



“Changefirst helps you build the capabilities to successfully implement change”

Building organisational resilience in turbulent times



Resilience: the key to thriving through change

Resilience is a crucial characteristic of any successful business. For example, the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 has created an environment of uncertainty and anxiety. The future of companies and even whole industries is under question. It will be the most financially resilient that survive.

Elsewhere, the events of 9/11 have often been used to illustrate the need for resilience in corporate infrastructure. In the Harvard Business Review article How Resilience Works (May 2002) Diane L. Coutu points to Morgan Stanley's rapid response to those terrible events as just one example; before that, to the actions of UPS, delivering parcels successfully just one day after the devastating hurricane in Florida in 1992.

For many organisations 'resilience' has a natural association with these kinds of scenarios – how you keep processes, systems, networks and infrastructure going when things go wrong. However, resilience is about much more than just business continuity and disaster recovery. It's a key factor in how an organisation's people respond to significant change events.



This is just as true when an organisation responds to external forces of change, like natural disasters, as it is of internal changes to business processes, systems and organisational structures. And this, of course, is where the majority of business change really takes place.

Resilient organisations need resilient people

The very nature of change is changing. A modern business and its people have to cope with an increasing number of economic, technological and organisational change processes, most of which are happening simultaneously.

Outsourcing, mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, financial difficulties, downsizing, expansion, competitive pressures, new IT systems... considered alone, any one of these forces can cause significant disruption to individual performance, from employees on the front line to Board-level executives. Considered together, they can disrupt the performance of the workforce to such an extent, that the performance of the whole organisation suffers.

In an IBM study of 2008 (Making Change Work), 75 percent of the companies surveyed said their approach to change management was usually informal, ad hoc or improvised. And yet change is one of the few things that all businesses can rely on. For example, in IBM's 2008 CEO survey, nearly every one of the 1,130 CEOs questioned were "adapting their business models". Two-thirds agreed that they were making "extensive innovations". And yet, there is a gap of 22% between how CEOs rate their ability to manage change successfully, versus their expected need for it.

'Resilience is a critical skill for anybody who has to deal with uncertainty, anxiety and change.'

Operations Director

It's this ability to manage change in which the real value of resilience lies for an organisation. Most change projects fail because the people involved are not equipped to deal with the volume of change the organisation puts upon them. Simply put, they are not resilient enough, and this leads to a lack of commitment to change, reduced engagement with change projects, and an overall air of cynicism and rejection.

What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to 'bounce back' from a difficult or adverse situation. It's the quality that enables one person to respond well and thrive during the change process, while a colleague with apparently similar skills and experience struggles to cope.

Resilience helps people regain control much more quickly during times of change. It helps them maintain higher performance levels and improves their overall sense of wellbeing. Resilience also helps people make sense of change more quickly, so they understand the impact on them and other people. At the same time, resilience helps people deal with multiple changes without being overwhelmed.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a difficult or adverse situation

The value of resilient people

Resilience is an incredibly valuable quality for employees at all levels in a business.

During any change process, people move from a current state (the way they work now) to a future state (how they will work in the future) via a “transition” state. It’s the transition period that is most disruptive, changing the way people think, feel and behave. The process of change disrupts our sense of control and pushes us out of our comfort zone: it makes people feel uncertain, even incompetent.

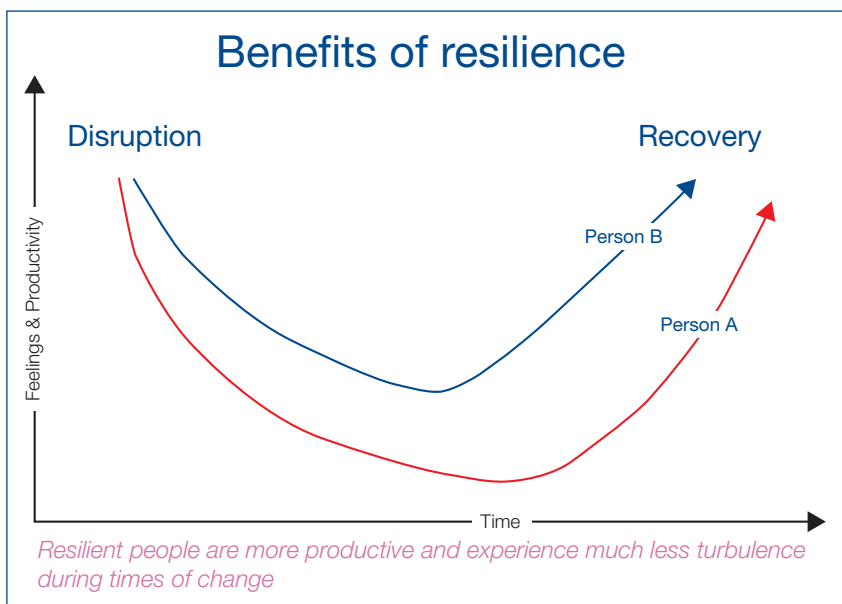
The extent of that disruption, however, depends on a person’s resilience.

Resilient people are not immune to change: they experience the effects just as anyone would, but they recover faster and respond better. As a result, they tend to be more productive during times of change, and to maintain higher quality output. They come to terms with change much more quickly, and experience much less turbulence throughout the process.

In an operating environment that’s increasingly characterised by change, the business benefits of a resilient workforce are considerable.

