

Context and relationship: defining resilience in health social workers

Dr Carole Adamson & AP Liz Beddoe, School of Counselling, Human Services & Social Work , University of Auckland,
Dr Peter Huggard, Director, Goodfellow Unit, School of Population Health, University of Auckland

A focus on resilience and social workers in health...

Collins (2007) challenges: what might enable some social workers to thrive and survive, compared to others who may become ill or disillusioned and sometimes leave their profession? Research in this area potentially has implications for retention and management practices, for health and safety and for the wellbeing of the workforce and service delivery to clients.

The research project:

- A qualitative study of experienced social workers in physical and mental health who self-defined as resilient
- Supported by research with social work supervisors (Allyson Davies, Wintec)
- Participants were asked to define the concept of resilience and to explore the elements of resiliency within their practice
- Underscores the importance of qualitative research that captures people's own experience and narratives and enables the unpacking of personal, professional, relational and contextual complexities of resilience

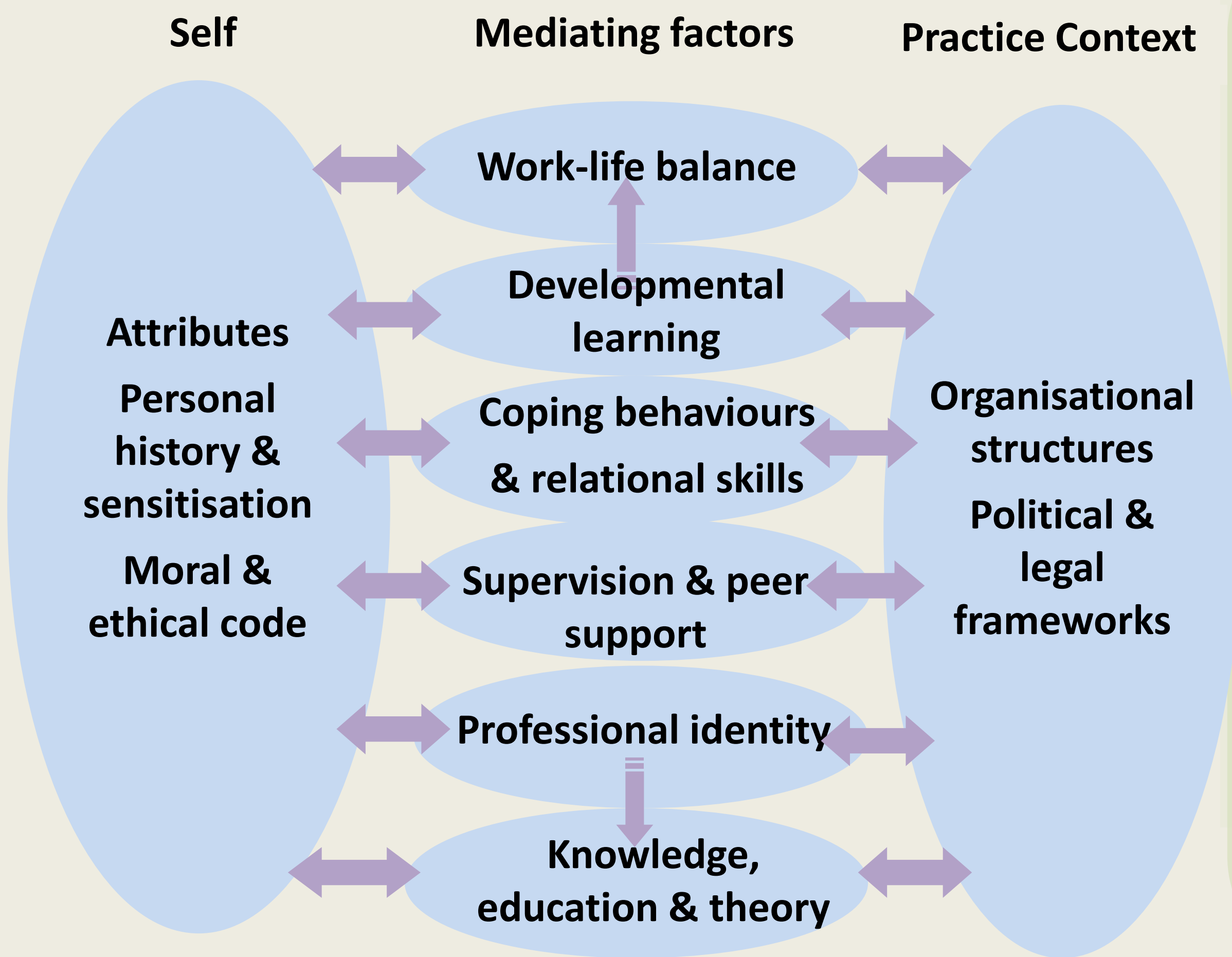
Capturing current theories of resilience: themes in the literature review

- Our literature review highlights that whilst there is significant research on service user resilience, this is not yet matched by an equivalent **focus on ourselves** and our workplace wellbeing.
- Resilience literature has moved progressively from a focus on individual attributes to a **relational** consideration of active dynamics between the person and their environment.

Research findings: Experienced social workers considered that their resilience was a dynamic and constantly adjusting interaction of personal attributes, the organisational environment and mediating factors that determined a sense of control and connection.

Our findings, developed into a conceptual **framework** potentially strengthen arguments for supervision and other professional supports and are aimed also at assisting ongoing curriculum design around developing robust social work graduates:

Developing a framework for resilience from the research:



Participants' initial definitions of resilience as a personal characteristic were developed into a strongly contextual and relational construct, the binding feature of which was self-awareness and the capacity to reflect.

A strong feature of resilience was the focus on relationship with colleagues and the quality of professional social work practice with service users.

Further reflexive and structural elements were identified, highlighting that resilience is in dynamic relationship with the organisational context.