough are in control of their emotions, their behaviour.

Yeah and there’s something about being able to...options, appraise, options announces scenario planning that they can do really quite quickly in their head just given the level of the situation ahead of them they can do that instantly or they take the time to do it properly.

Yeah, okay. Any other things that, you know, if you take Lindsay as your example, anything striking about him that you think, you know, part of his character, his make up?

He just, his character, I mean the guy is super intelligent, that helps.

Yeah, does that breed the confidence and the self belief?

Yeah exactly, you know, and there is something there, I don’t think it’s an element of mental toughness in itself but, you know, he just reads something once and he knows it, that is just a benefit, I don’t think that necessarily mental toughness but it just helps. And so he just self belief, self confidence, he knows his stuff, he has focussed, you know, he was, he did sales and now he’s a sales trainer. He is an amazing, you know, he’s now training people in selling around the world for thousands a day and it’s his consultancy that has been, now been brought out by WPP. Do you see, now he is mentally tough, why is he mentally tough; he’s –

You picked you know some words to describe him –

Yeah I’m just trying to think, he’s just calm, he’s calm, he’s considered, he doesn’t do stress so, you know, he doesn’t work all the hours, you know, he does what’s required.

Does he know when to switch off?

Yeah.
Interviewer: And what would you say, what sort of skill or characteristic of an individual, is that when they know when to switch off; is he measured or, you know, what would the opposite be, what would the opposite be to someone who knows when to switch off? Is it someone who just continually drives themselves forward?

CRIS: Now what is it, it's the ability to know what's needed and don't do any more or –

Interviewer: So that's great because I want to bring in this content, you mentioned this perfectionism and what I'm interested in understanding is you –

CRIS: Maybe they're not perfectionists because I am.

Interviewer: And do you think that might be where you didn't know when to switch off?

CRIS: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Right, so almost knows when to switch off is, the opposite is almost, could be perfectionists.

CRIS: It's funny because and maybe you'll find this, there are some elements of mental toughness that will work for you and against you in different situations. So perfectionism has worked for me and it works for me in my field because I get excellent results and I said people come back and –

Interviewer: So the output is better than others and therefore your performance –

CRIS: So people, I haven't done one bit of advertising, people have always come to me just as I'm thinking, oh do you know what, maybe I should do some networking, maybe I should go and knock on a door; I've never had to. And I think that's because I give such, the quality of my work is excellent which is driven by my perfection because a good consultant knows the questions to ask and knows what he wants to get and he doesn't quite know how to get there but do you know what, I know what I want and I'm not there yet. I've got an answer, I could work with this but I don't, I want more. So I think –

Interviewer: Well is there a sort of level of danger that sits with perfection?
CRIS: There is absolutely because you dot the I’s and cross the T’s but not necessarily when you necessarily need to.

Interviewer: It can add additional stress and pressure that may not have been there before do you think? Do you almost, there’s an element of stress and pressure in a situation and then your perfectionism adds a bit more.

CRIS: It’ll add to it.

Interviewer: I can be a compounding factor that if it is a very stressful situation, almost push you, could potentially push you beyond your capability.

CRIS: I’ve always said, I mean I can’t remember when I came up with this but through a period of (inaudible 41:58) I came up with beware of your strengths, they may be your weaknesses as well. And that is, perfectionism is a strength for me, but it’s a weakness and I am now so self aware I am aware of it and I control it.

Interviewer: Yeah, so that’s back to the self awareness you talked about before, so –

CRIS: Yeah which is emotional intelligence as well, it all wrapped into that.

Interviewer: So it’s almost that, sort of, people who are confident, being over confident; I can do anything and actually you can’t necessarily do everything.

CRIS: I would be wary about not taking I can do everything as a good thing because I’ve always felt that and it’s always worked for me.

Interviewer: Well there’s that level of confidence isn’t there, but there’s also a pragmatism that says and as you said earlier on, I might not know how to do it but I’ll work out how to do it.

CRIS: Yeah, that’s pragmatic.

Interviewer: So it’s not that you, so there’s a pragmatism there that says well actually I don’t, I know I can eventually do everything rather than I can do everything.

CRIS: No absolutely, yeah I’ve always said give me enough time and I can do anything.
Interviewer: Yeah, so there's almost a –

CRIS: I'll learn it.

Interviewer: - there's confidence and then against that would you say that perhaps there's almost, there's a level of blind confidence or -

CRIS: Yes exactly, the blind confidence, actually I do know somebody who seems to have blind confidence and it's just, he's a bit of an idiot.

Interviewer: I have a friend who's like that, you know, he thinks he can play tennis and he'll go for the winning shot every time and we call him one in 20 –

CRIS: Because he gets it one in 20.

Interviewer: One in 20 times, now Rafa Nadal would get it 20 out of 20, Roger Federer would get it 20 out of 20. Rob on the other hand gets it one in 20 and the other 19 he loses the point so to actually when you look at him as a tennis player he's pretty c**p. But every now and then he can hit a great shot but he has this blind confidence that every time he goes to hit it and playing tennis with him is a nightmare.

CRIS: Yeah.

Interviewer: So what about the person you know that's got this sort of blind confidence; is it sporting or is it business or -?

CRIS: No it's business but, or is it blind confidence? He seems to have blind confidence but he is actually, he's driven by other things, he's driven to act successfully because his brother has built a business and sold it, multimillionaire, his dad did that and he feels he should do it and so he –

Interviewer: Does he think he's gained confidence because of their, do you think it breeds? Because you talked before about –

CRIS: No, do you know what it is, I may be confusing myself actually, he's more of a conman. You know those people, because he's not that good at what he does but he does do good stuff, he seems to be successful.

Interviewer: Does he cope with the stress and pressure?
CRIS  I don’t know him that well actually.

Interviewer  Does he perform consistently and consistently well? As a conman, he could be a good conman.

CRIS  Yeah you see I think he’s mentally tough as a conman, he’s a business conman. He somehow gets people to pay him when he’s a completely average performer; in the quality of his work he’s completely average. But he –

Interviewer  His ability to self promote.

CRIS  Exactly and blag and to get people to pay him stupid amounts of money and when he moves from office to big office and his overheads has just doubled, he somehow gets his, he somehow blags it to his customers that they need to pay him more.

Interviewer  So do you think they’re influential, because I would describe that as they’re influential, he has influence? Do you think people who are mentally, because you talked before about the ability to manage people.

CRIS  Yeah.

Interviewer  Now be that employees or customers or, you know, if you think about a sales environment which we both worked in, is it a, you know - ?

CRIS  Well you see I’m kind of thinking of mentally tough, mentally tough is something that goes on with inside you.

Interviewer  But then you talked earlier on about ability to manage people and you talked about care about –

CRIS  So it’s what’s behind that, so the ability to manage people, what’s behind that is something that’s within them. An ability to manage people is something that you see, underneath that, what are the elements of that that makes someone, that is mental toughness. I think that is the, what is it, the ability to...

Interviewer  Because that’s what you made me think when we started to talk just –
Interviewer: Yeah, this individual is able to win, because I mean in sales that's the job, your job is to go and get the customer to buy your product. But everyone is a sales person, you know, when you're in management you've got to get people to follow you, you know, to do the things you want them to do, perhaps to do the things they don't want to do, you know, that might well be the definition of leadership but you've got to be able to influence people. And I was really interested in this sort of, you know, care about what people think, ability to manage people that perhaps actually very different to a sporting environment where almost the influence you want on people is a negative influence if it's a football match. Even if you play something like darts or snooker, you know, you want to be able to influence even, you know, more in a mental way the other person, you can't blow their dart out the way, you can't shake the table but you almost want to create pressure on them to, you almost want to influence them, sort of, psychic, from a mental perspective, whatever against, you know, another footballer, a tennis player, there is a physical, you know, you can out power, whereas in those sorts of sports you can't. So that's what came up to me in my mind when you started talking, but what ability to manage other people, what are the skills or characteristics of an individual and if you said Lindsay for example, back to Lindsay, what is it about Lindsay that helps you, using the ability to manage people perhaps better than others?

CRIS: He speaks, he has such self belief and self confidence and such ability in what he does, so one of the basic building blocks is being actually good at what you do, do you know, you do have to be good at what you do. This guy, this other guy, the conman, what he's good at is blagging, see what I mean? Not necessarily his work but Lindsay is excellent at sales, he's done it, he is an excellent salesman himself. So when he talks to people he has that self belief, that self, it's when I crossed from the pubs division to the beer division, nobody could tell me because I'd been in pub management stuff, no one could tell me anything about pubs; running pubs, about retail in the beer division, nobody could. And then my customers were in pubs, they couldn't tell me anything, you know and it's an immense confidence and a very relaxed innate, I know my stuff with, which comes across and helps you to manage people. I mean there is, I think that kind of comes across in that sixth sense sort of a way where people can tell that you get it, that you know it and they can't blag you.
Interviewer: The confidence, so on the confidence bit, do you think it’s contagious because his ability to manage other people and you talked about, you know, from a sales perspective I, you know, I describe myself as conman because my job is to make people confident in whatever I’m selling.

CRIS: Yeah.

Interviewer: So do you think there’s almost a -?

CRIS: In some ways, sales is part of mental toughness, possibly because you can be mentally tough but if you’re linking mental toughness with high performance then you need to interact with other people. You can be mentally tough but you’ve achieved nothing or your performance is average or –

Interviewer: There are very few roles where you would perform on your own –

CRIS: Yeah.

Interviewer: - in business. I mean sport, there’s lots of things you can perform on your own –

CRIS: Yeah, no that’s intriguing actually; yeah the battle is within your own mind. Like golf, it is 20% technical, 80% mental so mental toughness really matters and everything. In the business world there are very few roles that you do and it’s just you and your output, you have to work with others. So you’ve got to be mentally tough within yourself and then you’ve got to manage or you’ve got to be mentally tough on your subject matter and you’ve got to be mentally tough with people. You achieve nothing other than getting things done through people; above you, at your same level and below you. And so it’s how, if you’re understanding of people, it’s your ability to, it’s quite sales really, you’re everything that you want somebody to do, whether you’re delegating or sharing or managing upwards, downwards or sideways, you’re selling. And good sales listens well, understands what the objections are, clarifies, summarises, overcomes and plays back so that people just find it hard to say no because, you know, you’ve sold it to them.

Interviewer: So it’s almost get mentally tough people who are able, they get people to say yes?
CRIS  It’s not, they’re not the only ones that can get people to say yes, but yes.

Interviewer  What I’m really, you know, one of the things that’s interesting I think and one of he things I’m looking at is the differences, you know. Is sporting mental toughness and business mental toughness the same and should we be, you know, teaching people, supporting mental toughness which is what a lot of people do or should we be actually saying –

CRIS  There are differences.

Interviewer  - there are differences and these are the differences, actually you know, some aspects of sport in mental toughness, destructive within certain work environments and then –

CRIS  Well yeah because you look at Tévez , so you might say football, a subject dear to my heart, or rugby, you have to be mentally tough to make a team. But then is there a mental toughness which is team orientated that group, a mental toughness to enable you to achieve, it’s the classic presentation, classic kind of presentation; selection weekend programme, where you’re given a task that you’ve got to achieve your own task but also the group’s task. And that could be the big difference, I get mental toughness with the golfer, absolutely but Tévez was all about himself and the big I am, mentally tough himself and achieved some amazing things. But was actually destructive within the team. And do you know what’s happened, I think Tévez is, personal performances since he’s been pulled into the team and the group, I think his personal performances aren’t as electric as they used to be.

Interviewer  So what would you say the, sorry, the characteristics are there, what’s he lacked or gained depending upon how you look at it? You know, you could also look at it from a team perspective but, you know, has he, you know, is there a level of benevolence, is it, you know, and then therefore do you look at the team performance and measure the team performance against the individual, what’s important then from the football? Because if he was destructive when he thought about just himself and he was constructive, might not have been as good as he was but obviously he wasn’t in the team, so having him just thinking about me means he’s not in the team.
CRIS: I know, it’s bizarre isn’t it. Part of me is wondering whether just to go off, I don’t know if I’m going off at a tangent but is it that actually mental toughness is an individual thing, it goes on inside your head and it is just like Tiger Woods and golf. But then is there something about in a work situation, a team mental toughness, a group and that could be a group of you and an individual that you’re working with or you and a team and you could, maybe you’re a member of different teams with different mental toughness’s and maybe you perform well because you put yourself, because you’re mentally tough inside yourself you’ve put yourself in the right groups.

Interviewer: That’s an interesting point, that’s slightly different that. So mentally tough people put themselves into the right –

CRIS: Are good at placing themselves.

Interviewer: - into the right groups. Because one of the things you talked about earlier on was this, sort of, management of people but what about, do you mean interaction with people?

CRIS: Yes; managing the situation with the person so they’re managing the interaction.

Interviewer: Because that brings in, you know, a number of different things such as, you know, their self belief, their ability to influence, how they relax their emotional intelligence, all of those things would come together in a situation. And how you then manage that situation, you know, if you manage it positively can you create confidence in somebody else and give them confidence and transfer confidence or transfer self belief and therefore that has a positive impact as opposed to perhaps in sport where you’re looking to almost shatter the confidence of your opponent.

CRIS: I don’t know if I’m helping or hindering any of your hypothesis but at the moment, my head is that mental toughness is within yourself and that what we’re talking about now are behaviours that enable a mentally tough person to perform well and that that’s separate.

