

# Grit

Grit to overcome obstacles to reach goals and remain composed

## What is grit?

Grit is not about being the smartest person in the room, but rather it is the willingness and ability to hang in there when the going gets tough. It's a single-minded dedication to a singular goal, coupled with the determination to see it through, which requires clear focus and prioritisation. Employees with true grit can overcome obstacles to reach goals and be confident and composed in the face of challenges. Grit predicts who will accomplish challenging goals.<sup>1</sup>

Angela Duckworth's definition of grit is:

*"Passion and perseverance for long term and meaningful goals"*<sup>2</sup>

People who are strong in grit are always striving to improve. They are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to achieve while remaining passionate about what they do.<sup>3</sup> Grit is an integral aspect of success that is independent of, and contributes beyond, talent and intelligence. Grit involves consistently working towards a goal, maintaining effort and interest over time despite encountering failure, challenges, and plateaus in progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee and Duckworth, "Organizational Grit," 98-105

<sup>2</sup> Duckworth, *The Power of Passion and Perseverance*

<sup>3</sup> Sheehan, "Building Organizational Grit"

Grit consists of two key components:



**Passion:** An intrinsic interest in your craft and a sense of purpose



**Perserverance:** Having resilience in the face of adversity and unwavering devotion to continuous improvement

### Why is grit important?

Grit is a driver of achievement and success.<sup>4</sup> It is an essential quality for success as it contributes to predictive value independently of talent and intelligence. People must put in effort for a talent to become a skill that leads to success, and this effort can be a partial result of grit.

Research shows that grit predicts high performance in a variety of domains.<sup>5</sup> It can assist in predicting the likelihood of graduating from high school or college, and performance in stressful jobs such as sales. Grit also helps people to the highest ranks of leadership in many demanding fields.<sup>6</sup> Grit can predict which people will accomplish challenging goals, as those with high grit are more likely to persist when faced with challenges.

### How do you measure grit when hiring?

Questionnaires and scales are useful for research and self-reflection. This type of scale or survey is helpful for getting a guide of an applicant's grit levels; however these psychological tests and surveys can easily be faked to have high grit. They should not be the sole assessment of grit when recruiting and should always be used with other measures.<sup>7</sup>

Another way to assess grit in candidates is to look at their history, as carefully reviewing applicants track records can help assess grit. Many year commitments to an organisation, rather than frequent job shifts,

<sup>4</sup> Baruch-Feldman, "What is Grit and Why is it Important?"

<sup>5</sup> Sheehan, "Building Organizational Grit"

<sup>6</sup> Lee and Duckworth, "Organizational Grit," 98-105

<sup>7</sup> Lee and Duckworth, "Organizational Grit," 98-105

can indicate grit - especially if there is evidence of advancement and not just frequent shifts between specialties. When checking references, it is vital to listen for evidence that candidates have bounced back from failure in the past and not just for successes. Candidates who have demonstrated flexibility in dealing with unexpected obstacles and sustained a habit of continuous self-improvement are those that are likely to be high in grit. Most of all, look for signs that people are driven by a purpose bigger than themselves, one that resonates with the mission of your organisation.<sup>8</sup>

### Grit measurement and reporting

Talegent's Grit report offers ways to assess and measure candidates on competencies that are related to grit. The information gives recruiters insight into a candidate and assists in hiring decisions and should always be used as part of a robust selection process. These competencies include:

#### Problem analysis:

Using experience, data, and theory to work through problems.

High scorers are likely to use data to support decision making and will evaluate the logic of information presented. They can reflect and draw on past experiences, and use theories as a basis for problem-solving.

#### Self-belief:

Being confident in your ability to succeed, retaining a positive attitude.

High scorers are likely to be confident in their decision making and ability to succeed. They see feedback as valuable and maintain a positive outlook despite adversity.

#### Persistence:

Being focused and determined to achieve despite difficulties.

High scorers are likely to push themselves towards goals and see commitments through to the end. They remain focused and engaged even when working with managed risks.

<sup>8</sup> Lee and Duckworth, "Organizational Grit," 98-105

Self-control:

Resisting temptations in favour of long-term goals.

High scorers are likely to remain calm and controlled despite challenges, and will focus on long-term payoffs over short-term temptations. They keep promises they make to themselves and others and are aware of their weaknesses.

