

Leading People and Performance

Title: A Reflective Portfolio on Enhancing Team Collaboration

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Part A: Context and Developmental Needs

1. Behaviour Identified: Low Stress Resilience

The main behavioural problem that hinders my leadership growth is stress sensitivity—the inability to regulate feelings and cognitive processes during stressful situations. My weakness is stress, particularly when it comes to timed assignments, new assignments or assignments that I have to do in a group whenever tension is involved. This results to mental barriers, physiological stress reactions such as increased pulse rate, rapid breathing, and complete withdrawal from the task. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is not simply a situation but rather depends on how people think about pressures which are imposed on them. Stress response is a mental and physiological reaction to the perceived load that is beyond the individual's capacity to manage. What is worse is that this behavior does not only impact internal performance, but it can be seen externally. Colleagues tend to think that my passive behaviours mean that I am not able to lead, thus erode leadership legitimacy. During the high-risk stages of a group project, I am passive in my contributions, thus perpetuating a negative feedback loop. My level of reactivity rather than responsiveness hampers me when it comes to positions that require leadership in situations of pressure and stress where one is expected to be calm, composed and clear-headed.

This behavioural conflict is in clear violation of the psychological personality suitable for managing global development projects, which is my intended professional pursuit. These roles involve taking charge when things are not clear like during disasters and in conflict regions where there are likely to be tempers flaring and resources are scarce. In such settings, Maltzman (2012) suggests that project leaders need to sustain functional performance in stressful and unsettled conditions, while being compelled to make important decisions under ethical and logistical strain. It is no longer an advantage to be able to function effectively during these conditions, it is a minimum requirement. My current behavioural pattern of freezing during stressful simulations and the student's avoidance of visibility suggests that he can not meet this standard. If this is not addressed, I may not be considered for field leadership positions, or I may be limited to positions that are more technical in nature and do not involve decision-making responsibilities. I have a keen interest in handling people and efficient projects aimed at bringing about change; but my stress

response puts me in the wrong stead concerning the authority or self assurance crucial in those positions.

2. Empirical and Experiential Evidence

This is not a speculative understanding of the self-identified behavioural challenge; it has been tested and then supported by other data sources, including performance data from within the modules. The PSS score of 28/40 (Appendix A) also suggests high perceived chronic stress levels. Cohen et al. In the view of (1983), scores above 26 are seen to reflect a low tolerance to ambiguity, which may also be marked by symptoms such as tiredness, temper, and indecisiveness. At the same time, the Psychology today stress assessment was conducted on me and I got 83/100 meaning that I am very stressed (Appendix B). This is higher than the benchmark mean of 59, indicating that I fall in the first quartile for stress reactivity. These findings are therefore generalized well across the different tools and the environment. The third assessment I took was the PsychCentral Anxiety Test, which put me into the range of 23-67 that indicates a tendency to such symptoms (Appendix C). This means a tendency to worry or cognitive interference during tasks that expose or vary, which is inherent in leadership in real-world tasks.

Stress responses have also been noticed in the instances of module seminars and simulations. During a conflict negotiation simulation exercise (Appendix D), I physically backed off when the conflict heightened. I did not get an opportunity to moderate or even provide input to some extent, all though I had done my homework. This is a feedback that was made by a peer in the feedback session that I was ever missing during the moment that required me to lead, something I have been doing for several times. Arnsten (2009) suggests that acute stress decreases the prefrontal cortex working capacity and affects attention control and verbal fluency, which I have seen in myself. In my reflective entry the same day (Appendix F), I described feeling disconnected and powerless even though I had rehearsed my answers in advance. This division between preparation and execution is indicative of a candidate not being able to apply himself well enough and this can only mean a behavioral issue. When pressure is applied, I do not respond, I fade away. This erodes trust and puts me out of contention for positions that require presence and ability to moderate situations.

3. Impact on Leadership and Career Progression

The most significant impact of my low stress resilience is the lack of visibility in leadership. Leadership development is more of a process that takes place in real time and is most evident during emergent situations. And this is why my behaviour mirrors avoidance when calmness is required the most. For instance, when presenting a sustainability simulation, a technical problem arose. Although I knew how it could be solved, I remained silent, did not say a word, and watched the other members of my team take charge. Later feedback noted my initial contributions had been strong, but that my silence during crisis moments had “undermined trust and dependability.” According to Goleman (1998), the key component of EI, which is emotional self-regulation, falls apart if it is not present. I am not incompetent or bereft of ideas, but my anxiety inhibits those resources when the pressure is on. This makes others not believe in me and as a result, I also do not have confidence in my future contributions – a cycle of belief.