Interviewer: Right, okay. So it’s the characteristics of the individual, how is that individual characterised and the behaviours, you know, are a set of things that we would describe against people, you know, someone’s persistent.
You know, we’ve described that people compartmentalise, you know, you could describe it as almost as cognitive behaviour. So I think it’s, personally I think it’s quite difficult to separate the behaviours because you’re inextricably linked to the behaviour.

CRIS Yeah, no hold on I know what you’re saying; mentally tough people so if I’m there and I’m mentally tough, to get the performance I need, I need other, in a business situation I’ll typically need other people.

Interviewer So you’ll need to behave in a way but perhaps you also need to get other people to behave in a certain way.

CRIS Yeah and my mental toughness is where, it’s not just mental toughness in controlling myself its, and what goes on inside me and what I do but it's a mental toughness in, applied to getting other people to do things and to get the results you need out of other people. And that isn’t about you managing yourself, it is about you managing other people and it’s kind of very related but it’s different; does that make -?

Interviewer Yeah.

CRIS It’s kind of, you need a set of skills to manage yourself, you need a self of skills to manage other people and they’re very related. But actually you could say they’re different as well and it could be a similar skill and if you’re good in one it means you’re probably going to be able to manage other people because you’re good at managing yourself.

Interviewer Yeah and does that rub off in a sense, you know, does confidence rub off, does leadership rub off, does persistence rub off, does perfectionism rub off? So one of the things I have with my team is the attention to detail and I continually pick them up on it, you know, and I’ll pick up my pace and, you know, if things are aligned in a presentation, you know, I call it my sort of, almost work OCD. I mean frankly, you know, things can be a mess –

CRIS It's having standards.

Interviewer - and I have a chaotic brain so periodically when I deliver things though it has to be ordered, almost an even number of things, almost –

CRIS Yeah, I wonder whether –
Interviewer: And that rubs off.

CRIS: Does it rub off? I think you teach people, you’re right, I think like what you were talking about there is you are setting a standard and a mental toughness is not settling for less. So, you know, I think it’s a, I mean at Johnson and Johnson we had well dressed slides, slides had to be presented with a certain level of detail and professionalism and if they weren’t they were below standard. So mental toughness, you being mentally tough are not giving in, when you’re stripping off I don’t know but they are going to deliver to your standard.

Interviewer: And it’s the influence on others that –

CRIS: I think because people are inspired, like Lindsay is very, what’s the phrase –

Interviewer: Inspiring.

CRIS: He’s very inspiring, he just is.

Interviewer: Inspirational.

CRIS: And somebody who, sort of, isn’t inspirational, rather than using the word isn’t inspirational, how might you describe somebody who is, you know, do we think people who are inspirational –

CRIS: Unengaging.

Interviewer: Unengaging. So it’s almost that people who are mentally tough have the ability to engage.

CRIS: With others.

Interviewer: Or can you be –?

CRIS: No I think the mental toughness is not giving in until you have engaged. The ability to engage does not mean you are mentally tough, you can engage with people but give in and you’re not achieve things but you’ve engaged with somebody. But on the bigger picture you just didn’t get there
because you’re not mentally tough. But I think mentally tough people don’t give in until they have engaged.

Interviewer    Yeah, right.

CRIS    And there’s a certain element of perfectionism in there, we’ve just talked about standards, meeting certain, you don’t give in until you’ve got that standard that’s required. A perfectionist doesn’t quite, goes all the way for everything, a pragmatic perfectionist which I am now understands what standards are required, won’t settle for less but doesn’t necessarily over specify when he needs to.

Interviewer    Okay.

CRIS    He’d ideally love to but he holds back.

Interviewer    Alright, if you’d have asked Lindsay, so if you’d have, you know, imagine you’re Lindsay and we asked the question, what do you think the characteristics of a mentally tough business performer are. You know, so think of Lindsay who you consider to be mentally tough; what do you think he will consider the characteristics or attributes of a mentally tough person would be?

CRIS    My immediate thought is that he wouldn’t be able to answer that question.

Interviewer    Alright, why’s that?

CRIS    I think he just does it innately.

Interviewer    So do you think he’s mentally tough without knowing that he’s mentally tough?

CRIS    Yeah, I think if you ask him he’d go, yeah I am, yeah but he –

Interviewer    But then if you asked him that question and you said to him, well what’s it about you then, what’s it about your character that makes you mentally tough; what do you think he would say?
CRIS: Fundamentally he’d say self confidence, self belief, self awareness; fundamentally those things. I was going to get into things like the ability to negotiate, the ability to sell but they’re kind of characteristics.

Interviewer: There’s almost that level of persistence, self belief, you know all of these things sit in with the ability to sell, you know, people who sell you want to believe in the product you sell, you have to be persistent. So sales is almost a role that requires a level of, in my opinion anyway, mental toughness, you know, it taking the knock backs because you get lots of them, it’s one part of the professional environment where you do get lots of knock backs.

CRIS: It is, yeah and there is a mental toughness to get up from that cold calling, mental toughness to just carry on cold calling. Yeah, no that’s a good point. Yeah a drive, a drive to achieve, a confidence that you can actually –

Interviewer: What about goals and objectives, do you think mentally tough people like goals and objectives?

CRIS: I think a goal, yes I think a goal and an objective can bring, can allow the mental toughness to flourish. Like I believe right now I am lacking a goal and so I’m kind of, not my performance on projects but me as a company, me as an individual are kind of coasting, do you know what I mean? So I can’t call myself a high performer right now –

Interviewer: No.

CRIS: - I am on each individual piece of work but overall I’m not, I’m just coasting.

Interviewer: Do you think mentally tough, you know, do you think Lindsay walks around and he’s like, I’m mentally tough. I mean he might not even recognise that he is so there are times when actually he probably, you know, he might sit down and relax as we talked about people who can relax, you know, he’ll know when to switch off. So it’s almost this thing that you utilise and I think I liked your phrase before, a balance portfolio of skills without the dangerous gap and one of those gaps might be, you know, perfectionism or the gap might be doesn’t know when to switch off.

CRIS: Can’t manage it.
Interviewer: And therefore you might be mentally tough, you might be bang, bang, bang; delivering. There's a point when you need this and it's either over working or you don't have it and also because you don't have it, bang, you're –

CRIS: It crashes.

Interviewer: - you either crash or you stop performing for some reason. So I like your analogy there. So Lindsay doesn't necessarily think that he's mentally tough but there are situations and again, you've mentioned this, sort of, cold calling sales type activity where, you know, almost got this drive to –

CRIS: Drive and it's, yeah I mean it's interesting because that's different. I think sales people who are cold calling often, they operate on that variable thing which is this one might work, this very next call could be the one.

Interviewer: So do you think that mentally tough -?

CRIS: And the mental toughness is the bit that comes from the down of the cold call that didn’t work, that f****g horrible feeling when your gut hits the floor or just that emptiness that you feel when it didn’t work for the tenth time and then you look at the next number on your sheet or you look at the next person and you go, this one could be it though.

Interviewer: So is that the hope or optimism then; are they optimists or are they pessimists? Do you think Lindsay is an optimist or a pessimist?

CRIS: Total, yeah.

Interviewer: An optimist?

CRIS: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you think of any sort of people who you think are mentally tough that are pessimists?

CRIS: I can't, they wouldn't preclude it but I can't, no.

Interviewer: What would you say that the people that you know then who are mentally tough, you would say that's a common trait, you know, those people are generally optimists?
CRIS Are absolutely generally optimists, I would say optimism yes, it’s a bit like mathematics, you know, if you can find one exception then it can’t be an absolute rule but –

Interviewer And I think there aren’t any absolutes here I don’t think.

CRIS No, I would generally, I think optimist absolute not.

Interviewer Because I think it’s also about the context and the situations and I think one of the things that, you know, if we’re looking for absolutes we’re not going to get it and to some degree sport is a great laboratory for almost trying to find absolutes because there are so many, you know, there are so few variables in measuring someone’s 100 metres time. You know, it’s about the individual; yes you can measure their fast twitch muscles and those sorts of things but within business there’s no absolutes. So, you know, on the whole is there anything and I suppose this leads us perfectly into, as though you’ve read this already and I know you haven’t but it leads me perfectly into my next question. My next question relates to, do you think there’s anything here that we’ve looked at and talked about that’s really important but it’s only important in these scenarios or do you think that everything is almost a general and that actually a focus on consistency or consistence performance or people who are focussed or relaxed are perfectionists, almost those are the traits that you would generally see in people that you believe are mentally tough or is there anything you go that, you know, compartmentalisation, is there anything you think, no only in those situations or, you know, for example in sales or in cold calling or, is there anything that stands out?

CRIS Anything that we’ve mentioned so far that actually is only a subset.

Interviewer Yeah it’s almost, you know, do you think that any of the mental toughness attributes that we’ve talked about are uniquely specific business situation although, do you think there are anything, if you take sales for example; is there anything that you think, you know, persistence, we know, we talked about this constant drive, not giving in. Is that specific to sales?

CRIS No, I wonder if relaxed might be, not necessarily sales but I’m just thinking people on the trading floor, they never come across as relaxed. They could be calm in their heads, their behaviour, their physical activities and
everything, to somebody else they may not be looking relaxed but they're calm; calm and relax –

Interviewer So it's almost calm mentally –

CRIS A mental calm, yes, are mentally calm.

Interviewer Yeah because we wrote calm down before so there may be certain, you know, for example you wouldn't necessarily want somebody perhaps with the same characteristics and attributes as a trader to do open heart surgery on you.

CRIS Well –

Interviewer You know, do you think the characteristics of someone who's a great performer at open heart surgery has the same characteristics as somebody who is a great trader?

CRIS Yes I think they probably do, in that the stakes are so high and yet they calm, believe, self confident, they –

Interviewer I'm going to, is there anything you think might be different because there's something in my mind that I think differentiates those two and I think there's a specific characteristic. Is there any characteristic that you think, you know what, this person had that characteristic it'd work but if that person had it, ooh, I wouldn't necessarily want to go, I wouldn't want to give them my money and I wouldn't necessarily want to go and sit on a, be operated on by them.

CRIS Is it risk taking?

Interviewer That's the thing I was thinking of, you know, do you think that they both have the same view on it, you know –

CRIS I want to say yes because I think it's a controlled risk taking, yes they, I mean on a shop, the whats-its floor they're basically professional gamblers but they don’t take stupid risks because they'll lose, some do, they lose billions. But do you see what I mean; they have –
Interviewer: But the implications of the risk are different as well aren't they? No one’s going to die.

CRIS: Yeah, no likewise but, yeah but do you know there are some consultants that just caring people but they’re just working on a product and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.

Interviewer: So do you think those, I mean this is, so do you think they’re actually, they’ve got a level of almost existentialism that you can, you know, they don’t get too, so they’re emotionally involved to a level –

CRIS: Yes something is there about, I mean Lindsay doesn’t, I mean I get so wrapped up and Lindsay doesn’t seem to.

Interviewer: It’s like you mentioned urges before and almost they can control their emotional, sort of, boiling pot –

CRIS: They know when to switch off and they know when to just, they just innately, naturally don’t get so emotionally involved.

Interviewer: Do you think they see the risk then, in that sort of sense?

CRIS: I think they’ve measured it.

Interviewer: So is it not, because if you measure and risk and understand it then you’re almost then minimising it whereas other people go, that’s an enormous risk, I could never do that. It’s almost like working for yourself, entrepreneurs.

CRIS: And so maybe they are willing to take the consequences of the risk they’re taking. So A, they’ve understood the risk, B, they probably have mitigating risk and C, they’ve accepted that if it goes wrong they’re quite happy with taking the consequences.

Interviewer: A little risk or a little error in open heart surgery could be quite catastrophic. A little risk or a little error on the trading floor can probably, you can come back the following day and go, you know what, I’m going to take another risk and hopefully it will pay off. You can almost cover your tracks but you can’t go back as a surgeon and go, you know what, I’ll double save the person tomorrow, that’ll get me my count –
CRIS: No because they're already dead you can't now, yeah, do something, oh do you know what, I could try this, there you are.

Interviewer: So it's almost, you know, would and I suppose this is the question and it's the question I'm really interested in because if you say yes then that's fine because it's your answer, it's only if you have a profile of the characteristics of a trader and a profile of the characteristics of a high performing trader and the characteristics and a profile of a high performing heart surgeon you'd expect a lot of those, the mental, the characteristics to be the same.

CRIS: I would

Interviewer: And it's that sort of –

CRIS: Absolutely, yeah because it's managing under pressure, managing and getting the...yeah. I've got this thought in my head that came from a previous conversation and I don't want to lose it; can I jump here?

Interviewer: Yeah, no jump in please, yeah.

CRIS: There's something about Lindsay, like Lindsay, there's something about, it's not just about self belief but it knows no boundaries. So when we graduated I was gobsmacked when he started to interview for being an ambassador, you know a British ambassador to whoever. He knew no boundaries on what he could achieve. Now I have this saying I can do anything, but actually I kind of know where I belong, I've got this sense of well that's my bit, that's me.

Interviewer: He can choose anything that you choose to do but within boundaries.

CRIS: Kind of, yeah, I kind of just see I've got, I know I've got limits, I say I can do anything but I have got limits, however silly that sounds. Lindsay just had a different, he just saw it differently. The scope, the opportunity for me would be this, Lindsay sees this. That is probably why Lindsay is, I don't know if this is mental toughness or just, but he sold his fricking consultancy –

Interviewer: He's successful.