An organisation with resilient people, as well as systems and processes, is an organisation that can be more agile and proactive. It can adapt to meet the changing needs of its market with more confidence in the results – as well as being able to withstand and bounce back from the effects of unexpected change, whether it’s economic, competitive or environmental.

‘Change resilience at a personal level is about developing habits that help people to be more effective in navigating their way through change. However, these habits can only thrive in a receptive working environment; one where a high level of trust and engagement already exists. This is the job of leadership.’
HR Director



The wide-reaching benefits of resilience

The changes that disrupt a person’s normal working life will not necessarily be ‘negative’. Even positive changes – like taking on a new role, or implementing time-saving technology – can have a significant impact on individual and team performance. Getting the most out of ‘positive change’ as well as coping better with ‘negative change’ depends on a person’s resilience.

It is also important to remember that change isn’t limited to an individual’s working environment. The cumulative effect of change in someone’s personal and working life is equally important. In tricky economic times, for example, it’s likely that the same forces will mean people are dealing with increasing change at work and at home – as well as health, relationship, lifestyle and the myriad of other changes that everyone experiences.

What makes people resilient

Changefirst has been working with people and organisations undergoing significant change since 1995. The research and field work undertaken during this time has helped us identify the most important qualities that make some people more resilient than others.

In fact there are seven key characteristics of resilient people: optimism, self assuredness, focus, an openness to ideas, seeking support, being structured and being proactive. These components of resilience all play a vital role in enabling people to cope well with change.

As individuals we tend to draw on some or all of these characteristics in our normal working lives, and during the different stages of organisational and personal change experiences. However, it's the right combination of each of them that tends to make people resilient. If we rely too much on one or two of these qualities, or too little, we become less resilient.

For example: it's easy to see why optimism is required for a person to

respond well and recover quickly from significant change. Optimism helps us believe that the change will have positive results. Too much optimism, however, will decrease resilience. Overly optimistic people tend to engage too readily in change without really coming to terms with what it really means. Conversely, people who tend to be overly pessimistic tend to see change as a threat, which prevents them from engaging fully in the process.

Getting the mix of these qualities right is highly situational. Resilient people are able to draw on these qualities at the right time, and have an instinctive understanding of when, for example, being proactive is more important than seeking support.

'We liked the Changefirst approach to resilience because it was easy to use and effective.'

Head of OD



The seven characteristics of resilient people

Optimistic: resilient people believe that change will have a positive outcome: they are able to analyse even an apparently dire situation in a way that gives them hope for the future.

Self assured: resilient people have a strong but realistic belief in their own capabilities. As a result they tend to control change, rather than the change controlling them.

Focused: resilient people have the focus needed to be able to prioritise activities effectively. They can pursue goals successfully, even in the face of adversity.

Open to ideas: resilient people have an open mind to different tactics and strategies. They tend to be good at generating alternative approaches and solutions to match the changing situation.

Seek support: resilient people actively seek the support of others during times of change. They look for opportunities to involve the skills and experience of other people as well as their own.

Structured: resilient people are able to analyse the situation and create an effective plan to implement change – with enough flexibility built in to cope with the shifting situation.

Proactive: resilient people are prepared to step out into the 'unknown', and take the action necessary to make change happen.

Developing personal resilience

'Habits of thinking need not be forever. One of the most significant findings in psychology in the last twenty years is that individuals can choose the way they think.'

Martin Seligman, Learned Optimism

Most writers on resilience agree on two things. Firstly, a person's general level of resilience is determined by their experiences during their upbringing. And secondly, that while people have this 'starting level' of resilience, they can learn to improve it. Resilience is a skill that can be developed.

Changefirst has developed a unique coaching methodology and workshop that exploits both of these facts for the benefit of employees, executives and leaders in almost any organisation. Central to this is something we call the Personal Adaptability Inventory, or PAI.

The Personal Adaptability Inventory (PAI)

The Personal Adaptability Inventory focuses on the seven key characteristics of resilient people, and how an individual draws on those characteristics under the kind of pressure that's typically introduced by significant organisational change.

The PAI is developed and analysed in conjunction with Changefirst's resilience and change management expert practitioners during workshop sessions tailored to the needs of an organisation,

and its people. These sessions are designed to achieve tangible, lasting improvements in personal resilience and to offer practical advice for the issues people will face back in the office.

By analysing an individual's starting level of resilience, in terms of the seven key characteristics, we help people identify areas of strength and weakness and develop a plan to enhance personal resilience. By learning to be

more resilient, people can recover from the effects of change more quickly and more successfully.

The Changefirst approach not only benefits people as individuals: it provides them with the tools to develop resilience in their teams, and generates ongoing benefits for their organisation by increasing its overall ability to cope with and benefit from ongoing change.

The Thriving Through Change workshop

Changefirst's unique Thriving Through Change ½ or 1 day workshop is designed to help people and organisations develop their own change management capabilities, and improve personal and organisational resilience. It includes sessions on:

- The key challenges people face during change
- How different attitudes affect the success of change initiatives
- How to build personal resilience
- Helping teams to be more resilient
- Managing resistance to change
- Building ownership for lasting change

By transferring knowledge and understanding of what makes lasting change happen in an organisation, Changefirst helps organisations improve resilience and their own ability to manage change on a long-term basis.



'Our people really enjoyed the way the workshop is run. Everyone came away with a plan to help them become more resilient.'

Training Manager

Build your own resilience

For more information about developing resilience personally, and across your organisation, contact Changefirst:
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