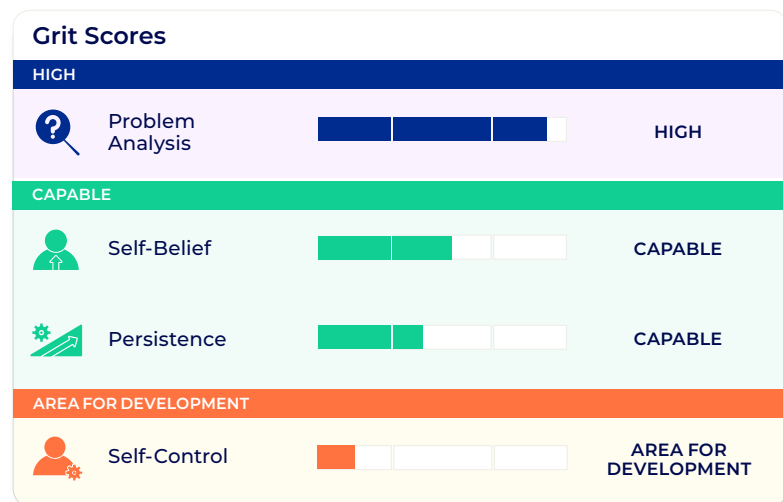


Figure 1. Talegent Grit report

### Grit within an organisation

Having a workforce that is made up of people with high levels of grit does not necessarily create an organisation with high grit. To build grit as an organisation, it is important to make organisational goals and the goal hierarchy explicit. If an organisation cannot prioritise its goals, this can lead the company to have difficulty making strategic decisions.<sup>9</sup> Employees will also be likely to experience trouble in prioritising their work. Teams and employees need an overarching goal that they are committed to and to which their individual goals can be tied. The organisational goals must also align with the culture that has been developed. Introducing new goals or values that do not work alongside

<sup>9</sup> Lee and Duckworth, “Organizational Grit,” 98-105

the organisational culture may result in employees being unwilling to put the required effort into them.<sup>10</sup>

Creating the right kind of working environment will also help cultivate a ‘gritty organisation’. In cultivating a workplace that is both demanding and supportive, organisations can develop employees with grit and create an aligned workplace. This can be done by incorporating high expectations, ensuring access to resources needed to learn and grow and offering psychological support.<sup>11</sup> Promoting a growth mindset—the belief that abilities can be developed through hard work and feedback, and that significant challenges and setbacks provide an opportunity to learn, is a good way to build this.

Another essential characteristic of gritty organisations is an unrelenting drive to improve. For this to work, leadership must accept and communicate complications and errors, something that isn’t always easily done. Leaders that are explicit about the need for calculated risk-taking, reducing mistakes, and continual learning tend to be the ones who inspire real growth.

Individuals with high levels of grit will have their own goal hierarchies but will embrace their team’s high-level goals that in turn support the organisation’s overarching goal. Teams with high levels of grit have a desire to work hard, learn, and improve together. These teams, and their organisations, will show resilience when faced with setbacks and will maintain a strong sense of priorities and purpose.<sup>12</sup> An organisational culture stemming from grit helps teams to consistently perform at high levels, even when faced with unpredictable challenges.

To attract employees, build teams, and develop an organisational culture around grit, leaders must themselves should have high levels of grit, providing a visible and authoritative role model for others. In their personal interactions, they must keep standards high and

<sup>10</sup> Sheehan, “Building Organizational Grit”

<sup>11</sup> Duckworth, *The Power of Passion and Perseverance*

<sup>12</sup> Duckworth, *The Power of Passion and Perseverance*

supportive.<sup>13</sup> Leaders who do the best have passion and persistence. They are incredibly adaptable, so when a roadblock arises rather than quitting or adjusting the goal, they can quickly find a new approach.<sup>14</sup>

### Relationship between grit and other traits

Grit is related to two other traits: self-control and conscientiousness.<sup>15</sup> Someone demonstrating high self-control or high conscientiousness is also likely to score high in grit. Grit and these related constructs have been associated with lifetime educational attainment and professional success. Many of these studies have also suggested that grit varies with age, similarly to these two constructs.<sup>16</sup> This gives the impression that grit is often learned indirectly alongside other traits such as self-control and conscientiousness, and that it can be developed in individuals with low grit.

It has been suggested that the concept of grit may simply be an example of remarketing existing concepts with nothing substantially new being added.<sup>17</sup> For example, many tests assessing or measuring conscientiousness use items that are almost identical to items on the Grit Scale, and the correlations between grit and conscientiousness reported in many studies tend to be extremely high. However, studies have also shown that grit predicts the completion of challenging goals despite obstacles and setbacks even when these other characteristics are held constant.<sup>18</sup>

### Grit and conscientiousness

Conscientiousness can be defined as a spectrum of constructs describing the tendency to be self-controlled, responsible to others, hardworking, orderly, and rule abiding.<sup>19</sup> Some studies found grit to account for additional variance in achievement and educational

attainment over and above conscientiousness, while others found that grit did not explain additional variance in GPA when controlling for conscientiousness.<sup>20</sup>

However, when compared to more traditional predictors such as cognitive ability and grades, grit scores proved to be just as useful in predicting who would stay in school.<sup>21</sup> People scoring high in grit were also less likely to drop out of college than those with low grit.