CRIS: Yeah, is it mental toughness? How is mental toughness to be, to...yeah.
Interviewer: It’s almost a double whammy isn’t it in the sense of people who are mental tough were able performing, you know, and cope with stress and pressure in high performance environments but to them is it a high performance environment, you know, are they almost, sort of, rationalised in a way to the point where this is just what I do. And therefore actually I don’t see, I don’t have that stress and pressure –

CRIS: Exactly, so they don’t, they see no limits, why don’t they see any limit. I guess it just comes back to this self belief and self –

Interviewer: But if you put him in to do something, so he went to be an ambassador but let’s say, you know, if we said to him Lindsay, what’s the worst sort of job you think you could ever have to do and he described it and let’s say it’s to be a gardener and then he had to go and do it, do you think that he’d be the best gardener you’d seen or do you think he’d just go, I don’t want to do this, can’t do it?

CRIS: No I know, interesting, I think, because he has done, he did trade marketing for a while for Gilbey Vintners in the spirits were an abyss market and I think he probably just coasted and didn’t necessarily perform; did what he needed to do but then he got his, did his stint and moved out. Maybe that’s mental toughness because on the bigger picture look where he is, he knew what he wanted to do and he was mentally tough enough to do the coasting and not drive and not do this and just do his time. He was mentally tough to say, no I don’t want to go there, he took it, it was expected of him, he went and did it then got back on the path.

Interviewer: Yeah, interesting. Conscious I’ve taken up quite a bit of your time, can I ask you one final question and that’s really around if you consider whether business mental toughness is a positive skill or whether a positive/negative aspects to mental toughness? I know we’ve talked about some of these things, are there any sort of characteristics or attributes that you believe have a potentially negative impact on the performance in the workplace, is there anything –?

CRIS: Is it performance in the work place as opposed to your own performance?

Interviewer: Well, perhaps both.
Because yeah, absolutely, mentally tough people can be quite detrimental to other people. So if you take a mentally tough person who doesn’t give a shit about anyone, they can steamroller.

Interviewer: Do you think they can be intimidating?

CRIS: Absolutely.

Interviewer: So it’s almost, and it’s back to your point here that influence on others, almost you’ve got a –

CRIS: Actually stick Stuart Macfarlane; Stuart Macfarlane very mentally tough, very driven, my contemporary and we swapped jobs at one point and he, you know, I do what I do now, he was head of Interbrew for Britain then Europe and now he’s doing some international with (s.l. Ambap 1:22:19). Done very well for himself, definitely very mentally tough but he’s a t**t and he’s s*at on people all the way and he’ll play you as he’s your best mate and then ignore you the next day. I’m not saying mentally tough people need to be t***s or anything like that but he is a t**t and his mental toughness came over negatively on a number of people. He did very, very well and I guess the business overall did very well because of that, but there was, what do you call it in his wake, you know –

Interviewer: Collateral damage.

CRIS: Collateral damage which was acceptable on a bigger picture but actually if you –

Interviewer: Those individual –

CRIS: He was fricking horrible.

Interviewer: Okay.

CRIS: Did I go off on a tangent then?

Interviewer: No that was brilliant, I mean that was a really good example, the way that you’ve described that there and I suppose that’s the premise of the question is that, you know, mental toughness is described from a sporting perspective as this amazingly positive thing. Although there are a number
of articles and a number of instances and one of the things, it relates to confidence in a way, you know, it's almost this, people can do anything. Well if you look at mountaineers, you know, the article I read on a particular mountaineer was he was prepared to give up before the summit and very close to the summit to survive and live, whereas other individuals continue to drive on because –

CRIS And then died or might have died.

Interviewer Yeah, then you start to get to the top but, you know, it was about getting to the top, so their goal was to get to the top, to summit. His, his goal was to get down safely.

CRIS And in some ways that's Lindsay taking, okay if I've got to do two years in trade marketing I've got to do it, I won't go for my summit right now, I'll pause and I'll get there later. Tévez is a great example because his mental toughness was destructive on people in the team, absolutely, at the time, it was –

Interviewer There's almost a, I suppose you can be, the negative aspect can be a, sort of, selfishness, a self, as opposed to perhaps a selflessness.

CRIS Yeah and alienating other people and so much so that the team stops to work, stops working.

Interviewer Yeah, so it's almost that back to the influence on others and they can manage and they won't look sideways downwards, there's that influence that you're, you know, someone who's mentally tough can potentially either push their confidence onto others or almost intimidate others. And again, from a (inaudible 1:25:16) perspective you're looking at using your mental toughness for a negative impact on others. And from a business perspective you don't want to negatively impact others unless it's perhaps the competition but more often than not it's about positive. Is there anything that we've talked about and you've thought, I thought we'd talk about that but we didn't; is there any sort of characteristics you thought, you know - ?

CRIS No.

Interviewer Well thank you very much.
APPENDIX I - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (SHANE)

Topic: Business Mental Toughness

Date: 09/05/13

Interviewee: Shane

Interviewer: Right, so firstly I would like you to consider what 'mental toughness' means to you – how would you define it? So, to help you develop your definition I will provide you with an analogy: if I were to say, “What is a car?” many people would describe something that has 4 wheels, an engine, doors etc. but that’s not what I’m referring to, because we’ll come to the components later. What a car actually does or the benefit it provides is it transports us from A to B. So, what benefits or what do you believe if we describe the term ‘mental toughness’ in business – so what do you think mental toughness means to you in terms of performance in the workplace; can you offer perhaps a definition or a quote or how you might describe it?

SHANE: ‘Mental toughness in the workplace’ right. First of all the ability to ... the characteristic of mental resilience in demanding and stressful, and possibly distressing situations; that would be one and the resilience would be the ability to function and the ability to continually function under those conditions. That would be the first thing, the resilience.

And then secondly, the ability to be assertive under demanding and stressful business situations; and let me think for a minute, because I sense there’s a third component to it. The ability to manage demanding, stressful and sometimes distressing situations – how’s that?

Interviewer: Yes. As I said, there's no right or wrong answer. I just want to sort of probe a couple of these. When you say 'manage the situation' can you embellish that? What do you mean by 'manage the situation' – can you give me an example that perhaps you've seen yourself or somebody else?

SHANE: Yes, continually.

Interviewer: What are you managing; what are you doing?
SHANE  Well if you’ve got a demanding, a stressful and sometimes distressing situation, it usually represents a business situation that’s either wrong, be it temporary or continuing; rather than wrong, a better word is unsatisfactory; inefficient. And one way to deal with that is to manage it in terms of recognising that there is an unsatisfactory condition; characteristic somewhere. Analysing what the root of that problem is and then identifying and possibly imposing a managerial solution to it. So, in other words, rather than continuing to let it be a problem, attempt to fix it.

Interviewer  So would you say that’s around making decisions?

SHANE  I think it’s more, the mental toughness component of that is about being decisive, that’s not necessarily the same thing. By which I mean, so in terms of the … just to re-visit that just for a second, in terms of managing, in terms of being mentally tough by managing a difficult situation; I think there are probably maybe 2 principle components of it: 1) is being decisive, and in this case it’s being decisive about understanding that there is a problem, and secondly about being analytical in terms of understanding what the problem is.

So the difference between that and somebody who may not be mentally tough in this context is somebody who is; the antithesis of it, mentally weak, is somebody who may not realise that it is something that’s wrong; the way that they might see it is assuming that the situation is right and the weakness is on them.

Interviewer  Okay, I’ll come back to that. Just to paraphrase up; qualify it – so, mentally tough people are able to understand that something needs to be done?

SHANE  Yes.

Interviewer  Whereas mentally weak people in the scenario you are describing don’t believe there’s anything to be done, it’s them that’s at fault.?

SHANE  Yes.

Interviewer  So there’s almost sort of self-blame?

SHANE  Yes.
Whereas mentally tough people are looking for an action or an activity to rectify … you know, they can see the problem?

Yes.

And the problem isn't them?

Yes.

Okay, that's interesting. Can you give me an example? Perhaps you've seen somebody or a scenario.

Let me just think for a minute for an example that's a good illustration of it. Just as I'm thinking about it, remember that … sorry, I forgot what I was going to say then; I'll come back to that in a little bit. An example: bullying.

Okay.

Where you get managerial bullying and you get people who are … you'll get generally 2 reactions to that, you'll get people who will not realise it's bullying and be stressed about it, and will become victims; will act as victims. And then you get the other people who will deal with it; not necessarily through conflict, but through proactive response.

So is that sort of almost...

The difference being that the latter will understand that there's something not right on the other side, and the former won’t, will just assume that’s the way it is.

Yes, they’ll accept it, almost, being weak.

Yes, that’s exactly what they’ll do. A theme in that in the ability to do all that is of course self-confidence.

Okay. So, mentally tough people are self-confident?

Yes. In fact a better way of putting it, rather than say people who are self-confident, self-assured; people who are capable of recognising when they
are right, even when things, even when business conditions or business processes or activities and situations around them won’t always be.

Interviewer: You mentioned self-confidence and then you rectified that to self-assured. What’s the difference; is there a different polar opposite?

SHANE: Being self-assured is a logical basis for self-confidence. So, rather than being self-confident through egomania, there is self-confidence through understanding of what a situation is and personal strengths and the rightness of a personal position; a personal activity.

Interviewer: So, for the egomania bit is it almost that people can be over-confident and therefore that’s a weakness?

SHANE: Yes. They’re confident, but yes I think that’s right, because they are confident without basis.

Interviewer: So would you say it’s almost like a hill; and on one side you’ve got over-confidence, and then self-assured in the middle and then on the other side almost-

SHANE: Yes, that’s good.

Interviewer: -lack of confidence?

SHANE: That’s good. By ‘hill’ you meant distribution, but yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Almost the performance level of the individual is almost at a peak when they are self-assured and then confident in their own ability, okay.

SHANE: To some extent it’s just the use of terms, but by self-assured, the basis of my argument is: where people are self-assured they are self-confident, and are therefore proactive and mentally tough on the basis of logic; possibly a combination of logic and decency.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ‘decency,’ because you used the example of bullying?

SHANE: Yes, it might be, just as an illustrated example, but that might be a ‘red-herring’ to be honest – but they are confident because they are self-
assured, not they are self-assured because they are confident. And you will find people where each of those 2 situations will apply to different people; there will be some people who are self-confident because they are self-assured, because they are thinking about what they’re doing; they have a logical basis for their position and for their actions and they understand that. And then there are other people who are self-assured because they are just innately self-confident; self-confident is-

Interviewer: It’s almost a blind confidence.

SHANE: It is a blind confidence, that’s exactly it.

Interviewer: Without any logical support then you’re just naturally bullet-proof in a sense, “I believe I can do anything. I have no way of empirically giving you and understanding that I can do it; can I say, ‘here’s my Master’s Degree; here’s evidence?’ but I believe I can…”

SHANE: Andrew Newman

Interviewer: Interesting. Can I bring you back to the decency, when you said it might be a red-herring, I’m not so sure because decency is a word that other people haven’t necessarily used, but they have alluded to situations that relate potentially to it, so I can you explain what you meant by ‘decency’?

SHANE: Remember, the illustrative example I used was bullying. It’s a good illustrative example because to deal with it, people who can deal it generally are mentally tough, so it’s a good illustrative example for the type of thing that you’re talking about. The word probably came; the concept probably came because I was thinking about that, but-

Interviewer: Sorry, you mean in what concept? Is there a lack of decency from the bully or is it the fact-

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: -so that.

SHANE: It’s fundamental.

Interviewer: Yes, but for the mentally tough individual who is being bullied, how do they-
SHANE: All I’m getting to with that is this basis of the legitimacy of somebody’s position, on the basis that the logic of the basis for their self-assuredness. So my argument was going: they have a self-assuredness based on logic about what they’re doing; the rightness of what they’re doing. And some of that in determining if a situation is right or wrong, and if a situation is … what they’re doing, what their position on it and their ability to make a judgement, the concept of decency probably is a component in that.

Interviewer: Sorry, can I … because this is really good; this concept of right or wrong – so we take the bully for example, do you think bullies are mentally tough?

SHANE: Yes, sometimes they are, but that’s an example where you’ve got, they are self-assured because of self-confidence, not the other way round.

Interviewer: And so if we talk about right or wrong, and you just say that, and I’m not trying put words in your mouth, I’m just trying to understand the context, somebody who stands up to a bully because they know it’s wrong, because they can understand right and wrong and a bully would bully because they don’t understand what’s right and wrong.

SHANE: Yes, basically.

Interviewer: And so mentally tough people understand what’s right and wrong?

SHANE: Not necessarily.

Interviewer: Okay.

SHANE: No, not necessarily.

Interviewer: Right. And why would say ’not necessarily’?

SHANE: Remember that … because I think what’s emerged is a concept of … let me just follow the stream of logic: people being self-confident, so people making judgements about demanding and stressful situations, and from that the concept of self-confidence, the related concepts of self-confidence and self-assuredness and 2 types of people; 2 types of strong-minded people coming out of that. 1) that is self-confident on the basis of self-assuredness and the other one at the other extreme being self-asserted from an innate, rather than a logically based, self-confidence.
Ask me the question again that you asked me.

Interviewer So do you think mentally tough people understand right and wrong?

SHANE Not always, no.

