

## A formula for Mental Health and Well Being

Martin Smith is a senior lecturer at Nottingham Trent University and an independent trainer who delivers a range of mental health programmes to a wide variety of organisations in all three sectors. His work as a psychotherapist over the past twenty years has significantly aided his work in helping people in the workplace develop effective strategies for good mental health and well being. Here he shares some ideas around how we perceive difficulties and a formula for managing and coping with adversity.



There are many aspects that go to make up good mental health. In my work with many clients over the year I have found two key things that often stand out when it comes to identifying ongoing mental health issues. These are a clear sense of loss of control in the persons life coupled with a diminished interest in things they used to like to do and then the second aspect is a lack of psychological flexibility.

The latter is a primary aim and focus of ACT - Acceptance and Commitment therapy, an approach I have followed and used in my practice for a number of years now. The ability to be flexible and to take control is significantly impacted by a range of issues in our lives and helping people regain that sense of control and flexibility I have found to be immensely helpful.

One idea that I find fits well with these aspects is the use of **Attributional styles** - how an individual views negative and positive situations and events in their lives. Three core attributional styles have been developed and well researched since the 1970's and I feel that they still fit, and can help us take a different perspective on life's issues.



The three styles make up an interesting formula which when applied to issues can mark the difference between potentially a mentally healthy approach or not.

The three aspects are:

### **Do we take things too Personally?**

This aspect covers the degree to which a person attributes an event to internal or external causes. we might attribute a bad experience to various outside influences whereas others we blame it all on themselves - it is all my fault.

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### Is the issue we are dealing with Permanent or Temporary?

This aspect covers characteristics considered stable versus unstable (across time). We could define an issue or failure as unstable “I just didn't study enough for this particular exam” whereas others might take what is consider a more stable approach “I'm **never** good at exam, I will always fail”.

### Is the issue Pervasive?

This distinction covers global versus specific and the extent of the effect of a particular issue. A more negative approach might be for example, “everyone hates me” “everything is bad in my life” as opposed to a more specific approach of “I am currently having issues with my partner over holiday plans” “my boss thinks I did not do a good job on that report”

Slightly simplistic I know, but overall when dealing with negative, stressful issues in our life we are looking for a formula which addresses negative issues and adversity issues as:

**More External / Unstable / Specific**

as opposed to

**Completely Internal / Permanent / Global**

It is not always easy to apply this formula and it may not be appropriate to all situations, but I feel that this is a good start as a formula for good mental health in difficult and adverse situations.

Martin can be contacted directly via email - [info@taking-control.co.uk](mailto:info@taking-control.co.uk) or phone him on **07 973 410 010**.