Overall, there are some strong similarities between grit and conscientiousness, and in some aspects they do measure or predict the same thing, but it seems that grit does account for achievements and results that conscientiousness does not. Much like conscientiousness, people appear to become “grittier” as they grow older and more mature. There is also a strong correlation between grit and other traits such as psychological well-being, optimism, and life satisfaction.<sup>22</sup>

### Grit and self-control

Self-control refers to the management of attention, emotion and behaviour to achieve goals rather than putting goals aside for more immediately pleasurable things. Having strong self-control is often associated with positive life outcomes.<sup>23</sup> Grit is closely associated with the concept of self-control,<sup>24</sup> where grit and self-control differ is in the types of goals and the timescale that is involved. Self-control is required to manage conflicting lower-level goals or actions, but grit is persisting in a high-level goal over long periods of time, regardless of challenges faced.<sup>25</sup> Having low self-control often includes indulging in an action that satisfies an immediate low-level goal but is soon regretted. The alternative to grit is giving up on a high-level goal because the means to the end of that goal have been blocked.

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13 Lee and Duckworth, “Organizational Grit,” 98-105.  
14 Goran, “5 Ways Successful Leaders Cultivate Grit”.  
15 Vitelli, “The truth About Grit”.  
16 Kannagara et al., “All That Glitters Is Not Grit”.  
17 Credé, “What Shall We Do About Grit?”.  
18 Schmidt et al., “Same Same, but Different”.  
19 Roberts et al., *Conscientiousness*, 369-381

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24 Duckworth and Yeager, “Measurement Matters,” 237-251  
25 Kannagara et al., “All That Glitters Is Not Grit”.

Self-control and grit both involve having the persistence to achieve goals in the face of adversity. It seems that self-control is more matched with everyday success and smaller goals, whereas grit is more tied to achievements that take long periods of time to accomplish.<sup>26</sup> A construct validity test of the Grit Scale showed that high grit scorers had significantly higher levels of self-control and mental well-being, were more resilient, and were more likely to have a growth-oriented mindset.<sup>27</sup>

### Developing grit

While some people tend to have higher levels of grit than others, it is something that can be developed. Developing grit requires a highly disciplined effort that starts with identifying specific areas for growth and persisting in achieving these goals. Grit involves persisting over time despite facing challenges; the same is true for developing grit. Developing grit consists of a few key components:<sup>28</sup>

#### Having passion:

Having an intrinsic interest in your work or goals is essential. Passion not only fuels progress, but it also drives grit in a big way. If you know what you want and why, you will work hard and persevere to achieve it. When you understand your purpose, you won't give up in the face of challenge.

#### Building perseverance:

Having resilience in the face of adversity and unwavering devotion to continuous improvement is necessary for grit. Learning to keep going when faced with challenges is needed to build and develop grit.

#### Embrace Failure:

A big part of leadership and grit is knowing that you will fail, but you don't allow failure to define you or stop you. Failure is a big part of the path to success; it gives you the opportunity to learn. When you have grit and you fail, you move forward.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Duckworth and Yeager, "Measurement Matters," 237-251

<sup>27</sup> Kannangara et al., "All That Glitters Is Not Grit".

<sup>28</sup> Conant Leadership, "How to Build Leadership Grit"

<sup>29</sup> Goran, "5 Ways Successful Leaders Cultivate Grit".

Developing your grit and strengthening your resolve often helps develop better leadership skills as a result. Cultivating grit might be the difference between remaining the same or achieving a breakthrough in a goal you've had for a while. Grit is the passion and perseverance essential for achieving long-term, meaningful goals. People who are strong in grit are always striving to improve.<sup>30</sup> They are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to succeed, while remaining passionate about what they do.<sup>31</sup>

### Key Points

- Grit is the passion and perseverance to complete long-term goals.
- In cultivating a workplace that is both demanding and supportive, organisations can develop employees with grit and create an aligned workplace.
- Someone demonstrating high self-control or high conscientiousness is also likely to score high in grit. Grit and these related constructs have been associated with lifetime educational attainment professional success.
- There is also a strong correlation between grit and other traits such as psychological well-being, optimism and life satisfaction.
- Developing grit requires a highly disciplined effort that starts with identifying specific areas for growth and persisting in achieving these goals.

<sup>30</sup> Duckworth, *The Power of Passion and Perseverance*

<sup>31</sup> Sheehan, "Building Organizational Grit"

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