Interviewer Not always, okay. And rather than defining assuredness and confidence, can you give me an example of somebody, be it professional/sporting where you think, “That person’s mentally tough but they don’t understand right and wrong.”?

SHANE Yes, I can – Andrew; good entrepreneur, but very blunt in his thinking; not innately bad or anything but very, very clumsy because of his inability to understand … he’s actually, he’s mentally strong; mentally very tough and I will raise another point, right, so I will say he’s mentally very tough, he is. Part of that toughness comes from naivety, which in itself is derived from a complete absence of emotional intelligence.

Interviewer It’s interesting you raised that; I think sometimes we … and this is where if you go back to the stress and pressure of a situation, in for example, reprimanding somebody; in for example, firing somebody, which actually if you are empathetic would be stressful. However, if you lack emotional intelligence therefore you have no empathy, you’re naïve to, or ignorant to the fact that that’s a stressful or pressured environment, and therefore you wouldn’t need to have any mental toughness because actually, it’s not tough.

SHANE Agreed; you put that very well.

Interviewer And so that’s one of the things that I think some people appear to be mentally tough because they’re ignorant.

SHANE That’s right.

Interviewer Or lack understanding.

SHANE Because it’s a form of blindness; I think that’s exactly right. Another analogy that shines some light on that position, it’s the difference between somebody who is brave and somebody who doesn’t get frightened. The concept of you can only be brave if you’re scared; you’re not being brave if
you’re not frightened. So it’s not the same situation but it is a similar one. And you could actually say; you could define mental toughness as the ability to be, to present strength, in a situation where you are finding especially demanding or stressful in some way. If you’re not for exactly as you’ve said, if it’s not demanding, if you’re immune/insensitive to the aspects that are demanding and stressful, and I’m usually those terms fairly generally; right, difficult situation, you don’t need to be mentally tough, you’re not actually mentally tough, you’re naïve.

Interviewer And when you say ‘present strength’ in stressful situations, are you saying that in the sense that there’s an audience; do you think there’s an audience to mental toughness?

SHANE No, not necessarily. No, by ‘present’ I mean, ‘generate’ or ‘deploy’ might be a better word.

Interviewer So people can be observed in that way.

SHANE Because the thing goes on in angle (inaudible 00:22:36) go on.

Interviewer But there is this sort of … you mentioned something earlier about managing situations and you mentioned present themselves as strong in stressful situations, and that can either be in the sense that … I suppose, if you’re operating individually in an environment where it’s just you, then you can be mentally tough etc. However, within business you invariably don’t operate in an isolated environment, and so this … when you said ‘present strength’ did you mean, you know the individual is strong or is observed to be strong?

SHANE No, I meant is.

Interviewer Is. So they perform?

SHANE Yes.

Interviewer Okay. Just wanted to clarify that. And we’re sort of led onto the next question, so there is no sort of almost right or wrong definition; there is no uniform definition from a sporting perspective on what mental toughness is, but if you were to boil it down to the key: what does it deliver? It’s the ability to perform in coping with stressful situations and therefore almost you can define the same situations within business. Now obviously within sport,
depending upon the sport, depending upon the training etc. you know you can clearly sort of say taking a penalty for example might be considered a stressful situation. You know, hitting a shot over water for a golfer, they might define as a stressful situation. If you were to think about business, which situations in business do you believe require mental toughness?

SHANE Well, there are a lot of situations; very diverse situations. Roles that involve hostility, so sales and customer service roles; situations that are stressful because of difficult and risky business conditions.

Interviewer Stressful business conditions; and what might they be?

SHANE If you’re trying to keep a company afloat; if you’re having to make, for example, decisions based on financials that are speculative. If you’re working in situations where there are few solid reference points upon which to do planning and-

Interviewer It’s almost a lack of information.

SHANE -lack of information, yes. For managers that’s a big-

Interviewer And again, from a company performance perspective it would be lack of sales, lack of profit, lack of cash-flow; a lack of something. Almost a lack of something within a business context can create stressful situations.

SHANE Frustration – I mean there are frustrating aspects of business where you are frustrated because of the performance or characteristics of colleagues or customers.

Interviewer Good one.

SHANE Poor communications.

Interviewer Again is that a lack of information?

SHANE Yes. Just let me think for another minute; I mean that list could be limitless.

Interviewer Let me just flip it on its head then, because if it’s almost limitless we could be here for a long time. So the other aspect of this is: do you think there are any business situations that don’t require mental toughness?
SHANE: Well, there are, yes, because there are some roles that are … some roles are generally far less demanding than others.

Interviewer: What do you mean exactly?

SHANE: There are quite a number of roles that are routine. I will give you an example: we’re strictly in the private sector are we?

Interviewer: Yes, if you need to sway outside that’s fine.

SHANE: You will find if you work in some aspects of … if you’re looking for, if you’re actively looking for things that don’t require much toughness, right, you can find them in places like local government.

Interviewer: Let me just ask you a question then, and this will hopefully help me get to the point that I’m interested in. If I put you in that role that you’ve just defined as - how would you feel?

SHANE: Well it wouldn’t be right because that’s not … I think I see where you’re going with this. It wouldn’t be right because I’m not wired for a role like that; I don’t do routine roles, I do roles that require creativity and a host of other things.

Interviewer: So would you feel frustrated; would you feel anxious?

SHANE: No.

Interviewer: You wouldn’t?

SHANE: No.

Interviewer: Would you be able to perform?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: So you could do it-

SHANE: Yes.
Interviewer: -but how would you feel? Would you be happy?

SHANE: No.

Interviewer: So, do you think ultimately would you continue to perform at a high level?

SHANE: Yes, I probably would because (inaudible 00:30:26) happens, that I’m wired that I always try to perform at high levels no matter what I’m doing. But I wouldn’t be particularly … what would be missing would be fulfilment.

Interviewer: You wouldn’t feel fulfilled? Right, okay.

SHANE: You’re on a nice line of attack there, because the point that you’re making is that there’s a general theme of, in terms, in terms of the question: are there business situations which aren’t stressful; which don’t require mental toughness? The answer is: probably yes there are, and one of them is where you have somebody in … where the match between their personal characteristics and the job requirement is a very good one.

Interviewer: And therefore, other people would find it stressful and be anxious-?

SHANE: Correct.

Interviewer: -and the individual, so people who are naturally … so we talked about sales before being a hostile environment and an environment that might require mental toughness, but for some individuals it’s not stressful, they can perform.

SHANE: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: And therefore they have a perfect match. So they may well be mentally tough, because of the stress and pressure other people would feel they just don’t feel it.

SHANE: Right.

Interviewer: So actually, if I was to say every business situation could require mental toughness, because every business situation might have a lack of something.
SHANE: Yes, it could, every business situation could – could. I think it doesn’t necessarily mean that it will, but in terms of could, yes. Remember, even somebody just to use the situation that we’ve identified there, how do you avoid … so logic is, mental toughness being about being able to deal with demanding, and how do you know if they’re demanding? Well, they will be stressful. If it’s stress you know it’s demanding in some way; being able to deal with that situation generally somebody who has got a very, very good match between their personal characteristics and the job the stress will be minimised there.

Interviewer: Yes.

SHANE: But even then, right, they only need a bad manager.

Interviewer: And it doesn’t necessarily mean, so for example, or does it … if you were to take somebody who loves routine and put them in a high-change environment and vice versa; you took somebody who loves changes/creativity, and give them a very mundane, routine job you’re almost … those environments … if we described for example a routine mundane administrative role within local government, we could also describe a routine administrative role as an air traffic controller, where you have to follow process; you do the same things over and over, but one might have more stress or pressure associated with it than the other. So it’s not just about whether it’s routine, it’s about the type of pressure as well as potentially the individual, so it’s almost-

SHANE: Agreed.

Interviewer: -you can’t have the environment without the individual.

SHANE: Agreed.

Interviewer: So I like this ‘feel fulfilled’ so we will move onto the sort of characteristics in a second. So, situations vary diversely; there are certain situations which may not require a lot of mental toughness; the pressure and the output and the requirement might not necessarily be that high and therefore the vast majority of individuals would be able to do it?
SHANE  Don’t know about that. I think, remember that there is you know the theories that have got a lot going for them; I’m trying to remember the … is it Gallop that do the...?

Interviewer  The poll?

SHANE  No, well they do, but I think it’s Gallop who also have range of a really good personal characteristics analysis, because they’ve got the data. It’s that thing about … I’ve got the book somewhere, about don’t think about people’s weaknesses, think only about their strengths, identify where there strengths are and match the strengths to the job; it’s one of the personality test things, but it’s a particularly successful one; I think it’s Gallop’s. And the point being that the range, the spectrum is the word, of personal characteristics is very, very wide. And the combinations, so you have a very large number of personal characteristics and ergo you have a gigantic number of combinations of those personal characteristics. Ergo, your spectrum of what people are like is very, very good. So I’m not sure I would buy the … it would possibly be questionable that there are some … I may be wrong, it may be that for example a very large proportion of the population are okay; anybody who can work in a factory, shop-floor level, can probably work in any factory, that’s probably more or less true. But I would caveat it by saying that the range of personal characteristics is very, very high.

Interviewer  It’s interesting because there are also theories that say you know for example, ‘the big 5 personal constructs for personality’; there’s another one I’ve just read about recently – I can’t remember what it’s called now. Sorry, what I wanted to go back to though was, there are situations that we may find stressful or other people may find stressful, so there’s almost this sort of, you talk about sales, I don’t find the sales environment a particularly stressful environment. But other people do, and other people would never want to do it; never wish to do it.

SHANE  I always found it stressful but still did it.

Interviewer  Yes. And so it’s almost as you said, a spectrum, and then therefore there are characteristics of an individual that’s almost like a graphic equalizer, that if you get a perfect match you’ve almost got utopia that the individual is perfectly matched and therefore you’ve got that sort of almost harmony between the individual and the role, and therefore you would expect perfect
And then any degree further away from that, depending upon what it is, will start to potentially reduce that performance, or, they may be able to cope with the stress and pressure for a period, but it may then diminish their performance against, and the same from a sporting perspective, if 2 individuals; because obviously we’ve got things like intelligence which we’ve not necessarily talked about, but we’ve talked about emotional intelligence or our ability to understand other people’s emotions is something that we can’t ignore again as, alongside that we can’t also ignore someone’s intelligence because we talked about people’s naivety or their ignorance to something, either a situation or potentially a problem as you talked about at the beginning. So, do you think within that there’s almost an element of intelligence being able to understand things?

SHANE Yes, there probably is. Intelligence and analytical capabilities, pompous way of saying it but, yes.

Interviewer So that you know, mentally tough people are analytical?

SHANE Do remember though, well, hang on. I think that’s one way that people may be mentally, what’s the term we’re talking about here?

Interviewer Mental toughness.

SHANE Mentally tough managerially. Remember that you homed in at the start of it, you homed in on, I gave you 3 levels to it I think, or 3 examples of it and we homed in on the last one, right. But I think somewhere in there I said, did I say ‘assertive’?

Interviewer You did.

SHANE Right. Remember that some people probably exhibit mental toughness simply because they’re assertive. So I guess what I’m saying is, is that some situations may not require much analysis as a determination whether they’re right/wrong or present opportunity for improvement. And sometimes people are good at dealing with that deal with it just because they’re assertive.

Interviewer So they might be lucky in getting the right answer? They may perform and they’ve asserted themselves but it may not be logic-based, it could be-
SHANE  Yes. It’s not necessarily logic-based.

Interviewer  So it could a ‘true or false’ and they could say it’s true and be assertive and everyone believes that true is the right answer.

SHANE  Yes. I mean the other thing about that, like I said we homed in on the last thing I said about people being self-assured, and we ask: why are they self-assured? Well, they understand what the situation is and have confidence about the legitimacy of their own actions; their own position. Sometimes that’s going to be intuitive; an intuitive understanding it’s not a myth. I think what it is, I think there are some situations that we process subconsciously, right. So, on Tuesday morning I knew that guy was going to run into me; I knew instantly that there was going to be an accident; I wasn’t in any danger, right, but I knew there was going to be an accident because I’d processed that far faster than I could have analysed it.

I think some people do understand situations intuitively. I think in fact probably everybody understands some situations intuitively but different people will have the capability for intuitive understanding of different situations; I think intuition in itself it’s probably a spectrum. The common theme is understanding, is self-assuredness because of an understanding of a situation, right, and knowledge and understanding that a personal position (inaudible; over-talking 00:43:33).

Interviewer  Do you think that comes from experience?

SHANE  I think some of it does, yes. I think it does. Because some of the rules that you would apply about, and I’m using the word ‘rule’ in a logical sense not in a social sense, the rules that you would be applying about … I think in some situations I think some of them are probably learned; some of them are, some of them would be, so some of them would be social in context, whereas some of them would be-

Interviewer  They must be then intuitive?

SHANE  Yes. Just think for a minute about the nature of demanding situations, right. Sometimes they will be demanding in business, sometimes situations are demanding because of situations that other people are creating and/or decisions that other people are making. So they are in short they are a consequence of management. Other situations are absolute – so, if you’re
an FD, right, they’ll say what they like FD’s, but the 4 o’clock in the morning calls for an FD is usually cash-flow, that’s the reason companies don’t go out of business because they’re not selling anything, although that’s probably wrong, but because they run out of cash – cash-flow, cash-flow, cash-flow. A thing like cash-flow, a thing like a company’s cash (inaudible 00:45:10) is probably less a thing about management than just a characteristic, a nature of a situation that arises in a particular company, so it’s a characteristic. Your reaction to that is going to be less a learned thing than an analytical thing and a logical understanding of it; and similarly there will be some things that are a consequence of management. Where you have a stressful situation that maybe a consequence of personal interaction, so it’s a human relationship thing, a lot of the rules that will apply then are learned, because they’re social characteristics.

