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## **Mental Toughness**

The concept of mental toughness has garnered substantial interest among academic and sporting communities since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Theory and research on mental toughness has evolved considerably since Jones, Hanton and Connaughton's (2002) landmark study. The majority of scholarly work to date has focused on the unobservable psychological attributes that were said to characterise the concept of mental toughness, and their developmental sources and processes via *qualitative methods* (e.g., interviews, focus groups). These efforts resulted in the identification of several core attributes of mental toughness (e.g., *self-efficacy*, optimism); however, these findings were largely descriptive in nature in that little attention was devoted to clarifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for an attribute to be considered characteristic of mental toughness. An independent stream of work borrowed from the *construct of hardiness* (*control*, *commitment*, and *challenge*) and updated this framework with the concept of *confidence* to conceptualise mental toughness as the 4Cs (Clough, Earle, & Sewell, 2002). The 4Cs model and its operationalisation via the MTQ48 has been the preferred conceptual and measurement approach for many researchers. However, conceptual (e.g., distinctiveness from hardiness) and psychometric (e.g., limited factorial validity evidence) concerns associated with the 4Cs model and the MTQ48 remain unanswered (Gucciardi, 2017).

Scholars have proposed several definitions and models of mental toughness over the past two decades, which differ in their scope (e.g., unidimensional versus multidimensional) and defining qualities (e.g., resources that define the content space). Despite these nuances, and debates regarding a precise or agreed upon definition, each of these perspectives share the common conceptualisation of mental toughness as a psychological capacity of individuals that characterises their potential for action towards an objective or purpose. It is this conceptual commonality that has informed the most recent definition of mental toughness as “a state-like psychological resource that is purposeful, flexible, and efficient in nature for the enactment and maintenance of goal-directed pursuits” (Gucciardi, 2017, p. 18). Several conceptual features are implied within this definition. First, the defining and essential attributes of mental toughness are psychological and therefore encompass cognitive (e.g., planning or reflecting), affective (e.g., emotional regulation), and motivational (e.g., strivings) resources that maximise the likelihood of achieving one's goals. Second, these psychological resources are salient for the attainment of objectives or desired outcomes to which people are committed and value because they share the commonality of purpose, adaptability, and efficiency. Third, as a psychological capacity that is available for deployment prior to, during, and in response to challenging circumstances, individuals must be aware of the need to access these resources and apply them purposefully, flexibly, and efficiently towards an objective. It is for this reason that mental toughness is conceptualised as a state-like psychological resource, one that encompasses relatively enduring properties in *cognitions*, *affects*, and *motivations* that people bring with them to situations yet is open or amenable to social and contextual information (Harmison, 2011). Collectively, these attributes provide insight to the key boundary conditions of mental toughness.

## References

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