In career terms, this behaviour disqualifies me from the high-pressure environments I seek to contribute to. Many international development project managers are likely to be called upon to lead in responding to disasters, mediate between different agencies or work under political pressure. According to Turner and Müller (2005), leadership under pressure is a characteristic of project-based organizations. Failure to act during critical periods erodes stakeholder confidence, interrupts project progression, and jeopardizes the field team. Otherwise I may be sidelined from positions that involve leadership in the field and instead I would be posted to less challenging responsibilities. That is not the kind of career I want for myself. I hope to execute mission-critical initiatives, engage with vulnerable groups and mediate high-stakes conflicts—yet such work requires trust. Trust is built when leaders can act cool and confidently, particularly during the moments of uncertainty. In its absence, I am in the position of performing below my ability but still possessing capability or capacity; behaviorally impaired.

4. Relevance in Contemporary Leadership Contexts

Stress resilience has become one of the critical competencies that are highly valued in the contemporary leadership domains, particularly in the purposeful fields. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), resilience and emotional regulation are among the ten leadership

competencies that are likely to be crucial in the future. It means that self-awareness, work-focused flexibility and the opportunity to create trust cannot be viewed as additions that can be made to an already fairly set leadership model in the face of a crisis. From the stress tests and class activities, I can conclude that my current stress profile is low in emotional continuity under such conditions. According to OECD (2020) it is a common blunder that causes development project to fail, especially when being supervised by junior or mid-line managers due to poor stress regulation. I fit that exact profile. If I cannot manage internal stability, I shall not be able to lead teams, negotiate with the donors or engage in constructive manner during the field crises. This would not only impact my future but may have adverse effects on individuals that rely on the successful completion of such programs.

From theoretical perspective, Teece's (2007) Dynamic Capabilities Framework supports the call for sensing, seizing, and, responding in real-time. My behavioural constraint interferes with the "seize" aspect of the cycle. Whenever I sense something, I analyze it and consequently, the opportunity to act is lost. In the previous seminars, when I was asked to assume a leadership position during the conflicts within my group, I opted to either go along with the flow or remain quiet. This reveals a deeper problem: not only stress, but stress that produces learned helplessness in the high tension environment. This will lead to chronic underperformance where I will avoid those activities that would need some effort. It is the ability to cope with emotions that brings out competency in pressure. It is the quality that distinguishes a planner from a leader. Without this capacity, I will fail not because of lack of intelligence or motivation, but because I let stress dictate the limits of my capabilities.

5. Long-Term Developmental Implications

If the stress resilience remains low, then I will end up with a career that is beneath my potential. According to Maslach and Leiter (2016), burnout is caused by chronic emotional dysregulation, a state I am yet to be close to experiencing. I see people avoiding tasks that are likely to be visible to other people, reluctance to speak in public, and nervousness when preparing for team presentations. These are early signs of burnout, and if prolonged by repeated failure or humiliation, may lead to complete withdrawal. This has direct bearing to my field of work as international development professional since burnout rates are high in this line of work mainly because of the

emotional toll and the rather unclear reporting responsibilities. Lacking proper coping skills, I will either leave the field or be stuck in dead-end clerical or advocacy positions that are not in line with my capabilities or interests. That would be personal failure and missed opportunity to benefit a field that I could potentially make a difference in.

Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory gives the positive view. Stress regulation is significant as it enables broadening of cognitive scope, problem solving, and development of psychological resources. This is the mentality I need to develop. My action plan cannot be a quick fix; it must involve structure for desensitisation to stress, feedback loops, and consistent practice of decision-making under pressure. The only way I can prevent this is by treating stress as a leadership training tool as opposed to a problem. Becoming a resilient and effective project leader is not something that can be learned overnight or by chance. That will occur from changing avoidance for engagement, passive for active, and reaction for response. The stakes are high: Without being able to do this, I will be out of place to advocate for the interventions that should be implemented. If I succeed, I will have transformed my biggest vulnerability into the most significant strength that I can offer as a leader.