Interviewer  Yes, and therefore you’re not bringing your previous social experiences will enable you to either perform in those situations or not perform, potentially, depending on how you define performance. You know, you cope with the situation, react positively/react negatively.

SHANE  You actually meant ‘behave’. Behave in that situation is a better word.

Interviewer  Okay. So there’s almost a level of behaviour that sits almost mental toughness manifests itself in behaviour.

SHANE  Definitely.

Interviewer  Because it’s inside your head isn’t it?

SHANE  Mental toughness-

Interviewer  Is the cognition, the analytical piece, the manifestation that people see that would then say that you’re mentally tough, is either you behave in a very calm and assured or however you would describe it, way, and perform or somebody would-

SHANE  It will almost certainly manifest in behaviour. The behaviour in some situations a mentally tough reaction, may be to do nothing, but you’ve actually behaved consciously, understanding the situation; there’s nothing to be done, to hell with it. You said today, “I’m only doing it for the money.” Right, okay, the antithesis of it as I say is in all of those situations where the
person involved doesn't understand that there is a problem with the situation; it's an acceptance of the situation and an assumption that the problem is an inability to deal with it; I'm paraphrasing a pretty complex situation. And my argument – self-assuredness on the basis of the ability to understand a situation and react to it and a personal characteristic of generally proactively reacting in situations like that, the understanding probably has 2 mechanisms: 1) logical capability and the other intuition; intuitive capability, both of which may be lacking for whatever reason in a person who is not mentally tough.

Interviewer: I suppose by definition, somebody's who's ignorant to something would lack intuition.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: You can't be intuitive and be (inaudible; over-talking 00:48:50)-

SHANE: Not about the situation, exactly.

Interviewer: They're polar opposites, so, mentally tough people are intuitive; mentally weak people are ignorant almost.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: To situations. Okay, moving on then to mentally tough people, I would like you to ... you can just jot down initials. I would like you to think or write down the names of some people who you would consider are mentally tough, and perhaps some people who you think are mentally weak, or lack mental toughness. Not necessarily on the whole but perhaps in certain situations.

SHANE: What am I going to do with them after?

Interviewer: What I'm going to do then is I'm going to ask you ... we're going to go onto the car having wheels and a steering wheel and an engine and gearbox, and what are the characteristics of perhaps the people who you think are mentally tough?

SHANE: So I've got, 'tough' and I've got 'non-tough'.
Interviewer: Yes.

SHANE: How many do I need?

Interviewer: If you can write 5 or 6 down; it doesn't have to be exhaustive, just put the initials. I will give you a couple of minutes.

(pause)

So I play golf and if I was to think about – I’m never going to be professional, but if I was to construct the ideal golfer I wouldn’t necessarily say that Tiger Woods, for example, is the perfect golfer. What I might do is I might say well I’d like some of his physical power, some of his sort of skill, but I might want some of Phil Mickelson’s tenacity or I might want some of Ernie Els’s charisma and you build those characteristics together. So if you look at those sorts of individuals there, what are the characteristics that these mentally tough individuals – you say these people, they all have that. Those who aren’t tough don’t have it; they almost have something else or the opposite.

SHANE: Okay.

Interviewer: So what might those characteristics be? I mean if we just go through some of the things – would you say that these individuals are self confident?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you say that perhaps these individuals lack a bit of self confidence?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: And again, almost self assured from an assertiveness perspective.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: These characters are assertive, these guys are resilient –

SHANE: Definitely.

Interviewer: - these guys are decisive, analytical, does that fit the –
SHANE: The decisive and the analytical thing I think is of all of those and definitely that one; on my left hand side your right, they're all smart.

Interviewer: So when you say smart, what do you mean?

SHANE: They are thinking and analytical, all of the other things as well but –

Interviewer: So when we say thinking and analytical, does that mean that these people here don’t think?

SHANE: Yes, very often it does.

Interviewer: Okay, so they sort of tend to do things without thought?

SHANE: Certainly without really proactive thought.

Interviewer: Is it – I’m just using the word, I maybe completely wrong and feel free to say it to me, is it almost – are we almost defining common sense?

SHANE: No, more than that; the proactive analysis of a situation.

Interviewer: So these guys are intelligent and these guys aren’t intelligent?

SHANE: I think everybody on there is – hang on, no, all of the three guys on my left are intelligent, right? Not everybody on my right is.

Interviewer: However some of the people on the right you would say are intelligent?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: So it’s ability to think – is it about thinking in situations?

SHANE: Yes, and about situations.

Interviewer: And dealing with situations, that they are able – is it the fact that they can deal with lots of different types of situations?

SHANE: I think the difference is that – well –

Interviewer: Because I’m trying to understand what the opposite thinking is.
SHANE: Yes it is, yes it is; it's that versatility.

Interviewer: So it's not so much the ability to think itself, it's the versatility –

SHANE: I think the versatility comes actually from an ability, or a habit, of examining situations, right, rather than possibly – I'm feeling my way here – rather than a tendency to try and deal with situations exclusively intuitively.

Interviewer: Right, so they react, whereas these consider?

SHANE: Yes. Yes, good.

Interviewer: So we could say that they are considered rather than – I would say rational.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: And then on the back of that would you say that these are almost reactive, irrational?

SHANE: Certainly reactive and sometimes irrational. I've deliberately put one smart person in there; I've deliberately put one performing person in there, who I don't think is mentally tough.

Interviewer: Okay.

SHANE: And two who are definitely not mentally tough.

Interviewer: So you've put somebody in there who performs but you don't believe they are mentally tough? Why don't you believe they are mentally tough? What do they lack or –

SHANE: They are – they lack the resilience in – and it's not a criticism, right, to say the very least it's not a criticism but they lack the resilience to continue in situations that are repeatedly demanding. All of the people on the left can do it week after week, year after year; these are particularly strong individuals, very strong managers. One of them was a colliery manager.

Interviewer: So these people can sustain performance?
SHANE: That's it. Sustain performance in those situations; that's good actually, sustained resilience in continually demanding situations.

Interviewer: So these are almost – they haven't got sustained resilience and the others have.

SHANE: It's interesting, now you've taken it down that route I think probably one of them has reasonable mental toughness; my left hand side are probably people, all three are people with superlative mental toughness.

Interviewer: So it's almost – we talked before about spectrum, in my view it's not black and white, it's shades of gray, again depending upon the situation some people, Tiger Woods on a golf course amazingly mentally tough, but put him in a bar of good looking women and he tends to crumble or do things. This is where I was –

SHANE: They probably do that, okay –

Interviewer: [s.l.] Like a normal distribution.

SHANE: It probably won't be normal, will it?

Interviewer: Well, say distribution.

SHANE: Yes, bow shaped distribution. It probably won't go to infinity; there will be some people with zero. It's high here and low here, right, and what you'll find is a lot of people who are smack in the middle, that's the nature of a distribution. What you've probably got here are all people there –

Interviewer: Can I re-draw that in a slightly –

SHANE: Before you do it, just before you do it, in my right hand list I've got two who are in the other [s.l.] ten and probably one who is average.

Interviewer: Would the distribution be more like that?

SHANE: It might be, yes it might be.

Interviewer: In a sense.
SHANE: Hang on, hang on. Your Y axis is the degree of mental toughness; your X axis is the number of people who have that level – is that correct?

Interviewer: Yes but it might be –

SHANE: It's not quite going to work, is it?

Interviewer: No, I need to –

SHANE: There's something about your X axis that's different to mine.

Interviewer: Because over here you're – what's your Y axis?

SHANE: Level of mental toughness.

Interviewer: Oh right, so you've got people who are generally average?

SHANE: One, yes.

Interviewer: Then these here, these guys down here –

SHANE: All three of those are there.

Interviewer: But their level – if the Y axis is level of mental toughness, surely they should be up here?

SHANE: Oh sorry! Actually you're right. Sorry, that's right. Sorry, hang on. Sorry, it's the other way around, I've got them the wrong way round, my Y is the degree of mental toughness – of course it will because that –

Interviewer: Your X.

SHANE: - sorry my X, that's the degree of mental toughness and that's the number. Of course, it would be, that's the way it is with a distribution.

Interviewer: Okay, so if we look at these people and we – what are the characteristics would you say that the people on your left, the tough people, what sort of characteristics do they display normally?

SHANE: On my left?
Interviewer: Yes, if you had to describe them as a group.

SHANE: Go through the list I’ve already generated and I’ll tick them off.

Interviewer: So their ability to deal with hostility.

SHANE: Yes, very high.

Interviewer: Very high.

SHANE: It doesn’t mean to say that – I’ll come back to that, but yes high.

Interviewer: Frustration with others, in the sense of they don’t get frustrated with others, or do they get frustrated?

SHANE: They can deal with frustration with others, all of those, all three of them.

Interviewer: Whereas the people on right, in certain situations, might not necessarily –

SHANE: Far less so.

Interviewer: And how would that manifest itself? Would they become frustrated?

SHANE: Yes, usually unhappiness and underperformance.

Interviewer: Yes. Considered and rational, which were some of the things we’ve just described?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: Versatility of thought, self confidence.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: Feel fulfilled?

SHANE: Yes, yes, yes actually, yes.

Interviewer: Do the people on here not feel fulfilled?
Two of them almost certainly don’t, one of them didn’t but deal with it by changing jobs.

And actually, sorry, just on that feel fulfilled, I am just trying to tie into something else you said earlier; within this feel fulfilled is it because they think – and this is back to your comment earlier on about rather than thinking about the situation, they think it’s them and therefore I’m not fulfilled because there’s something wrong with me.

Yes.

Whereas the mentally tough people will be fulfilled because the bit that’s missing they’ll do something about it.

Yes.

Okay. Analytical?

Yes.

Decisive?

Yes.

Assertive?

Yes.

Resilient – decency?

Yes.

I’m going to ask you a question about these two groups, I mean it’s just something that I’m interested in understanding because you talk about Tiger Woods and he cheated on his wife, and you talk about Lance Armstrong and he cheated on his sport, he didn’t necessarily cheat on his wife, because he can’t do what he did without his spouse knowing – would these two groups cheat?
SHANE  I don't think it divides – it's divided between the two groups, and probably the decency one isn't, it's not dividing very well. I think the decency thing came it where it's a reference – remember it came it from there being two – remember, when that came in that was before we'd eliminated one half of that characteristic, so we said – we came back. Okay, it's mentally tough when there is something to be mentally tough about.

Interviewer  So on the mental toughness side, in the sense of right and wrong, you look at people who effectively commit a business crime, they'll lie about something, they'll cheat on something and athletes will cheat and take drugs; do you think there's an element within mental toughness around decency?

SHANE  Yes, I think it's interesting because it's actually a nice line of attack; it's not distributing that well on my two columns, right? However, on my right hand side, okay, I have one person definitely not mentally tough, something that almost defined him and another thing that defined him was his ability to be devious, and I can think of another individual who has a similar characteristic.

Interviewer  So I'm going to throw another word in then –

SHANE  But that decency thing, that's not dividing quite – that's a more complex thing, I think it's something that's in the mix.

Interviewer  Right, okay. If I was to throw a word in, rather than decency I'll put the word trust. Would that divide?

SHANE  No.

Interviewer  No, okay. Continually functioning, which is almost this sort of doggedness, this –

SHANE  Good, you should write that down.

Interviewer  - doggedness!

SHANE  Yes, that's what my Dad would have said, doggedness; if you asked my Dad about me, right, one of the things he'd tell you, and he would; he'd say doggedness and stickability. All of my left hand three will stay with it.
Interviewer: On stickability, and this is where there’s almost – I’ll give an example, because you are a diver, you are diving and you can see the wreck you want to get to but you can also see you are running out of air; do you think mental toughness comes into the decisions you make at that point? Do you take the risk, do you go for it –

SHANE: Yes I do.

Interviewer: - or do you come back up?

SHANE: No you come back up – is not one of my words decisiveness?

Interviewer: Decisive, yes, but I wanted to push that – and this is where this element of risk, because decisive might not have a risk associated with it, it might just be –

SHANE: I think it does actually, because it’s not decisive if it doesn’t.

Interviewer: Well, so for example on Saturday do you want to go for a Thai or an Indian, you might be decisive and say Thai, but there’s no real risk associated with that. However if I was to say to you do you want shellfish or chicken, there might be a decisiveness, there might be a risk associated with that if you are allergic to shellfish. So you can be decisive but in the situation I gave you, which is almost life and death, you very much know you go back to the surface, you don’t risk it all, but when we talked about doggedness somebody who has got doggedness or this stickability might think no, I can keep going, I’ll keep going, I’ll go to the wreck and might put their life in danger.

SHANE: Well, I’m not sure you’ve got that good of an example there, but let me just pursue it; let’s stay with the diving analogy. I’m going to come to the diving analogy but before I do it let me just make another observation. We are talking about the concept of toughness, mental toughness –

Interviewer: Yes.

