RESILIENCE ALLIANCE

TidalShift

Ten Ways to Increase Your Organization's Resilience
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A resilient organization is one that can sustain high levels of performance while experiencing high levels of disruption. Whether disruption comes from external forces that require the organization to adjust or from changes that are initiated from within (usually it's a combination), organizations who can avoid significant drops in performance generate a significant competitive advantage over their less-resilient counterparts.

Here are ten things an organization can do to increase its resilience:

1. HIRE RESILIENT PEOPLE
Human energy–mental, physical, and emotional– is the currency of organizational change. Some individuals are better prepared to manage their own responses to change than others. In addition to the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform core job activities, organizations should take the ability to operate effectively during change into account in hiring new employees. (It's also important to help current employees develop their resilience.)

2. ENSURE THAT LEADERS MODEL RESILIENCE
Leader modeling is one of the most powerful forces in an organization. To the extent that leaders are "consciously competent" about resilience–that is, they are knowledgeable about how to operate effectively during change and have reflected on and developed their own resilience, they can serve as effective role models for others. Making their own development process visible to others also allows them to model the process of growth and learning.

3. BUILD A RESILIENT CULTURE
An organization's culture–the shared mindsets and behaviors that characterize its unwritten operating system–can either support or discourage effective approaches to uncertainty and change. Creating systems and processes that place a high value on adaptability, reward positive responses to adversity, and collect and share stories of resilience signal the organization's emphasis on building strong change capability.

4. COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY
One of the biggest challenges people face during periods of high turbulence is the ambiguity that accompanies uncertainty. Although some degree of uncertainty always accompanies change, many organizations compound it by doing a poor job of communicating. It's important to tell people what is known (facts, plans, etc.), be clear with them about what is unknown, and help them understand when and how additional information will become available to them.

5. ALIGN AROUND CLEAR GOALS
When multiple sources of disruption are affecting an organization, people can become disoriented and unclear about where to spend their limited supply of energy. In the absence of guidance, each person will prioritize actions based on his or her own sense of urgency. When an organization can agree on a small number of critical goals, and make sure each individual is clear about how those should be reflected in his or her own priorities, less energy is wasted in confusion and unproductive activity.

6. SUPPORT RISK-TAKING

An organization discourages risk-taking when it makes it difficult for people to try out new behaviors and tends to punish failures rather than use them as occasions for learning. This will lead people to be cautious in exploring new ideas and perspectives. During periods of significant change, this will dramatically decrease the level of adaptive behavior people display, since operating in uncertainty requires experimentation. Organizations that consciously foster innovative approaches and take the time to learn from failure reap the benefits of greater adaptive capacity.

7. INCREASE DIVERSITY

One of the most important ingredients in dealing effectively with unfamiliar situations is a wide range of perspectives that can be used in solving problems and identifying options. Organizations that proactively seek to draw in differing viewpoints, including a variety of educational and professional backgrounds, life experiences, etc. will reap the benefits in the quality of solutions generated.

8. STRENGTHEN TEAMWORK

Although teams do not always outperform individual efforts, ambiguity and change create conditions that maximize the benefits of teams for problem-solving and decision-making. This is only true, however, if the teams use effective processes to accomplish their goals. It's important to invest time and energy in key teams to ensure that all members share a common goal, recognize their interdependence, effectively influence one another, and display strong communication and critical thinking skills.

9. MONITOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Despite an organization's best efforts to prepare itself for turbulence, a major shock to the system will still create a huge energy drain. It's even worse when the potential for disruption could have been foreseen, allowing time to prepare, but was overlooked. Highly resilient organizations do not turn all their energy inward; they establish a sensing function whose role is to identify trends in the financial, political, and social environment that could have an impact on the organization.

10. BUILD SLACK INTO THE SYSTEM

Human energy is a finite resource. When all available energy is fully absorbed in essential activities, the effect of an additional disruption is often devastating to the organization. For this reason, resilient organizations keep some reserves. Rather than taking on every new initiative that seems promising, taxing the organization to its limits as a matter of course, they ensure that people have at least a small amount of time and energy that is not committed. This serves as a source of creativity when things are going relatively smoothly, but can be recruited into action on an urgent priority when needed without causing high levels of strain.

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