Part B: Literature Review

1. Understanding Stress Resilience in Leadership Contexts

Stress resilience is the capacity of an individual to respond positively to stress, to stay healthy during stress, and to bounce back to normalcy after stressful experiences (Southwick & Charney, 2012). In leadership roles especially in leadership positions especially in an environment of volatility or in mission based industry like international development it has become an assumed basic competency rather than an advantage. The Transactional Model of Stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is one of the most famous theoretical models providing a definition of stress as the interaction between an individual and the environment. In contrast to the notion that stress

exists outside of the person, this model focuses on the degree of the person's evaluation of the pressure and what he or she believes to be effective strategies for dealing with it. Those who think of situations as being threatening or beyond their control are likely to suffer from behavioural immobility or emotional over freezing, which hinders decision-making.

This is particularly so in contemporary society where volatility is intrinsic and expectations for performing under pressure are high. For low resilient people, especially those who are young in their careers or inexperienced in high pressure conditions, these appraisals result in psychological avoidance. This can be seen as a failure to speak up during conflict, inaction during disruption, or avoiding responsibility. These reactions though may be attributed to shyness or lack of preparedness are in fact mediated by maladaptive stress responses. They are disadvantageous in setting up leadership structures where leadership has to be tangible and regular. This is because cohesion in a group decreases when there is no leader to maintain composure. Thus, it is not just a personal focus on personal stress, it is imperative within leadership succession. It allows presence, initiative, and emotional stability in case uncertainty interferes with arrangements.

2. Emotional Regulation and Executive Function

Pressure management is now a topic of interest for both scholars and practitioners since it is now recognized as one of the fundamentals of leadership. In Goleman's (1998) EI model, self-regulation is one of the five competencies that are a foundation to leadership success alongside self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. This is an implication that the extent to which a leader can regulate his or her emotions or give constructive answers during pressure situations defines how persons perceive the leader. On the other hand, emotional dysregulation results in unpredictability, avoidance, or overly emotional reactions. These behaviours erode trust, hide motives and reduce team confidence especially when working under time pressure or stress.

This has been evidenced in both empirical literature and practice. In the study based on organisational samples, George (2000) supports the view that the effectiveness of leaders defines staff retention and their resilience in teams. On the other hand, when the manager is dysregulated, the members of the team tend to adopt the manager's anxiety level, which translates into reactive behavior and interpersonal conflict. Pandemics such as COVID-19 offer real-life examples that

can be related to the concept. Jacinda Ardern's handling of several national crises was not only good governance but also good for the morale of the country. She became emotionally grounded and stable. On the other hand, leaders in similar democracies with volatile psychological statuses, including perplexed acquiescence or denial, as seen in some leaders, incurred significantly high leadership and choice costs as noted by The Lancet (2020). These examples show how emotional regulation impacts results on one hand in large scale politics and on the other in small scale teams. In any given development field that involves human lives, funding and reputation, lack of emotional self control can cause the collapse of projects and rift in partnerships.

3. Cognitive Impact of Stress on Decision-Making

Apart from causing disruptions in emotional well-being, stress affects cognitive function in a significant manner. Stress is shown to impair the prefrontal cortex which is the part of the brain that is tasked with activities such as decision making, attention and working memory (Arnsten, 2009). This is especially the case in leadership roles, where decisions sometimes must be made quickly with information that is not fully available. Stress non-coping in individuals is thus cognitively taxing that limits their ability to process information. This leads to uncertainty, inefficiency or reckless behavior which is not healthy for leadership. The Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) offers an additional perspective, indicating that moderate level of arousal makes for improved performance, however, high level of stress decreases intellectual and behavioral performance.

This is evident in both organisational failures and training environments. The inadequate management of relief efforts during Hurricane Katrina is an example of how stress at the organizational and personal levels can immobilize leadership, prolong the response time and complicate human suffering (Comfort, 2007). On the other hand, structured resilience training as in the Israeli Defense Forces indicates that exposure to stress in training improves the soldiers' accuracy in actual operations (Ben-Shalom et al., 2005). The results obtained herein are relevant to the behavioural challenge under consideration. Students or early career persons who exhibit cognitive breakdowns during stressful scenarios in classroom simulations are likely to exhibit similar breakdowns in actual high risk settings if appropriate interventions have not been put in

place. Thus, stress resilience should not be viewed as a way of increasing comfort but of maintaining mental soundness in activities that require strong leadership and clear mind.