SHANE: - mental toughness. I think it is generally a characteristic of – this may not be mental toughness, there may be a difference between mental toughness and mental strength, I don’t know, maybe, maybe not.
You tell me what you think it is.

Okay, but mentally strong people are generally decisive; mentally weak people – sorry, psychologically strong people are generally decisive; psychologically weak people are generally indecisive.

I think Lance Armstrong is extremely decisive on taking drugs.

Yes.

However I would say that is a sign of mental weakness. My personal view; so I gave you the analogy of the diver but it actually came from a real study, so you can be decisive, in my view, you can be decisive on doing something that’s bad.

Yes you can, that’s right.

So decisiveness I would say could be a component but you can be decisive and make the wrong decision.

Oh yes, absolutely right, absolutely right but the thing is what will happen is you’ll make the decision.

Yes, so if you’re – and when you said doggedness, so the doggedness is I don’t give up, I don’t give up, I don’t give up.

That’s correct.

So you are going down, you are going deeper, you don’t give up, you don’t give up but you, at some point, give up; so your doggedness that your Dad described that you’ve got, is something –

He’s talking though about maintaining, staying with something under a long period of hardship rather than being decisive.

Yes, but staying with something is a continual decision to stay, because if you’re running a marathon, if you are doing something – this stickability, this don’t give up – giving up is a decision to stop. To go back to the surface is a decision.
INTERVIEWER So when you’re at that depth –

SHANE Stay with the diving analogy for a minute, the answer is if – usually if there is a diving thing going on and you get to the limit of it and you know you haven’t the time to go deeper, it’s barely a decision; a decision, right, is making a call when the right thing to do isn’t necessarily clear. If it’s clear it’s not a decision, this is what you do, right? So the wreck thing, that analogy doesn’t work very well, it’s absolutely clear –

INTERVIEWER To you.

SHANE Well, let me swing it round and give you a situation where it has happened; I have been diving where an unplanned – things have taken place where I’m running out of air, literally, or we don’t want to go and we know we are into a decompression position and we haven’t planned to decompress and the people upstairs don’t know, or are assuming we are not decompressing. In those situations more than once, I’ve deliberately let myself run out of air and just used my partner’s system for a few extra minutes while we finish something off and gone up on him. I was in a situation where two divers could just read each other, we knew what we were doing, it’s dangerous but we’d make a decision. Also where we look at each other and realise and just done the stops on the way up; you are not really supposed to do that but we’ve done that, and that is a decision and you have to make the call, are we doing it this way or are we not and they are tough decision because strictly speaking you are breaking the ruling and you are introducing elements, additional elements, of danger in a situation that’s dangerous enough. But nevertheless they are considered decisions.

INTERVIEWER All of the things you’ve described that you are saying are not considered, even if it’s almost not a decision it obviously is because there are times when you’ve chosen not to do it.

SHANE It’s an interesting point, I’ve never – you raise a possibility, a picture of it that I’ve not really considered before. What you said before was intriguing, about the stopping or continuing being a decision. I’d never really – in terms of resilience, in terms of the ability to – this may be important actually, because –
I’m sorry, the thought process came from a study in mountaineering about mental toughness and somebody who you would use all of these words to describe writes a report about how getting within 200 feet of K2, three times, and turning back. Because at that point he knew he could get that 200 feet, what he didn’t know was whether he could get back and to him the goal was not getting to the top of the mountain, it was getting home.

Absolutely.

But there were others, at that point, who took a different decision and actually it’s back to this phrase, would die for. So there’s a doggedness that can be destructive and if you take that into business almost the failure within business when you see individuals is almost – when I say failure, not necessarily in around that they are a failure, but their body may fail, they may become exhausted, they may make poor decisions, they may not perform at the level they could perform before because perhaps they’ve been over dogged. So do you think this concept of doesn’t give up – because one of the other words that somebody used was perfectionist, and almost if you were a perfectionist you stay with it, you don’t give up until it’s complete – but then does perfection exist?

Therefore within the process of what we are doing and performing, is there a point where we say that’s where we stop? And the give up isn’t a negative, it’s almost a –

Yes, I agree, I've understood it better now. I think the answer is yes. Remember that though, that there are degrees here and in terms of the resilience, the concept of resilience, doggedness, stickability, one difference here is the ability of people to stay with something and not necessarily fight their way through it literally, but certainly metaphorically. There are people who will, in demanding situations, will stop, will get out earlier because they don’t have the tools to deal with it. Those who have said tools, there may be a different set, there may be different combinations in different people, that will often generate resilience but as you’ve said, I hadn’t actually thought of it this way, but I think you are right. There then comes a position where the decisiveness comes in later on and what would happen in some situations my right hand side wouldn’t make the [s.l] call, or at least two of them wouldn’t. All of the people on the left would.
If I gave you another word, and it relates to what you’ve just described, I think you’ve used the word and I’m just interested in your view of it, it’s one of the key characteristics that’s being use in the past and by other people – focussed. Are you describing that these individuals – when you say that they are continued [s.l.] insight are they focussed? It’s almost this do they not get distracted, do these people get distracted or are they just not focussed or is it something else?

SHANE Which ones?

So these guys, who were tough, focussed and don’t get distracted, or are the people who aren’t tough can be focussed but can be easily distracted.

Yes, generally yes; all the people on my left, when they are doing something, they are doing it, they are very, very focussed and professional, professional men. Where there is a difference is in the – there’ll be some – clearly the people aren’t identical so some of them will react in some situations differently to the others, but no, I’d say that high focus, real intense focus –

Almost flow? Flow, when you are in that sort of state of flow where – I know when I’m working in Excel and I turn it off -

Absolutely, that would apply to all the people on my left and none of the people on the right. I think part of that, you said focus, I think concentration might work equally well, but focus – sorry, in this context where you said you used the word focus, high levels of sustained concentration are what would define the focus. That’s what it would mean in that situation.

On the back of that then, the people on your right, their concentration can break.

Yes. Concentration wouldn’t really apply to any of them very much. Not high levels of sustained – sorry, sustained levels of very high concentration, no.

Okay, are there any other sorts of characteristics that you can think of, or perhaps it’s something that the people on the right have that perhaps the people on the left don’t. So perhaps some people who lack mental
toughness or a level of mental toughness, they don't perform because of something, perhaps it's something that you think is common amongst them.

SHANE: Well none of the people on the left are – sorry – no, I was going to say ambition, but the point is it's something that was lacking and not the other way around.

Interviewer: No, no, no that's fine. So these guys are ambitions and these lack ambition?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: So there's almost a level of ambition within mentally tough people; is it almost they want to achieve things, there's a sense of achievement or –

SHANE: Bear with me a second. Generally yes, but I'm not sure – the reason I'm hesitating is because I'm not confident that there's an actual, there's a correlation.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

SHANE: So I think that might be dangerous. Another thing that I'm thinking of – just write this down and I might tell you to cross it out – what is the – how do I say this, it's not a word, it will have to be a phrase – use sense of duty.

Interviewer: I like that. Phrases are good, phrases are better than words because it almost gives it some context. Just explain what you mean then between those two groups.

SHANE: With regard to that?

Interviewer: Yes. You are talking about being responsible, almost these people are responsible – are these people irresponsible?

SHANE: No, but they feel – they are – oh God! I'll describe what I'm talking about, but I may be wrong. My people on the left, their sense of duty in and sense of responsibility in a professional situation is very strong, they are very conscious of it and are – it's a very strong motivation but it's not something that they've decided to be, it comes from an intuitive, from an innate – it is an innate characteristic.
Interviewer: So they were that way when they were born.

SHANE: Sorry, innate isn’t – in the biological sense, no. Intrinsic is better; intrinsic better than innate.

Interviewer: Yes. It’s almost tacit knowledge.

SHANE: Yes, whereas on the right, I’m not saying that they’re not all irresponsible, they don’t recognise the responsibility.

Interviewer: They don’t feel responsible.

SHANE: But it’s not a – it’s something that essentially they can switch on and off.

Interviewer: Is it about priorities?

SHANE: No, no it’s not –

Interviewer: So what do you mean by they switch on and off?

SHANE: I’m trying to find the antithesis for the condition I’m describing. It’s not a – in the people on the right it’s not a particularly strong sense and it’s not something that’s motivating to them. On the people on the left, one of their professional characteristics is derived from the fact that they have this tacit sense of duty and responsibility. Somebody is paying me to do this so it’s going to get done, it may be bad but that’s what I’m being paid for, and it’s there all the time. It’s a very big personal [s.l.] driver.

Interviewer: So in that context how do the other people behave then, do they sort of, do they not care?

SHANE: No I think they’re less – I mean, in some cases I think they’re – right, okay. The people on the left are people who are driven, the people on the right aren’t.

Interviewer: I was about to use the word –

SHANE: That’s where – but, but that’s where it’s coming from.
Interviewer  And it’s not that they don’t have any drive, but perhaps there are times when they don’t always have it?

SHANE  Yes.

Interviewer  And almost like a sense of duty sustains the drive and perhaps the doggedness of those in –

SHANE  I think that in a sense that sense of duty is probably something that’s behind the doggedness, it’s a driver for that. Now, where I am hesitating a bit is – remember I have to – can definitely say, I can definitely apply the term, now whether that’s because – whether that is, sorry, a characteristic of people who are mentally tough, I think that sometimes it will be, maybe not always.

Interviewer  Does it link into – and this is where I’m trying to find something from these people that I would say are, what’s the word I would use, careless perhaps; the diver that’s careless has drive, will continue but becomes careless, the mountaineer that almost – a lack of – the sense of duty is almost to themselves, survival. I don’t care whether they survive; I’d almost kill myself to do this.

SHANE  You’ve got it, part of that, one of the things that that sense generates is probably a sense of – sorry, hang on. Sorry, I’ve lost it. Let me stay with it for a second because it’s important. You used the word care, and it was a good one because what it drives is a sense of – I had it and I’ve lost the words – but they’ll have, they will retain a sense of the importance of process of – what’s a better word than process? Professionalism is the word I was looking for. It tends to apply in professional situations more but the mechanism is often exactly the same; if you are good at diving you know what the procedures and you know why and you maintain them, you don’t bugger about with them.

Interviewer  So your view of I don’t need to make a decision, it’s not a decision, is a decision. It’s almost programmed.

SHANE  Correct, yes. I’m not sure; I’m hesitating a little bit on whether that’s a mental toughness, a mental toughness thing.

Interviewer  Would you describe all of these people here as professional – sorry, these people are always professional?
SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: Do these people sometimes lack professionalism?

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: And therefore it’s not – if you take, back to the perfect golfer, not every one, if it’s a spectrum, sorry graphic equaliser of capabilities and they could potentially be almost endless, although there appears to be a number of call-ons, you know, this professionalism, their ability to perform in a particular way enables them to almost feel self assured, because I have a way of doing it, and somewhat it’s that stickability about saying no, I know this way always works, I’m always going to do it this way.

SHANE: Well I think – just on the latter, I think it’s more about continuing to do things, which may include doing things in different ways rather than being – so doggedness isn’t the same as dogmaticness, if there is such a word, that’s a different concept, but in terms of – it’s interesting that the left hand side are all phenomenally capable individuals; the right hand side one of them is not bad, two of them are hopeless.

Interviewer: But again, you are ultimately defining their performance and therefore these people don’t perform in the same situations as these guys would. These guys would consistently out perform them –

SHANE: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: - for the reasons of the characteristics.

SHANE: Absolutely, absolutely, no question.

Interviewer: I used the word carelessness before, it's not carelessness I’m trying to think of a better word – I can’t get it out of my head, but I will come back to it. I just want to try and spin this, so I’m just trying to elicit a number of different questions, the characteristics. Everybody has a slightly different sort of starting point, so the other people I’ve interviewed have started in different areas and so actually you might not cover the whole map, but you will cover a large proportion of it –

SHANE: I’d expect that.
introducing the other things and you might go, ah yes I would agree with that except etc. So the next question really sort of approaches it from a slightly different way, but it's just to see if you come up with something different. If you were to pick one of these people on this list as somebody you considered to be mentally tough and you would ask them the question what did they think the characteristics of a mentally tough individual are, what do you think they might say?

SHANE Whoo! Gosh! Okay, the resilience word would come up with all of them; the assertiveness would come up with all of them, beyond that –

Interviewer Just on assertiveness, so if someone is assertive, what's the antithesis of that then?

SHANE Submissiveness.

Interviewer Submissive.

SHANE Yes.

Interviewer Almost give in to others?

SHANE Yes.

Interviewer Okay. Any other things –

SHANE I think that's a difficult thing to gain their impression of it; I've picked some good examples here, it's difficult to do. I think that – hang on... ...They might put it in different words, but I think the being smart thing would probably come into it as well, this concept of understanding, of being tough through understanding that a situation isn't right.

Interviewer It's not that you appear tough in a sense.

SHANE No.

Interviewer Actually, you may appear calm and the antithesis of tough is that in this situation they're able to assimilate all the information and deal with it a way and perform, where others might flap and panic.
SHANE Yes, exactly.

Interviewer And actually other people might appear to be tough and get aggressive but these individuals are able to actually-

SHANE Absolutely right. But the key thing is they know when something wasn’t right; so they’d recognise when a situation was inherently demanding and perhaps demanding and/or stressful, approaching a level that is questionable; of questionable acceptability. They would understand that and they would be capable of understanding what the nature of it was, what the cause of it was.

