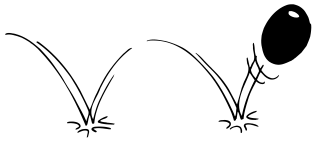


Center Solutions

Ideas for Today's Workplace from the Center for Organization Effectiveness, Inc.

Spring 1999



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Diane Hamilton, Partner

Creating Resilient Organizations

By Diane Hamilton, Partner

What is it about individuals and organizations that cause some to proactively embrace change, successfully orchestrate change initiatives, and position themselves for the next change, while others limp along, respond defensively, and fail? At the Center for Organization Effectiveness, we wanted to conduct research about some of the facets of organizations and organizational life that contribute to success or failure. To conduct the research, we partnered with some of our clients and colleagues and created the Organizational Learning Series (OLS).

The OLS team includes:

Diane Hamilton, Wayne Reschke, Steve Palmer—Center for Organization Effectiveness

Rhonda Holler—Cellular One

Sharon Klawitter—UW-Extension

Chris Weber—Schneider National

Dan Loichinger—Performance Achievement Group, Auto Glass Specialists

Professor Ramon Aldag—UW-Madison, School of Business

Methodology

We began by clearly defining our research topic. Through much evaluation and discussion, our research question became:

What factors contribute to the resiliency of employees during organizational change?

Resiliency was defined as the ability to adapt to changing situations and demands and to 'bounce back' from setbacks.

After the research question was defined, the next steps in the process were:

- 1—literature review
- 2—data collection
- 3—data analysis

Literature Review

The OLS team reviewed abstracts of approximately 100 articles during the literature search. The literature review confirmed our theory that the topic of resiliency is multi-faceted, that many areas are worthy of further study, and that there is opportunity for widespread application within our organizations. The search allowed us to further refine the research question and begin to define the methodology for our study.

Data Collection

A number of focus groups were conducted in the OLS organizations. The focus groups allowed us to gather some preliminary data about how front-line employees and managers defined resilient people and organizations. Questionnaires were completed and focus group discussions were facilitated. Results of the focus groups gave us the input we needed to develop a survey instrument.

The survey instrument was then tested with several hundred pilot participants. After refinement, the questionnaire was sent out to a wide range of organizations. We received over 500 responses to the questionnaire from various organizations and government agencies in the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia.

Data Analysis

The results of the research study yielded a number of interesting findings. Some of these are highlighted on the back side:

Center for
Organization
Effectiveness, Inc.

*Our purpose is to
help foster and build
effective organizations.
Organizations that
are enduring and great.*

*This newsletter is a
part of that effort. If
you know others who
should be on our
mailing list, please
write or email their
name and address.*

*The Center for
Organization
Effectiveness
partners are:
James Gray
Diane Hamilton
Wayne Reschke
Lori Gibson
Steven Palmer
Margery Sorensen*

What a resilient organization looks like:

- Has a clarity of purpose (e.g., has a clear mission, targets/goals, and values)
- Is forward thinking (e.g., encourages open communications, rewards high performance, emphasizes learning, emphasizes the big picture, involves employees in decision making)
- Has an environment characterized by support, trust, and open communications (need for change is clearly communicated, has an atmosphere of trust, encourages opportunities to influence change and provide input into decisions, responsibilities are clear, people have supportive colleagues)
- Employs people who are proactive and have a personal openness (people have a sense of purpose, keep an open mind, keep things in perspective, are self-directed, cooperate with others, take risks, accept responsibility)

What a resilient organization does not look like:

- Has an environment characterized by threats, hostility, and miscommunications (e.g., hostile and defensive atmosphere, unclear expectations, work overload, threats to job security, personal attacks)
- Is an authoritarian organization (e.g., closely monitors employees' performance, tolerates organizational politics, is power-oriented, is rule-oriented, emphasizes authority, punishes failures, has many levels of hierarchy)

The top factors that greatly reduce resilience of individuals and organizations include:

- A hostile atmosphere
- An atmosphere which tolerates personal attacks
- Being asked to perform tasks that may be unethical
- A defensive atmosphere
- Threats to job security
- Unclear expectations
- Conflicting expectations
- Lack of personal control

Interestingly, with few exceptions, the data was stable across all of the demographic groups we measured (including gender, age, race/ethnicity, country, size of organization, individual contributor/manager, etc.)

Next Steps

The next steps for the OLS team are to further analyze the findings, write up our conclusions, and submit them for publication. Look for future updates in this newsletter and on our web site (www.greatorganizations.com). We'll also be revising the survey instrument and making it available for use within organizations. In that way, organizations can take what we're learning and further apply it to their specific work environments. If you would like to know more about building resiliency within your organization, contact us at 608-833-3332.



6515 Grand Teton
Plaza Suite 145
Madison, WI 53719

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