

# A Longitudinal Qualitative Study of Team Resilience Emergence in Newly Formed Teams Undertaking Military Training

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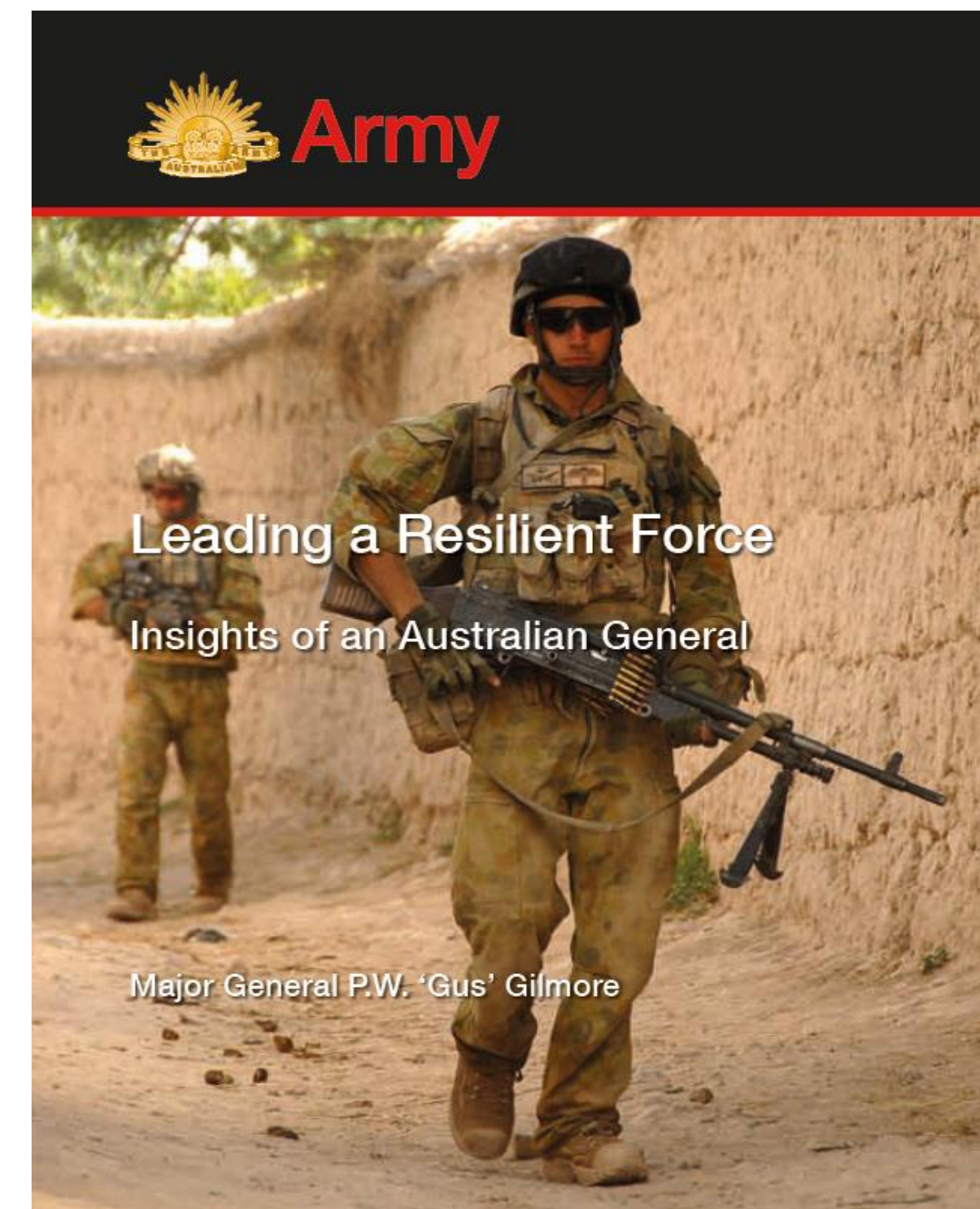
**Australian Government**  
**Department of Defence**  
Science and Technology

# Setting the Scene

- Teams are a building block of Army training
- The capacity for teams to function effectively under adversity is critical to mission success
- Preparing (resilient) teams is an Army priority

(Army R&D Plan, 2016)

- How can Army prepare teams to operate effectively in challenging operational conditions?
- How can Army build better team and organisational resilience?



# Setting the Scene

Limited research on team resilience in military contexts (Mjelde et al, 2016; Temby & Vozzo, 2017) and there is need to better understand factors that influence team resilience emergence, including adversities.

