

Organizational Resilience: Building Your Organization to Last

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Business confidence hits an all-time low! Once again, hard times and new business challenges are upon us. Is your organization ready? Are you prepared to overcome yet another set of adversities? Is your workforce prepared for organizational changes that may have to be made to respond to business challenges?

Most, if not all, companies have faced adversity at some point in their existence, and surely many are experiencing difficulty as I write this article. The business confidence index (BCI) was at its lowest last month, as reported in the September 10 issue of Business World Online. “Unrestrained oil increases amid a looming fiscal crisis have left businessmen more critical about their present condition and less optimistic about their future,” according to the report.

If we examine organizations that have prospered over long periods of time, we will observe that all of them display remarkable *resiliency*, that is, the ability to bounce back from adversity, sometimes even stronger than before, and keep on going. Research on organizational resilience show that the factors that strengthen organizational resilience are similar to the factors that strengthen personal resilience.

Factors that Strengthen Resilience

Personal and organizational resilience can be strengthened by having a clear purpose, developing initiative, having a support network, and improving flexibility.

First, resilient individuals have a clear sense of who they are and what they want to create and achieve in life. This clear sense of identity and direction helps give meaning to their lives and provides focus when faced with trials and difficulties. In the same way, resilient organizations have a clear purpose and a core set of values or guiding principles. In the words of its co-founder, Hewlett-Packard’s *raison d’être* is “to provide something that is unique [that makes a contribution].” Merck is in the “business of preserving and improving human life,” while Motorola exists “to honorably serve the community by providing products and services of superior quality at a fair price.” Leaders of resilient organizations take steps to ensure that their purpose and core values represent more than nice-sounding platitudes. They strive to make these a compelling reality for everyone in the organization by creating or capitalizing on opportunities to show individuals how decisions and actions should be directed by the organization’s purpose and values.

Second, resilient individuals demonstrate personal initiative. They focus more on what they can and need to do to achieve their goals; they do not focus on what they cannot control or what others are or are not doing to them. Resilient organizations promote personal initiative by empowering their workforce. They do this by structuring their organizations in a way that places decision-making authority on those who are closest to the job. More importantly, they make

sure that their leaders know how to effectively encourage responsibility, acknowledgment, and creativity so that employees feel that they “own” their jobs.

Third, having a supportive network of family and friends (with whom one can share problems and explore ideas, and from whom one can depend on for encouragement) helps develop personal resilience. In the same way, having a positive work environment fosters organizational resilience. When leaders empower their people, they are also promoting a supportive work environment. Demonstrating trust-building behaviors (*see article entitled “Integrity and Trust in the Workplace” in June 2004 issue of the PMAP Newsletter*) also contributes to building a supportive work environment.

Finally, resilient individuals are flexible. They have learned to make room for alternative ideas and new approaches, and thus are able to easily adapt to changing situations. Organizations that are committed to innovation and continuous improvement, as seen in their systems, structures, policies, and programs, progressively develop flexibility and become better equipped to handle adversities and manage change.

Helping Organizations Develop Resilience

Development Dimensions International (DDI) has several programs that can help your organization develop resilience. In *Leadership: Facilitating Change* and *Leadership: Inspiring Commitment*, leaders discuss the importance of having a clear purpose and they learn how to articulate that purpose in a vision statement. They identify values that support the vision, translate these values into practical terms to “keep them alive,” and they explore leadership behaviors that inspire commitment to the vision and values.

Empowering Leader is a program that aims to build leaders’ awareness of the benefits of empowerment. The course teaches the Empowerment Principles and equips learners with practical skills to encourage others to take ownership of their work and willingly accept responsibilities. *Personal Empowerment: Taking Initiative* is a parallel program for employees that seeks to change the mindset that empowerment is given, and provides techniques for increasing personal initiative.

Building Trust and *Trust: Strengthening the Foundation* explore behaviors and practices for creating and sustaining a supportive work environment. In these courses, participants learn about the effects of a high-trust workplace on employee and team performance. They become more aware of what they do that encourages (or discourages) trust. They discover the common Trust Traps and learn techniques to avoid them.

Finally, your organization can increase its flexibility if your people know how to effectively adapt to change. *Adapting to Change* teaches learners how to develop a more positive attitude towards change and how to better handle change on a personal level. *Helping Others to Change*, on the other hand, discusses techniques leaders can apply to help others deal with change more easily and move out of disorientation faster while minimizing the negative effects of change on morale, processes, and productivity. Organizational flexibility is also developed by promoting innovation and continuous improvement. *Thunderbolt Thinking* provides thinking tools for individual employees and workgroups that when applied will help rejuvenate corporate thinking

and drive innovation in the workplace. In *Impacting Your Work Processes* and *Taking ACTION to Solve Problems*, employees are made aware of the importance of continuous improvement in organizations and the role they play. Furthermore, they are introduced to a methodology and several tools to guide them through the continuous improvement process.

A clear purpose that is pervasive throughout the organization, a high-initiative workforce, a supportive work environment, culture and systems that support organizational flexibility—all these are factors that help build organizational resilience. Confucius says, “Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” Work towards organizational resilience and help your organization achieve long-lasting greatness.

For more information on DDI's programs, visit www.ddiworld.com or send us an e-mail at inquire@sgyddi.com.ph

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