4. Adaptive Thinking and the Role of Positive Emotion

On the other hand, resilience enhances psychological flexibility since it is the opposite of stress. Fredrickson (2001)'s Broaden-and-Build Theory posits that positive emotions enhance the range of thinking and acting possibilities. This enables them to think outside the box, accumulate social capital, and establish sustainable strategies of managing their stress. While those in chronic stress or anxiety show patterned behaviors, fear of the unknown, and avoidance of risks. From a leadership perspective, this constrains imagination, innovation, and the process of reframing issues as opportunities. In the world of development, where contexts change fast, and stakeholder systems are not simple, such an approach is not a desirable asset – it is a necessity.

This theory is relevant to leadership development programs as seen in UNDP's Emerging Leaders Academy, where stress simulation is applied to enhance creative resilience. Studies have also shown that participants who have higher levels of emotional intelligence are likely to perform better in ideation, conflict of interest and resource bargaining. When a person lacks it, they either isolate or , alternatively, become overly compliant with organizational power structures and lose their critical thinking abilities. In the classroom, similar patterns are also observed. Stress non-managers also tend to withdraw from activities such as group brainstorming or ethical decision making due to poor stress management. For the behavioural challenge at hand, this means that unresolved stress is not only an emotional strain, but it hinders formation of leadership identity. If positive coping patterns and cognitive accessibility are not attained, people become competent but inconspicuous the criterion that distinguishes who is promoted to strategic management level and who remains a technically skilled but invisible employee.

5. Strategic Response and Organisational Relevance

Stress resilience has implications for organisational capacity as well as the individual's own growth and development. Teece's (2007) Dynamic Capabilities Framework postulates that leaders and organisations must be in a position to identify opportunities, mobilise them rapidly, and

transform resources. This dynamic process relies on the leader's ability to stay alert, remain active in a crisis, and manage the lack of structure that often accompanies crisis. Inability to handle emotions and cognitive functions undermines this loop, especially the "seize" function that requires making a decision based on time and situation. When leaders fail to manage stress, they are unable to make decisions when needed and make what can be described as ineffective decisions, which lead to a lack of business opportunity and organisational flexibility.

Organisations working in high-risk environments understand this risk. For instance, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF—Doctors Without Borders) has included the psychological resilience assessment and support in project coordinators. Leaders are not only measured on their medical or logistical performance but on their capacity to manage emotions in war zones and rescue operations. Lack of emotional self-regulation is a major determinant of job responsibilities, especially for coordinators, who may be transferred to other positions or have their roles downgraded to prevent them from advancing in their careers. From an academic perspective it is a way to explain how stress resilience is an executive core competency—those who possess this skill are allowed to perform higher level leadership tasks, while those who do not, are eliminated. Thus, recognising this threshold is crucial for students who wish to obtain a leadership position in the field of international development. It transforms resilience not as a personal failing but as a prerequisite in order to succeed. Indeed to lead in volatility, one has to know things and be in good shape emotionally and cognitively when it counts.

Part C: Evidence-Based Action Plan (Appendix G)

1. Short-Term SMART Actions

The first short-term goal for changing behaviour immediately is the **ability to recognize signs of stress and use grounding during academic tasks**. Specific to this goal is the ability to identify signals of stress on the body like a tight chest or racing thoughts and then to use the "5-4-3-2-1" grounding technique. The strategy is measurable through writing at least two stress episodes in one week, identifying the triggers, and the coping measures. It is possible, one can do it in 10

minutes a day and very useful when it is necessary to work on regulation of emotions during the seminars, presentations, and debates. The above action is anchored on Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory which notes that people's psychological resources grow when they feel they are in charge. It will be done after four weeks, where the researcher will make use of the journal entries (Appendix F) to analyze the patterns and behavioral change.

The second short-term objective is to **take part in daily mindfulness sessions with the aim of managing emotional reactions**. This comprises one 10 minutes guided meditation session with the use of an application such as Headspace or Calm. In this case, the identification of a habit app and weekly entries in the self-monitoring log makes it possible to track the activity. Since it is a free of charge approach and takes a lot of time it can be easily implemented by the students. According to Goleman (1998), one of the aspects of the theory of emotional intelligence is mindfulness which helps in the enhancement of self-awareness. Thus, the goal of this practice is to change stress perception and decrease reactivity during the high stakes academic situations in the next 30 days. The effectiveness of this intervention will be assessed at the end of the month, using the stress inventory scores.