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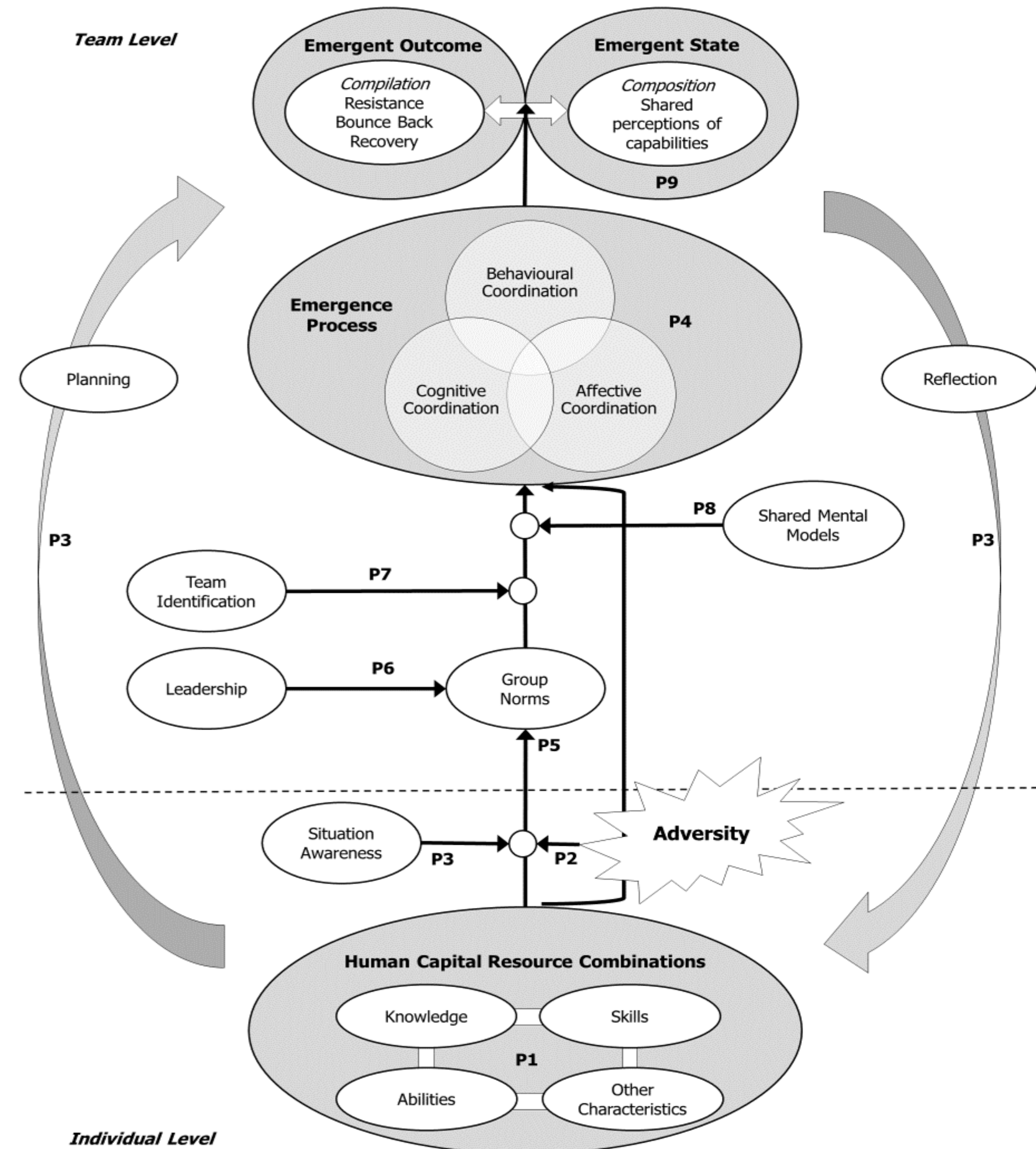


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## The emergence of team resilience: A multilevel conceptual model of facilitating factors

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# Aim of Study

- To explore newly formed military teams' perceptions of team resilience emergence, with specific respect to:
  1. the nature of adversity
  2. the salience of key inputs, emergent processes, and outcomes following repeated experiences of adversity.



# Methods

## *Sample and Context*

- 32 male Australian military personnel (Average Age = 26.3 years; Average Time in Service = 7.3 years) on 18-month training course.
- Small tactical teams of 4-8 members working together for extended periods in challenging conditions during course.
- Team composition was dynamic with membership changes throughout the course.

# Methods

## *Procedure*

- Seven group interviews over two time points
  - Four interviews at time point 1 (N=32)
  - Three interviews at time point 2 (N=24)
- Mixture of two or three teams within each focus group lasting 30-60 min
- Semi structured interview informed by our conceptual model (Gucciardi et al., 2018)

# Methods

## *Analysis*

- Reflexive thematic analysis by MC with support of PT, BH, and DG (Braun & Clarke, 2016)
  - (i) familiarisation with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing potential themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) producing the report.

