Thriving under pressure

Rethinking stress through cognitive hardiness

Dr Sherrica Senewiratne
Organisational Psychologist & Lecturer



How I found hardiness



The stress cycle

Trigger → **Interpretation** → **Response** → **Outcome**

Cognitive hardiness works here

Cognitive hardiness

How you read a stressor **before you react to it**

"A psychological resource that enables individuals to proactively engage in a mental appraisal of a potential stressor against their perceived level of commitment, control, and challenge to determine the coping response which augments their opportunities for personal growth."

How is it different?

Resilience

Looks back

Relies on how you've coped before

Grit

Looks at the present

Goes straight towards the stressor

Cognitive hardiness

Looks ahead

Appraises the stressor before you respond

Why it matters at work

Perform under pressure

Work performance

Show up fully

Work behaviours

Stay engaged

Work attitudes

Burn out less

Health and wellbeing

Senewiratne et al. (2025), Cognitive hardiness in the workplace: a systematic review and call for future research. *Management Review Quarterly, 76*, 1627–1666

Reframing stress

Commitment

Does this matter to me?

Control

What can I influence?

Challenge

What could this teach me?

Commitment is about purpose

Low

“Why am I even doing this?”

High

“This matters because …”



Finding purpose



Ask why
"Why does this matter to me?"

Find your person
Someone who keeps you accountable

Show up anyway
Know what gets you going on the hard days

Notice small wins
Pause and reflect when something good happens

Control is about influence

Low

“Nothing I do will change this.”

High

“What’s one thing I can move?”



Pivot to your control



Pause first
Take 30 seconds before you react

Ground yourself
Settle your body, then decide

List your choices
Options before action

Set small goals
Start with one small thing that you can do

Challenge is about growth

Low

“Why is this happening to me?”

High

“What is this teaching me?”



Explore your potential



Reflect regularly
Not just when things go wrong

Review your purpose
Think about the purpose behind what you're doing

Question the block
What's really holding you back?

Keep a wins list
Proof of how far you've come

Hardiness Wall

What’s one thing you will do differently after today?



Use it with someone else

- Does this matter to you?
- What can you influence?
- What could this teach you?



Thank you

Dr Sherrica Senewiratne
Organisational Psychologist & Lecturer

sherrica@stellamari.com.au