2. Mid-Term SMART Strategies

In the medium term, the first of the SMART goals is to **engage in two stressful leadership simulations**, which may include class debates, presentations, or conflict-solving assignments. The specificity of this goal is in being proactive, especially when it comes to assuming leadership, particularly in crisis or whenever the time is an issue. Assessment will be done by use of feedback from facilitators and peers regarding composure, initiative, and emotional presence that will be attached in the appendices D and E. These simulations are located in seminars therefore it is possible to reach the goal using the resources available in the current academic environment. The strategy is useful because it helps to put people under pressure naturally, and pressure is necessary to break patterns of avoidance and to develop sufficient leadership capabilities in individuals. It will be made time-bound through conducting two simulations in a six-week period and incorporating guided reflections after the activities.

The second mid-term goal is to use **CBT strategy in order to change negative thinking patterns during stressful tasks**. More specifically, it involves recognition of maladaptive and negative patterns of thoughts, for example, catastrophizing, or self-doubt and replacing them with more realistic and constructive patterns. The strategy is also quantifiable since weekly cognitive logs will be kept to monitor the progress. This is feasible with the support of university counselling services and the availability of CBT workbooks for download. According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress, cognitive appraisal determines the stress response. Through increasing the accuracy of the appraisal process, this intervention helps in a reduction of perceived threats. Weekly CBT diary entries should be kept for 8 weeks and written results should be shared with a mentor or an equal.

3. Long-Term SMART Goals

The first long-term goal is to **transfer the resilience skills to practice through internships and leadership projects**. The approach includes seeking for development-related internships or volunteering to lead the consultancy projects within the class. The purpose is precise in its search of environments that simulate conditions of future occupations. This will be done through the assessment by the supervisor and the self-assessment at the end of the placement. It can be attained through university career service offices and alumni mentoring. This goal is appropriate in applying resilience to professional leadership context, in line with Teece (2007)'s Dynamic Capabilities theory, which requires leaders to "sense and respond" through phases of turbulence. It will take another three months to place the structure, with the expectation of one full cycle of project implementation before evaluation of performance.

The second long-term goal is the **development of a structured system for creating mentor-ship and professional reflection**. Namely, weekly meetings with a mentor to discuss stressors, emotional responses, and leadership behavior on a monthly basis. This makes the process measurable since each session will be followed by a reflective log and an action review. This is because the mentorship resources are available through the university career services or through the alumni platform like LinkedIn. This is particularly important for maintaining behavioral change and the external accountability goal. According to Maslach and Leiter (2016) it means that burnout prevention needs constant self-reflection and supervision. Scheduling six meetings in six

months means that the habits will be established and thus long-term tracking and modelling can be effectively done.

References:

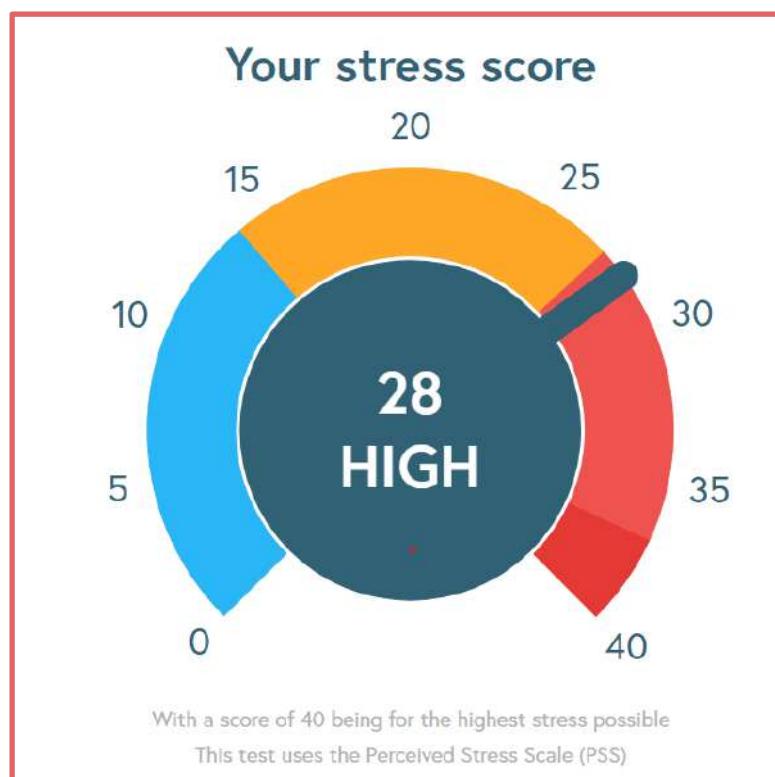
Part D: Appendices

Appendix A – Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Result

- **Source:** <https://www.bemindfulonline.com/test-your-stress>
- **Score:** 28/40 – **High Stress Category**

Context & Evidence:

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), created by Cohen et al. (1983), measures the extent to which individuals appraise situations as uncontrollable or overwhelming. My score of 28 positions me in the **high stress range**, indicating frequent feelings of unpredictability and inadequacy in handling tasks. This result strongly reflects my tendency to experience psychological overload even in moderately demanding situations.