# Findings

- Six overarching themes were *actively created* from the data

**1. Adversities that shape the nature of the emergence process are complex and varied**

**2. The general qualities of team members underpin team performance across adversities**

**3. The qualities of the team prior to experiencing adversity are key to its resilience**

**4. Emergent processes and states are key to team resilience.**

**5. Contingency plans and after action reviews underpin regulatory processes in the heat of the moment**

**6. Teams understand and observe changing trajectories of functioning after adversity**



## THEME 1

**Adversities that shape the nature of the emergence process are complex and varied**

Learning complex skills alongside performing under continued assessment

Adversity as a dysfunction in group dynamic

Combination of unrelated stressors creating adversity

Fear, uncertainty or feeling of risk from environment

Adversities are predominantly expected in nature

Adversity is chronic in nature

Adversity is acute in nature

Adversity is a shared experience

*"I don't think there's been an adversity we've faced so far that's been so overwhelming that we haven't been able to cope. **We've been able to work together and overcome it like almost pretty instantaneously and then crack on,** work out the causes for it so it doesn't happen again, and then carry on."*

*"So, I think everyone would, if something happened, being that someone gone down, with heat or what ever happened, and **that was considered an adversity by one person the whole group sort of would have the same mentality** towards that."*

## THEME 2

### **The high-level, general qualities of team members underpin team performance across adversities**

Ability to regulate emotional state during adversity is key

High levels of motivation to succeed at the individual level

Having an optimistic mindset to future performance

Resilience at the individual level is key to team level resilience

Individual ability to focus effectively throughout adversity experience

It's important to have an openness to feedback and learning

Situational awareness is important before and after adversity occurs

Teamwork characteristics of the individual support functioning

Past experience at the individual level supports team resilience

Having general KSAOs is important for an individual

*"...**Individual resilience, stick to it ness, grit, whatever the different names to it are**, which is one of the things we get assessed for in selection. That's what you need to get through it no matter what the thing, adversity is,"*

*"Stops you from being inwardly focused if you're aware of what's going on around you, **you understand how the whole team's reacting to the adversity rather than just being inwardly focused**, going on hurting, you understand that everyone is in the same boat, can sort of take you out a bit."*

### THEME 3

## The qualities of our team prior to experiencing adversity are key to its resilience

Cohesion between team members facilitates resilience

Trust between teammates, the leader, and the organisation

Having a strong 'we or us' versus 'I or me'

Shared past experience supports team resilience

Holding clear pre-set roles for adversity is important

Leadership supporting affective, cognitive and behavioural states

Shared mental models are important to maintain functioning during adversity

*“Also having clearly identified roles, instead of working in a team not having clear identified roles of who you are what you're doing, simplifies it down so if you're the medic, you're not thinking about what's going on the radio, you're thinking about what's gonna happen if someone goes down with heat.”*

*“You just draw on those past adversities, like, we've all done it. I know we've all been in s\*\*t spots and brought each other out of it, we're all still here, so ... In my head it makes me think that we can do anything that we can put our heads to it”*

**“Confidence in other people's gone up**, I suppose, because you've all been tested...You've seen everyone go through different things at different times so you've got a bit **more confidence individually in everybody.**”

## **THEME 4**

**Emergent processes and states are key to team resilience.**

“So if gaps happen in the team because you're such a small team. **If something's happened to a person and there's now a gap, that's filled by everybody else because everybody's looking for work constantly.**”

Certain states emerge that allow us to deal with adversity better

Affective state influences team resilience

Awareness that everyone needs to be in positive state

Loss of behavioural coordination due to individual stress experience

Shared Belief of Dealing with Adversity

Confidence in teammates during challenges

Confidence in all teammates to support performance

Confidence in teammates performing under stress

Shared confidence in work rate of teammates

We adopt processes when adversities occur

Flexibility and interchange of roles during adversity

Communication key to perform under adversity to maintain or correct performance

Importance of interdependency as a process

Performance rate adaptation to mitigate adversity

Use of humour to maintain positive affective state

Avoiding blaming individual for mistakes

## THEME 5

**Contingency plans and after action reviews underpin regulatory processes in the heat of the moment.**

Automatic reactions to adversity as a team following exposure to adversity

Planning or discussing potential adversities to limit effect

Teamwork through constructive feedback within After Action Review

*“I think in our heads, between ourselves and as team **we all talk about this, talk about that. So when it does happen we've already talked about it a hundred times** and we've already rehearsed it and there is no novelty ones.”*

## THEME 6

### **Teams understand and observe changing trajectories of functioning after adversity**

Demonstrating sustaining of performance following negative feedback as resilience at team level