Interviewer Because one of the interesting things for me in rugby is there are times when I know there are certain people will take the ball into a situation where they’re going to get hurt, they are really going to get hurt, and these people do it, and I’m … it might be seen as physically weak, but I want to get hurt; I want to be able to continue the match; I want to be able to do other things. And are these people mentally tough or are they just physically tough? And are they physically tough because they’re ignorant to the pain or actually they are just physically tough? And that physical toughness within those environments makes them mentally tough. And it’s almost, it’s this cognitive bit that’s important because I think within sport sometimes physical toughness and a physical tough, you know, almost masculine view, you know a masculine undertone well that would then almost define that all women aren’t tough, but then you know-

SHANE I think the analogy here is important, because remember part of the mental … so I’ve started from reaction to demanding, stressful and sometimes distressing situations. Right, that was a fairly reasonable starting point, but notice that of those 3 words, 2 of them were the concept of stress, which is essentially a psychological condition, right. I think one thing that’s very important is that clearly, some people are far more subject to stress than others. Right, now if you are resilient to stress; if you don’t get stressed then that’s generally going to be something like you’re emotionally non-intelligent; you just don’t get the stress because you can’t see the situation’s wrong, so you can just, we can block those out, right, emotionally. So we have to leave out here people who are not emotionally intelligent. But amongst people who have emotional intelligence there will be a range of, there will be a spectrum of susceptibility to stress in identical situations.
And low susceptibility to stress I think will be part of a characteristic that will help; a person who has such a characteristic is likely that will contribute significantly to mental toughness. But, and this is my point, people with high susceptibility to it may well be mentally tough as well, alright. And on my 3 there, I don’t know whether that just happened or whether there was something going on in my head when I wrote it but from your end to my end, the resilience to stress starts off very low and becomes very high, but all 3 of those people are very mentally tough people.

You could suggest-

**Interviewer**  How do you see that? How are you measuring that; the way they respond or?

**SHANE**  Well, I’m not on about the way they respond but the difference is in emotional reaction to difficult situations.

**Interviewer**  Right, good. So-

**SHANE**  And possibly, actually I don’t know whether, I don’t really understand much about emotional intelligence; it’s not a field I know very much about, but you have people who do react, who sort of interact with the world on a far more emotional basis than others; I don’t mean that in a sense of incapacitating emotionally it’s just that their relationship with it is an emotional one, whereas some other people it tends not to be, or far less so.

**Interviewer**  To sort of summarise it, are you saying you believe that there’s no direct correlation then between emotional intelligence and mental toughness and actually people can be mentally tough but have different levels of emotional intelligence?

**SHANE**  I think there is a relationship with it but I think that … because mental toughness is a composite of different characteristics, and if you have comparatively … if you have generally low emotional reactions to demanding situations, that will certainly make it easier to be mentally tough. If you have a high emotional reaction to it, right, still be mentally tough, but-

**Interviewer**  It’s just tougher?

**SHANE**  -it’s coming … I don’t know. And one extreme on this, I will try not to personalise this, but one extreme of this is somebody like me, who just does
... my relationship with business is always an emotional one, I don’t know
why, but it is. So there’s a lot of emotional sensitivity in me, that’s as a
strength in the sense you know, that I can often see things going on that
hardly anybody else can. And I’ve been years understanding that, years
and years and years, and now I understand and I see people and I realise
it’s not that they’re … they just can’t see things that I can see or predict
things that I can see. But there must be other things going on to make me a
mentally tough person, because if you weren’t you would just (inaudible;
over-talking); you couldn’t deal with it.

Interviewer So you have like coping mechanisms essentially?

SHANE I think it’s more than that; I don’t think it’s just coping it’s that that is
buttressed by other strengths. In my case I don’t think it manifests actually
as a weakness in other people it might be.

Interviewer So you don’t have to be emotionally intelligent to be mentally tough and you
don’t have to lack … you can lack emotional intelligence-

SHANE You can be comparatively low in it and be mentally tough.

Interviewer So it’s almost the opposite to the bell-curve in the sense of those who have
high levels of emotional intelligence is almost a benefit, and it’s almost that
perhaps the people in the middle-

SHANE Yes, but be careful with that one because I think that’s a matter of degrees. I
think you’re probably dealing with a scale, a scale inside people who are
emotionally intelligent. Remember, there people who aren’t. So it’s not that,
right, they aren’t, ergo they’re going to be mentally tough. Remember on the
definition-

Interviewer No.

SHANE They’re not scared so they’re not brave.

Interviewer Yes. But it doesn’t necessarily mean that if you lack mental toughness and
therefore you don’t appreciate the emotion … in an emotional sense, it
doesn’t mean that you’re mentally tough but because you lack it, it doesn’t
mean that you’re not mentally tough. So there’s no actual direct correlation
between mental toughness and emotional intelligence.
SHANE: So a simpler way of saying it is that I think being mentally tough doesn't mean being insensitive, but within mentally tough people there will be a range; there will be people who are more emotionally sensitive than others. So you have on my list one bloke who was a colliery manager; couldn't be a colliery manager by being sensitive, you just simply couldn't have put up; you couldn't have dealt with the men involved, and they were all men.

Interviewer: So in that situation, again it's almost situation-specific.

SHANE: Yes. I think I would say it was, yes.

Interviewer: So there are times when in a colliery you can't be sensitive to emotions.

SHANE: No.

Interviewer: But there are other instances where they would be sensitive to emotion.

SHANE: And in fact were.

Interviewer: And therefore it's almost they have the ability to almost choose their level of sensitivity to emotions and can control that, whereas there's those individuals who don't have any, or other people who almost perhaps constantly sensitive to emotions and therefore can't perform.

SHANE: Not necessarily. I think in some cases that will be the result, but in other cases, no, I think that's wrong. I think and a case in point, right, that I am probably exquisitely sensitive to a lot of situations but other characteristics buttress that. And I think an important point, and maybe it's obvious, but sometimes it's worth actually stating the obvious because not everybody can see it. What you've got here, what is emerging from this is that mental toughness really does seem to come from a synthesis of different characteristics; not necessarily a limited series of characteristics that as long as they all add up to 100% you've got mental toughness. It may be that some syntheses of characteristics quite independent of other syntheses of characteristics can lead to mental toughness, which is an interesting point isn't it?

Interviewer: And one of the books I'm reading at the moment; it's quite an interesting book because it talks about 2 different cyclists who both won the Tour de France, who both behaved and had completely different personalities;
completely, you know almost chalk and cheese, but you would define both of them as mentally tough if you define them winning the Tour de France. If you were to describe a different context then you might not necessarily describe them both as being mentally tough. So it’s almost, and back to your point – their personalities and these elements, some of them are very: yes, yes, you tick the boxes. Some of them it’s actually no – but the other one you would say tick, tick, tick – yes, yes, but then no on some others. So, it’s almost like a combination of things that enables them … they might not be perfectly mentally tough; they may feel some of the stress and pressure, and it’s almost that degree that actually your mental toughness out-balances the pressure and you perform but then all of a sudden there are times when actually the pressure and the stress and your mental toughness levels drop and you don’t necessarily perform. And the people who can perform, more often these guys are always in balance with a higher level, and these people there are times when it goes the other way and they may lose focus or drive or that professionalism; a sense of duty because of something.

SHANE  Yes, I can buy that.

Interviewer  I’m going to ask you one more final question, and it’s almost something that we’ve already alluded to. Do you think it’s a purely positive thing?

SHANE  No. No, I don’t, because in some situations some occasions I would guess that mental toughness; that there is a scale of mental toughness … mental toughness maybe on a continuum that includes or that can include aggression.

Interviewer  Okay, so that’s part of emotion?

SHANE  Maybe.

Interviewer  Would you say aggression’s an emotion?

SHANE  No.

Interviewer  An action, a behaviour?

SHANE  It’s a form of behaviour. I think depending on what … if you accept that you get people are mentally tough from different formulations of a number of characteristics. What’s probably coming out of your study is going to be a
pretty good sense of what the key characteristics are, right. I mean how you’d quantify them that will probably be the PhD that comes after yours. Some of those mixers I think will sometimes present a risk of people being prone to behaving in an overly aggressive way, so I think that would be … if there’s a danger, if there is a downside of it, it’s probably that association, that correlation in some cases.

Interviewer: Can I just pick up on the word ‘aggressive’ – so aggressive behaviour to somebody else, not an aggressive approach to doing something.

SHANE: Aggressive behaviour to somebody else.

Interviewer: And this is the bit I wanted to pick up on earlier but I didn’t quite find the right point to pick it up, and it’s probably the last bit that I think is important, because you’ve almost defined the impact on others.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: And we talked earlier about managing situations and potentially managing people. So do you think there is a potential for mental toughness to have a negative impact on others? You know aggressive-

SHANE: Run that one by me again – don’t change the question, just tell me-

Interviewer: Tell me do you think that mental toughness has the potential to have a negative impact on others?

SHANE: Yes. It has the potential to do so, but it wouldn’t be an absolute correlation, but yes I would.

Interviewer: Through the behaviour of-

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: So if we take mentally tough individuals these people could well be motivating, could be inspiring.

SHANE: Absolutely.

Interviewer: But their mental toughness could also possibly be threatening-
SHANE: Absolutely.

Interviewer: -from an aggressive perspective. Or also do you think people’s confidence can also be threatening? Because you’ve talked about self-assured-

SHANE: Yes, I think it is. Well, I know it is.

Interviewer: If you take the sporting analogy: when you compete there are very few competitive environments; in fact I can’t think of any at the moment where you would want to have a positive impact on your opponent – the mental state/physical state – you’re competing, so naturally high performers will want to have a negative impact on the person that they’re interacting with. Whereas almost in business yes, competitors, yes other sales people but you don’t work with them, they work in isolation to you more often than not. You know there are times when perhaps you might be debating but very, very rarely; the vast majority of times you’re working with people where actually you want to have a positive impact on them.

SHANE: Yes.

Interviewer: And therefore a lot of the characteristics and the benefits of being mentally tough and being able to sustain our own personal performance, as you mentioned this aggressive element, there is a potential danger that if we don’t understand our impact on others it could be negative on other people-

SHANE: Absolutely.

Interviewer: - it’s still positive for the individual’s performance, but overall individuals don’t perform, companies do. And therefore it’s about expanding from individual to group.

SHANE: Absolutely. And I think that effect probably happens more often than you might imagine, because I think there are 2 mechanism: 1) is, and I’ve got to be careful here, what I’m going to say is high performing individuals; that a lot of people will see a high performing individual as threatening, some are very confident; not necessarily aggressive, right, but somebody who is very confident and is obviously very capable, but often just the confidence – people who stand out, a lot of people will see that as threatening. I need to
be careful because I’m not sure the correlation’s directly with mental
toughness, so I’ve got to be a little bit careful there.

Interviewer

It’s not necessarily as a whole but some of these characteristics if people
have them-

SHANE

So, absolutely. If people have a number of these characteristics, if they
really stand out then some people, and generally people who are less
mentally tough, may see those as intimidating. And the other mechanism is
the one I said before just the tendency for some … the mix that makes
some people mentally tough to be prone to aggression. And you could
probably predict what the aspect of the mix is because one of those things
will be the lower end, so finite, but lower emotional intelligence.
Actually another one is very high levels of analytical capability have the
same reaction, where you’re in a situation of a team of people and there’s a
situation and you will say, "Well the reason this has happened..." I’ll give
you an example. So there’s a conversation going on about why something
isn’t sterile, and people start talking about the autoclave, and you have to
go, "Well, you know, maybe the pressure wasn’t high enough. It’s the
pressure-this, the pressure-that, pressure the other.” And somebody says,
"The only reason for the pressure; the pressure doesn’t contribute to the
sterility, the pressure is there because that’s the way to get the
temperature," you can only get water to get to that temperature under
pressure.
Right, okay; now when that happens often people are not going to like that;
people will often react quite defensively to that situation because it can
appear, it can often appear threatening, very common when you’ve got
people who have that very high level of natural, spontaneous analytical
capability and the tendency to express it. That’s often viewed as, well, in
fact it often can be aggressive; unintentionally so but sometimes it is.

Interviewer

Like it bursts out in an aggressive way.

SHANE

Yes. (Inaudible 01:59:33) was interesting and I’ll tell you why – because the
way that you’ve done this has taken up a shape for anybody who does mind
maps you know that when things become asymmetric in situations like this
something’s happening and that was right at the start of watching.

Interviewer

No, no, that’s the situation.
SHANE: No, it wasn’t there, that’s not where it was – it was right on the corner.

Interviewer: Oh there, well it was on the corner because–

SHANE: It doesn’t matter, but the point is there was something special going on with that (s.l. car).

Interviewer: Well these are the situations you defined, and actually what’s interesting you defined the situation probably better than some of the people did; I think some people find it difficult to articulate but what was interesting where you talked about sort of a hostile environment; you talked about particular types of jobs and almost people get conditioned to behave in certain ways in certain environments. And then almost when you take them out of those environments they can’t but behave in the way they did before. And therefore mentally tough … and this is where perhaps emotional intelligence comes into it is that you know, we had a conversation today about dealing with our managing director and you have to deal with him in his way, you can’t deal with him in the way you would deal with others, so you’ve almost got to be chameleon like in the sales environment.

SHANE: Yes, exactly.