Critical Relevance:

The score substantiates my self-identified behavioural pattern described in Section 1 and 2. From a leadership development standpoint, this aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) **Transactional Model of Stress**, which emphasises that stress arises when personal coping resources are perceived as insufficient relative to environmental demands. It explains why, in team-based simulations, I often default to avoidance and silence—my cognitive appraisal system is primed for threat, not challenge. Without improving this perception and resilience, I am unlikely to perform reliably in high-stress leadership scenarios, particularly in global development roles where constant adaptation is required.

Appendix B – Psychology Today Stress Assessment Result

- **Source:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/tests/health/what-are-your-stress-triggers>
- **Score:** 83/100 – “Very Stressed”

Context & Evidence:

This test measures how various life stressors manifest physiologically, emotionally, and behaviourally. My score of **83** significantly exceeds the population average (approx. 59), placing me among individuals with **severe emotional sensitivity to stress**. Specific patterns include increased muscle tension, short temper, and frequent worry—all of which I experience during team exercises or when managing multiple academic deadlines.

How Stressed Are You? Score



Critical Relevance:

This result offers insight into the **multidimensional impact** of stress on my leadership capacity. It confirms that my stress is not purely cognitive but also somatic—affecting energy levels, communication, and team participation. As noted in Section 2 and 4, chronic physiological stress hinders consistent leadership presence. According to Goleman (1998), emotionally intelligent leaders demonstrate control over such physiological disruptions. My failure to do so results in decreased trustworthiness and functional withdrawal, making this score directly linked to my diminished ability to lead under pressure in cross-sector project environments.

Appendix C – PsychCentral Anxiety Screening Result

- **Source:** <https://psychcentral.com/quizzes/anxiety-quiz>
- **Score Range:** 23–67 – **Evaluation Recommended**

Context & Evidence:

This self-assessment measures indicators of anxiety such as excessive worry, difficulty concentrating, physical tension, and avoidance behaviours. My results placed me in the bracket

where professional assessment is recommended. These symptoms are reflected in my behaviour during leadership tasks—most notably freezing during simulations or avoiding speaking roles during uncertainty.

Anxiety Test

Who is it for? | Is it accurate?

Score range: 23-67

Consider an evaluation

Critical Relevance:

This data reinforces my analysis in Sections 2 and 5 that **stress reactivity is becoming anticipatory**. It shows not only a poor reaction to stress but a developing pattern of anxiety about future high-pressure events. This aligns with Fredrickson's (2001) **Broaden-and-Build Theory**, which argues that anxiety narrows an individual's capacity for creativity, relationship-building, and adaptive thinking—key skills in global development work. Without intervention, this anticipatory stress could block opportunities to build confidence and assume responsibility, especially in roles that demand presence in unpredictable humanitarian or political contexts.

Appendix D – Facilitator Feedback from Conflict Simulation

- **Source:** Verbal and written feedback during Module Seminar 2
- **Quoted Comment:** “*You missed a critical opportunity to step up when your group needed calm leadership.*”

Context & Evidence:

This feedback was delivered after a roleplay exercise that simulated a stakeholder dispute. The facilitator noted that although I had shown competence earlier in the task, I **did not respond** when the team dynamic broke down. I remained silent, avoided eye contact, and later deferred post-session reflection to the group spokesperson.

Critical Relevance:

This moment demonstrates how **emotional shutdown under stress disqualifies visible leadership**. The missed opportunity confirms that stress impairs not only my cognitive processing but my behavioural follow-through. This aligns with Arnsten's (2009) neuroscience model, which explains how elevated cortisol levels can inhibit prefrontal cortex activity—affecting decision-making, verbal output, and control. As discussed in Sections 3 and 4, such behavioural inhibition, when observable by others, quickly erodes leadership credibility. In future roles involving project coordination across multiple stakeholders, failing to act at critical moments would compromise both project goals and team morale.