Perception of performance spike after adversity

Performance affected by individual withdrawn due to stress

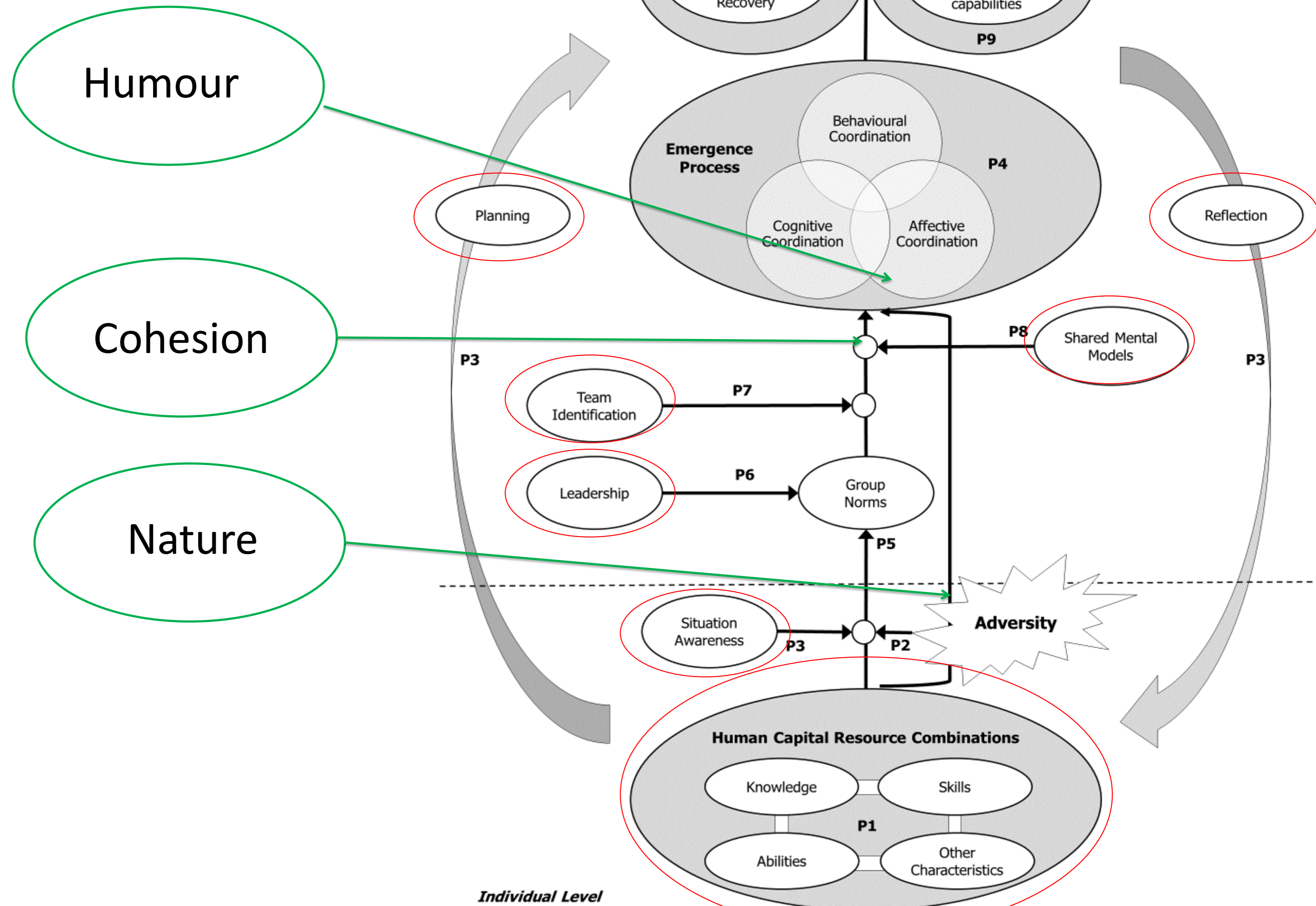
Performance fluctuates due to learning new skills

'We recognise indicators of a change in our team's functioning'

Situational awareness is important before and after adversity occurs

*“You get **picked up on something as a team** and then the way you react that, like, you can't look down on yourself, you've got to go on to the next thing straight away, **so you can pick yourself up again** and sort of carry on but **that's probably where there's that demonstration of resilience** after adversity”*

# Discussion



- Unique model finding
- Supportive model finding

Individual Level

# Conclusions

- Findings enhance our understanding of key inputs, emergent processes and outcomes associated with resilience in newly formed, dynamic military teams.
- Conceptual model of team resilience emergence largely supported, with findings unique to this model that contextualise to this sample.
- Periodisation of un/expected adversity experiences within training programs.
- Preliminary insight into leverage points for future intervention or development of team resilience.



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