Interviewer: But, sales people can come across as aggressive, because whilst you’re hameleon-like, it’s always hostile. So you can deal with things in lots of different ways, and cope with all the stress and pressure in lots of different ways, but there’s and underlying thing that you’ve got this, you might describe it as ‘resilience’ within the situation, but that resilience in that situation, in another situation might be seen as aggressive. So people describe me as resilient in work, but that resilience in a social setting can be seen as aggressive.

SHANE: Yes, I think I would agree. Yes, I can see that.

Interviewer: And so what was interesting about the way you described the situations was you described them in much more detail that some of the other people, you saw hostility, lack of you know, frustration, poor communication, and that’s why that’s part of that one because that was almost the situations that these things all relate to, and depending upon the situation, the characteristics are more or less important.
Is there anything that you think, “I thought you would have asked that?” Or, “We didn’t talk about that but I thought…” I think we’ve pretty much covered it.

SHANE I think you’ve been clever enough not to be very specific about what you’re asking. You’ve asked generally high-probing questions, you’ve generated a conversation; you’ve not hemmed anybody in, me least of all, with the way you’ve done the questions. I do think an interesting thing that’s come out of this; it’s not necessarily the main thing, but I think it’s probably significant that a lot of the conversation has involved addressing the concept of emotional intelligence.

Now, what does that mean? I don’t know, it may simply mean, well, it may mean a couple of things. One of the things it may mean is that issues of emotional … where you have people in business situations with low or zero emotional intelligence, it’s a classic situation where mental toughness is required in the success of dealing with it, just being a theme through that. It is also not without significance; this is very, very strange, this is a real weird thing, but I think I have what seems to be an unusual characteristic, and that is I seem to be expert in working with managers who have no emotional intelligence; I’ve done it twice, I’ve done it twice with men who are notoriously difficult to get on with, nobody can get on with them, they just leave a trail of disastrous relationships behind them, and yet I’ve managed to deal with them the pair of them. One of them was Colin Garner, and nobody could understand when I started working with him that I was able to work with him, just nobody understood that, although I actually had the measure of him. And for years I didn’t understand what all the fuss was about, I didn’t find him that difficult to deal with.

Interviewer Why didn’t you find him difficult to deal with?

SHANE Because his behaviour didn’t seem particularly strange to me.

Interviewer Is that because you could rationalise it?

SHANE Yes. At the time, I mean I was very, very young, and I was dealing with it completely intuitively, but his-

Interviewer Actually, can I just step in – because it’s interesting because the last 2 people I’ve worked for I would say have no emotional intelligence and people have said the same thing. And the difference between me and the
others, and whether this is what you found is everybody else felt threatened by them and I didn't.

SHANE  No, I think I would agree, that's the same thing.

Interviewer  And actually going back to your characteristics here, it's because to some degree I'm self-assured, so I'm confident in my own ability; I don't feel threatened by the individual as well as, I don't feel threatened by their lack of emotional intelligence, whereas another colleague has had issues with this individual.

SHANE  Yes.

Interviewer  And I think it's because they're not confident.

SHANE  You see, you've gone exactly where I went. Right, this relationship between being self-assured and the generally logical basis of that, and being confident and being able, ergo that leading to a toughness.

Interviewer  And what's interesting is I don't think this person's tough; not the manager, my peer, I don't think he's tough and I don't think he's tough for the reason you described, which was, he is self-, let me get this right, he's self-assured because he has this innate confidence.

SHANE  That's it.

Interviewer  But actually he's not. He comes across as confident but he's not because actually he's not self-assured. Because actually there is no logical base for his assurance of his confidence, he just appears confident. And what's interesting about it is he has a stammer; I was listening to the radio this morning about stammers, and he stammers at moments - he has 'a tell'. It's really interesting, when he's not confident he stammers and he stammers on things where he lacks self-assurance, when he actually lacks knowledge; he's not decisive, he's very analytical, phenomenally analytical, extremely bright and I would say he's dogged and he's got drive, but what I would say his weakness in this situation, and he has suffered mentally, and I think it's because he's not self-assured. And interestingly, the other thing that manifests itself in this situation is he gets frustrated, he gets frustrated with the MD.
SHANE    Yes.

Interviewer    And in those situations I don’t.

SHANE    You’ll need very particularly mentally strong people – where you’re dealing with people with no emotional intelligence? And some people will say, “There aren’t any people with no emotional intelligence.” Bollocks. Absolutely not; a lot of the studies, this crap of research you see on the characteristics and entrepreneurs a lot of it is complete horse shit because it’s not done properly. Well you’ve got a true entrepreneur, I’d not say they’re all zero intelligence, but a lot of them are. A lot of senior military men as well no emotional intelligence.

Interviewer    And this is where actually, and this is my view, where we talked about impact on others and aggressiveness and all of those things, and this is where if you … I don’t think you can be an entrepreneur and not be aggressive.

SHANE    No, I don’t think you can.

Interviewer    So if you looked at the characteristics of a successful or mentally tough entrepreneur, those people are entrepreneurs for a reason, it’s because they can’t work in companies.

SHANE    Absolutely.

Interviewer    Because actually if you put them in a company they would either create stress and pressure-

SHANE    That’s exactly what they do; absolutely correct, I couldn’t agree with you more, honestly.

Interviewer    Thank you very much.

SHANE    That’s alright. Has that worked?

Interviewer    Mm, very much.

SHANE    Okay
## APPENDIX J – PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTIC ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mike</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Shane</th>
<th>Graeham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to handle pressure</td>
<td>Being able to utilise a range of skills and practices when under pressure dependent upon the situation. Able to keep things in perspective and see the big picture and the detail in order to be decisive. Do not succumb to either acute or chronic pressure.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Override negative thoughts</td>
<td>The ability to override and block out negative thoughts and self-doubts concerning your mental and physical state.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>Decisive. The ability to make the right decisions quickly and consistently.</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can deal with ambiguity</td>
<td>Are comfortable with a lack of information and have an ability to intuitively fill in the gaps in order to develop knowledge of a situation or problem.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to multitask</td>
<td>Able to cope with many different variables including workloads and different people.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to prioritise</td>
<td>The ability to prioritise tasks in order of relevance and importance.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalisation</td>
<td>Ability to ring-fence situations or emotional states and not allow one situation to affect another.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to switch off</td>
<td>Those who are mentally tough are able to switch off when they don’t need to focus on an activity.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on experiences</td>
<td>Reflecting on personal activities and the experiences of others in order to learn for future events.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to lead others</td>
<td>The ability to lead people both below and above you in the organisation and to get them to do what you need them to do. Being consensual to other peoples views, ideas and opinions before making a decision.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensual</td>
<td>Understanding and accepting that other people have an opinion and may have a better solution or direction. No feeling inferiority if others provide better answers.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage Upwards</td>
<td>Able to manage the expectations and demands of superiors and when necessary say no.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Knowledge</td>
<td>Having the ability to perceive and understand the business environment, understanding the role you have to play, how social and business interactions work and a level of intuition that enables you to understand situations quicker than others.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Role Responsibility</td>
<td>Understanding and accepting that there is a team role to play and working with others within the team environment.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Game</td>
<td>Are aware of the tacit rules of corporate life and are able to operate within them or manipulate them to succeed.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive</td>
<td>Ability to understand complex situations quickly and make decisions.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Intelligence</td>
<td>Know how to behave in social situations and understand the implications of social interactions and their dangers.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration &amp; Focus</td>
<td>Single-minded and focused on the task at hand. Don’t get side tracked by internal or external pressures, when asked or there is an opportunity to do other things they refuse in order to sustain high levels of concentration on what they are doing. Maintain a perspective on what is need at all times.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to disappoint</td>
<td>A willingness to refuse when asked to take on additional work if they know it will affect their focus. They know their boundaries and work within them.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain perspective</td>
<td>Are in control of situations because they are able to focus on what is necessary. Are able to put things into perspective.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Are aware of and understanding your emotions when under pressure. Are able to manage your own emotions so that they do not affect your work or the work of others.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
<td>An awareness of one’s own emotional capabilities, strengths and weaknesses and the management of these to enhance performance.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>Sensitivity to other people’s emotions and situations, a tacit understanding of when situations may lead others to feel stress and pressure.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Values</td>
<td>Placing great importance on personal values relevant to becoming a better person and colleague. Always accountable, having pride in your work, you take an honest approach to doing the right thing. Modest and respectful you are considered and considerate of others.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest self appraisal</td>
<td>Taking an honest and pragmatic stance when appraising your own strengths and weaknesses, performances and decisions.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride in performance</td>
<td>Have a personal pride in the work that is completed and the way in which they go about work.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participant characteristics assessment.

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<th>Nick</th>
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<th>Graeham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Are willing to take responsibility for their actions and what needs to be done and prepared to defend them when challenged.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered</td>
<td>Think first approach. Examining situations first rather than simply trying to deal with them immediately.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerate</td>
<td>Understanding that the decisions affect other people and consider this when decisions are made and actions taken.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modest &amp; respectful</td>
<td>Show a level of humility. Care about more than just themselves and act in a modest and respectful way at all times.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Ability to bounce back from a disappointment or overwhelming event often stronger as they have learned from them. Keep on going when others would give up, don't take criticism negatively but see it as a way of adapting to the situation.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn from mistakes</td>
<td>See mistakes as a stepping-stone to success and a way of learning.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond positively to</td>
<td>Doesn't respond negatively to criticism. Can externalise themselves from a situation and see the issues rather than make them personal.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Ability to adjust ones approach when faced with different situations.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with success</td>
<td>Being able to cope with the pressure that comes with success and recognition and not becoming sidetracked or over confident.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Belief</td>
<td>Self assured of their ability to perform to the necessary level when under pressure through explicit knowledge of their technical and cognitive capabilities. Confident they can overcome any challenge they may face. Able to act independently or as part of a team.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Assured</td>
<td>Understand your own capability and have total confidence about the legitimacy of your ability to succeed.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Belief (Direction)</td>
<td>The explicit belief that the direction being taken is correct and that is will succeed.</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technically Strength</td>
<td>Have the knowledge and the experience of whatever the situation you’re dealing with. Linked to confidence.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act independently</td>
<td>Mentally tough performers get on with it and didn’t need to be directed. Have the confidence to act independently when necessary.</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Cris</td>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>Graeham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed approach</td>
<td>Appear relaxed to others (even if inside they are not) as a result of the confidence in your ability.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Motivated</td>
<td>Are intrinsically motivated to succeed either individually or as part of a team. Enjoy high pressure environments and have the clarity of thought and astuteness to turn these situations to their advantage.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive desire</td>
<td>Have a competitive desire and enjoy challenging situations.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Success</td>
<td>Willing to work with others, in a team environment, and give up personal goals in order to achieve a greater level of success.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Have an accurate vision of what it takes to succeed and know how to put it into practice.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoys pressure situations</td>
<td>Enjoy pressure and seek it out. Their performance is enhanced by pressure situations, either internally or externally created.</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astute</td>
<td>Having or showing the ability to accurately assess situations or people and turn this to your advantage.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough Attitude</td>
<td>An unshakable attitude directed towards succeeding. Individuals are disciplined, committed, remain positive and act professionally at all times. They are not afraid of conflict and will be bold and assertive when making decisions. However when necessary they are willing to compromise.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Not side tracked by changes and remain disciplined and focused on what is needed to maintain performance levels.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Set audacious goals rather than setting easy to achieve goals, individuals set goals that others consider unrealistic or unachievable.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>Always expect success and see the positives in any situation or person.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Driven. Sense of duty. Have a level of professionalism that ensures that they perform to a high level consistently.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifices (Dispassionate)</td>
<td>Disengage personal values and expectations in order to make the correct decisions for the business.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not afraid of conflict</td>
<td>Willing to stand up for themselves, their colleagues and their business when challenged. Don’t back down easily, robust in an argument when confident about the situation.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participant characteristics assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mike</th>
<th>Cris</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Shane</th>
<th>Graeham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Ability to ensure that other people act in a way that is expected. Being tough in support of your point of view and a conviction in terms of the decision.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts criticism</td>
<td>Doesn’t respond negatively to criticism. Has the ability to externalise themselves from the situation and see the issues rather than make them personal.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave &amp; Bold</td>
<td>Willingness to conclude issues quickly and move on. Not willing to let issues develop. Can be seen as ruthless, brave or bold.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to compromise</td>
<td>Prepared to accept that they can be wrong. Their ego doesn’t get in the way of decisions.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>Always working hard and being determined to get through mentally demanding situations to achieve their goals and vision. Open minded and willing to try new challenges and take calculated risks. An inspiration to others.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>They have vision of where they want to get to and have a drive and tenacity to get the job done. They are persistent and maintain a pace that enables performance.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>The ability to persevere when faced with adversities and challenges both on and off the field to achieve your goals.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Have clearly established goals that focus attention and drive performance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meticulous Preparation</td>
<td>Individuals know the subject area or activity incredibly well and it is easy for them to respond to challenges. They are well prepared and have a plan in place.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in my opinion</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Managing time efficiently to balance the many demands associated with business in order to get the very best out of yourself.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational</td>
<td>Are able to positively influence the performance of others (colleagues) though their behaviour, attitude and performance.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared to take risks</td>
<td>Are prepared to risk their reputation and take risks in order to progress.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Have an analytical approach to their work. Like to understand how things work and look for empirical evidence before making judgements.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic perfectionist</td>
<td>Not settling for less than is expected but not over delivering</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In some situations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>