Appendix E – Peer Feedback from Group Presentation

- **Source:** Peer Assessment Form from Seminar 3
- **Quoted Comment:** “*You were well-prepared but disappeared when we hit technical issues. It felt like you shut down.*”

Context & Evidence:

This feedback was received during a graded group presentation involving scenario-based crisis response. My contribution was strong during preparation but minimal during a live technical fault. A teammate stepped in to present on my behalf when I visibly hesitated and failed to manage the disruption.

Critical Relevance:

This is one of the clearest real-time reflections of my stress reactivity. It confirms that the issue is **not a lack of skill or knowledge**, but a behavioural inability to regulate in uncertain moments. Goleman (1998) and Teece (2007) both assert that leaders must function, communicate, and adapt under pressure. As described in Section 3, my inability to recover from a minor disruption reflects fragility in my leadership foundation—unsustainable for any career that involves emergency planning, community engagement, or political negotiation under stress, all of which are standard in global development work.

Appendix F – Reflective Journal Entry (Week 4)

- **Source:** Self-written reflection post-simulation
- **Excerpt:** *“My chest tightened. I felt like I was underwater. I knew what to say but could not say it. I let the moment pass.”*

Context & Evidence:

This entry was written immediately after a seminar simulation where I failed to engage in conflict mediation. It describes both my physical reaction (tightened chest, shallow breathing) and psychological experience (self-censorship, internal panic). The reflection also notes regret, shame, and the fear of repeating this pattern.

Critical Relevance:

This journal is critical because it shows the **personal cost of my behavioural gap**. It confirms my awareness of missed leadership opportunities and emotional exhaustion from stress avoidance. This supports Maslach and Leiter’s (2016) theory on burnout, which begins when individuals feel unable to act effectively under persistent stress. Section 5 of my portfolio identifies this as a long-term risk—not just for career stagnation but for reduced self-worth. The journal shows that if uncorrected, my pattern of freezing under stress may become internalised, leading to disengagement not only from leadership but from the career space entirely.

Appendix G - Summary of Action plan

Table 1: Short-Term SMART Summary

SMART Criteria	Goal 1: Stress Identification & Grounding	Goal 2: Daily Mindfulness Practice
Specific	Identify stress signals and apply the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique	Complete one 10-minute mindfulness session using Headspace or Calm app
Measurable	Record 2 instances weekly in a self-reflection journal	Track progress with a habit app and log weekly reflections
Achievable	Requires 10 minutes daily; manageable alongside existing academic work	Easily accessible via mobile apps and fits into morning routine
Relevant	Builds emotional regulation during group work and academic stress (Fredrickson, 2001)	Improves self-regulation and emotional stability (Goleman, 1998)
Time-bound	Practice for 4 weeks; review progress using journal (Appendix F)	Practice daily for 30 days; reassess using stress scale (Appendix A)

Table 2: Mid-Term SMART Summary

SMART Criteria	Goal 1: Leadership Role in Stress Simulations	Goal 2: Apply CBT-based Emotional Regulation
Specific	Lead at least 2 high-pressure classroom simulations or debates	Use CBT reframing techniques during academic stress
Measurable	Collect peer and facilitator feedback (Appendices D & E)	Maintain weekly logs of cognitive distortions and reframed thoughts

Achievable	Integrated into existing seminar structures	Supported by student CBT resources and guidance
Relevant	Develops leadership presence and stress tolerance	Enhances appraisal accuracy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)
Time-bound	Complete within 6 weeks with post-simulation debriefs	Continue CBT practice for 8 weeks; review with mentor after 2 months

Table 3: Long-Term SMART Summary

SMART Criteria	Goal 1: Apply Resilience in Internship/Project	Goal 2: Monthly Mentoring & Reflective Sessions
Specific	Apply for leadership roles in internships or student-led projects	Meet monthly with a mentor to discuss stress and leadership
Measurable	Use supervisor feedback and self-reflection to evaluate progress	Maintain a log and reflection summary after each session
Achievable	Opportunities available via university portals or LinkedIn	Access mentors via student services or alumni network
Relevant	Applies resilience theory to real-world leadership (Teece, 2007)	Builds consistency and reflection capacity (Maslach & Leiter, 2016)
Time-bound	Secure placement within 3 months; complete one full project cycle	Hold 6 sessions over 6 months with structured tracking