

Customer Connection

Vol.5, No.1
October 2005

Prevention. Intervention. Results.

Organizational Resilience in Changing Times



“What lies behind us is nothing compared to what lies within us and ahead of us.”

Anonymous

Life involves adapting to ever changing circumstances. Personal lives change and so does the work world. Change is the only constant. We've heard these expressions many times before. The bottom line? No matter where people work or what they do, the pace of change has never been faster.

What does this mean for organizations?

We know that the ability of an organization to change and adapt will influence its' chance of thriving – not just surviving -- over the long term. Whether or not individuals and organizations manage change well depends a great deal on a set of qualities referred to as “resiliency”.

Resiliency refers to the skills and capabilities to be robust and successful under conditions of disruptive change. Resilient individuals and groups remain focused and productive even in challenging times.

Characteristics of Resilient Organizations

Resilient organizations are **proactive**. They **recognize the need for change** before it is forced upon them. Strategies do not remain stagnant. They create an impetus, a direction. They also respond flexibly to changing circumstances.

Working from a strong **value system**, resilient companies don't lose sight of their higher purpose as well as their business purpose. They find ways of keeping employees at all levels engaged and committed to the work at hand. (They might even want to have fun at work). Employees see a strong and continuing connection between their daily activities and the organization's overall vision, values, and goals. When this happens, employees tend to stay engaged and committed to their companies, even during stressful times.

Characteristics of Resilient Organization (Continued)

Resilient organizations are **quick to improvise**, make the most of what they have and imagine possibilities and new opportunities. They remain flexible and are positioned to adjust as circumstances change.

Such organizations will seek out **leaders who demonstrate both optimism and realism**. They are able to model the skill of finding opportunity embedded in even the most difficult circumstances. They can also balance optimism with pragmatic realism and help their teams assess priorities and develop workable action plans.

The Best-Laid Plans...

If you want to build resiliency within your organization – or even within your immediate work group -- consider the following questions in your planning:

- *Do employees see the connection between their daily work and the overall direction for the organization?*
- *Does the plan incorporate learnings from key stakeholders: board members, customers, suppliers, employees, and industry?*
- *Has information been communicated in diverse ways and by different messengers to maximize understanding?*
- *Do processes address employee's concerns about change? Have resources been allocated to help people manage change? Does the plan acknowledge and respect the positive aspects and history of the company?*

Building strong and positive relationships at work helps everyone get through challenging times. **In times of change and transition, it's particularly important for people to have time to connect informally.** This could be the company softball team, pot luck suppers, the annual corporate challenge, or fund-raising for a charitable cause – any event that brings people together in positive ways.

Does the organization recognize the need for work-life balance? With deadlines looming, many employees recognize they may have to work longer and harder to get a time-sensitive project completed. Over the long term though, people are more productive when they have time for rest and recreation. If the CEO of a company routinely puts in 14 hour days and works weekends – and expects similar behaviour from others – there is a greater chance of burnout and high attrition over time.

Work that has meaning is crucial. Including: clear areas of responsibility, training and development opportunities, a chance to make a difference to colleagues and customers, defined job responsibilities and accountabilities, supportive supervision – all of these contribute to employee and organizational resilience.

Further Reading:

Leadership in Times of Stress and Change. Tager, Mark J., Woodward, Harry L. (2004)

Transitions – Making sense of life's changes. Bridges, W. (1996). Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading, Massachusetts

How resilience works. *Harvard Business Review*, Coutu, D. L. (2002). 80(5), 46-55

Interlock

*is a vital investment
in work-life
effectiveness.*

*We provide customized
prevention and
intervention programs
that deliver results.*

Call us...



INTERLOCK

4727 Hastings Street,
Burnaby, B.C. V5C 2K8

Phone: 604-431-8200 or 1-800-663-9099

Fax: 604-432-1555

Email: feedback@interlock-eap.com

www.interlock-eap.com