

# Resilience Building as a Protector & Accelerator

## 2020, Window of Opportunity

*By Robert Rigby-Hall & Yolanda Buchel*



### *Introduction*

Everyone is experiencing what it means to live and work in the VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous). For some, the world suddenly came to a standstill (hospitality, arts & culture). For others, there was a bizarre acceleration (healthcare & on-line education). And for many, working from home brought either a sense of isolation and being overwhelmed, or a sense of freedom and balance, or all of the above. It is a time where we needed to adapt and change to create new ways of doing things: some home schooled their children while getting their own work done at the same time, some provided care for their parents. Whatever the case may be, daily routines have been turned upside down, and whether we like that or not, it creates opportunities to approach things in a more sustainable and efficient way.

### *Change as default*

In today's world it seems that change is the default setting for organizations and individuals. However, our mindset is dominated by the desire for stability. In the past we've treated change as a one-off, as a project, as a phase – we “un-freeze”, change, and then “re-freeze the organization. We often appoint a change manager on a temporary assignment to focus everyone on the required change and alignment. When change is here to stay, however, it's important for individuals themselves to have the skills to manage this as part of everyday life. That makes us agile.

### *Resilience as a protector against stress*

The more agile <sup>(1)</sup> we are – as organizations and as individuals, the better we know how to deal with what's to come. Resilience <sup>(1)</sup> is the solid foundation we need: it requires self-confidence, innovation, problem solving, emotion management and empathy <sup>(2)</sup>. Those who already have experience in their lives with change and setbacks, know better than anyone how it works: you have to accept reality and keep moving forward, step-by-step, so that new meaning arises <sup>(3)</sup>. We are better able to tackle the stress of dealing with uncertainty and unpredictability if our resilience is higher.

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Companies that invest in resilience building, protect themselves and their employees. Work stress is a known risk factor for occupational burnout, depression, anxiety, and suicide. Occupational stress affects musculoskeletal health (e.g., back pain, neck pain, fatigue), increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, is a risk factor for diabetes mellitus, stroke, and dementia, contributes to accidents, absenteeism, fluctuations in turnover, and lower productivity, and increases medical, legal, and insurance cost. The estimated annual cost of stress to US businesses is \$300 billion. Multiple studies have shown how resilience increases stress reduction for executives and employees alike (4). A Mayo Clinic study (5), done between 2012-2016, showed that higher resilience is predictive of lower stress and better mental health among corporate executives. The lower-resilience cohort had a 4-fold higher prevalence of depression and an almost 3-fold higher prevalence of anxiety compared with the higher-resilience cohort. High resilience was positively associated with well-being and negatively associated with perceived stress. The study suggests that interventions to enhance resilience, at the individual and organizational level, help mitigate the negative consequences of work-related stress

Resilience results in the following benefits (6):

- Resilient people can **anticipate what's to come**. Daily self-reflection makes them alert to opportunities and threats. They are more willing to take on business challenges and experiment.
- They know how to better **absorb setbacks**, shocks and unexpected twists and turns – especially emotionally. Resilient people are better prepared, and able to accept that 'rocky roads' are normal.
- They **recover more quickly**, knowing who can support them, and are confident enough to try out multiple solutions.
- As the next wave of change comes, they are able to **effectively deal with change** because resilience enhances emotional fitness.

## *Resilience as an accelerator of performance*

A study of 471 North American companies (7) assessed agility and resilience on different levels (organization, team, individual) to enhance adaptive capacity and thus be able to deal with turbulent environments. The study demonstrated that environmental turbulence may indeed be managed by building agility and resilience. Companies exhibiting higher levels of agility and resilience are more competitive and profitable, even with higher levels of turbulence. Agility and resilience promote organizational performance.

Interventions to build resilience and agility include:

- Sense-making skills
- Openness to change
- Bias for taking action
- Ability to quickly adapt & test new ideas
- Contingency planning
- Learning to deal with the consequences of failed plans
- Developing a support system (alliances, partnerships)
- Preparedness to rethink and redesign oneself

## *Developing Resilience*

Online resilience training produces measurable improvements. A study of 600 participants (8), done in 2017, using a combination of e-coaching and short exercises based on the science of positive psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy, and mindfulness, showed improvements in resilience in proportion to the time spent in training - those participating for 8 hours could expect an improvement of 7% in resilience score.

Our own research amongst participants using WOOSH5's proprietary Resilience Scan, daily online positive psychology exercises, e-coaching, and accountability workshops; shows an average 11% increase

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in user resilience. Improvements in resilience are associated with significant reductions in reported stress and stress-related symptoms.

Key components in developing resilience would appear to be:

- Leadership support & understanding of the need for resilience
- A clear and proven model of measuring and developing resilience
- Measurement of pre- & post-training scores to evaluate improvement
- Sustained development through a combination of online training and workshops
- Additional support for those who need it, through coaching

## *Conclusion - Adaptive capacity*

We don't know what's going to happen in the future and it is precisely this uncertainty that we must take seriously, by developing resilience in both organizations and individuals. This will help ensure that no matter what challenges and changes we face; we are equipped to deal with them.

In an environment with increasing numbers of people working remotely, there is a strong need for managers to understand who is doing well and who may be struggling. It can be difficult for managers to identify these signals and so a process to assess and provide an outlet is key. By regularly assessing resilience at an individual and team level, the organization can gain awareness of the varying levels of wellbeing and productivity; in turn allowing managers and the company to focus attention and support in the most critical areas.

Now is the perfect opportunity to build resilience!

## **Notes**

1 Agility & Resilience by McCann e.0 2009

**Agility** The capacity for moving quickly, flexibly and decisively in anticipating, initiating and taking advantage of opportunities and avoiding any negative consequences of change.

**Resiliency** The capacity for resisting, absorbing and responding, even reinventing if required, in response to fast and/or disruptive change that cannot be avoided.

2 WOOSH5, 2015

3 Diane Couthu HBR, 2002

4 Smith and others Journal of Occupational Health & Medicine, 2018

5 Kermott and PloS, 2019

6 Guide to building a more resilient business HBR, 2020

7 McCann, Selsky and Lee, 2009

8 meQuilibrium, 2017

## **About the Authors**

**Robert Rigby-Hall** has over 25 years of global experience specializing in human resources and general management. He has run businesses and lived and worked in the United States, UK, Europe, and Asia. During his corporate career he worked for large global companies such as NXP Semiconductors, LexisNexis, and Hasbro. Over the years, he has seen many examples of the need for resilience as companies struggle to execute change and drive growth. Robert studied Business & Finance at the University of Portsmouth. He holds a Certificate in Corporate Governance from Kellogg Northwestern University and was the recipient of the Business Leadership Award by United Nations Global Compact.

During her 30-year career in the field of Learning & Development **Yolanda Buchel** again and again saw proof of the importance of resilience during phases of change, personal growth and renewal in people's careers and lives. She has held professional and management positions at Philips, ICI, GTP and Shell/Montell and is a recognized author of several books on self-development and resilience. Yolanda tested her own resilience by becoming an entrepreneur during the financial crisis of 2008. She is a co-founder of WOOSH5.com, a resilience building online platform. Yolanda holds a degree in A&O psychology from the Tilburg University in The Netherlands and is an internationally registered e-coach.