

Preparing for the way ahead

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Introduction

Everyone has been affected by events over the past three years and longer. The churn this produces in everyone's lives can be very unsettling and distressing. This causes bewilderment about what to do to protect ourselves and prevent matters getting completely out of hand.

This article is about resilience – the ability to see threats as challenges that can and will be overcome.

Resilience applies equally to organisations of all shapes and sizes as well as everyone who works in them.

Resilience is equally needed by everyone who doesn't work or whose work is focused on their family.

Organisational resilience

There are several forms of organisational resilience.

Having redundant capacity enables organisations to continue to operate whilst some of its activities and services are curtailed by a threat because the organisation has sufficient workforce and facilities to maintain continuous delivery of products when there has been a temporary reduction in organisational resources. The difficulty comes when the temporary reduction in resources becomes permanent. This means the redundant capacity no longer exists making the organisation less resilient in the long term.

Having a workforce that is flexible and agile, fully motivated and engaged with the organisation, makes it possible for the organisation to adapt to changes rapidly enough to maintain their level of activity and overall performance. If the workforce isn't flexible and agile, the organisation will find it cannot adapt to changes needed to sustain performance, thereby not being resilient against threats arising from outside the organisation. The internal threat already exists with a workforce that isn't flexible and agile.

Having leaders who use status power as their means of motivating and engaging the workforce is a way of ensuring the workplace is a place that meets the needs of its workforce. In these situations, the workforce will want to protect the workplace and do anything to sustain the benefits it receives from this form of leadership. This makes the organisation highly resilient.

Having leaders who use coercion as their method of making the workforce do what is expected, exposes the organisation to a rapid and catastrophic decline when it is faced with external adversities. This is due to the lack of interest, motivation and engagement that coerced workforces have in their organisation, making it not respond well when directed to adapt to external organisational threats. The workforce is already under threat. Telling it to change isn't

going to maintain performance; there's no point as it is already suffering from threats and will be extremely reluctant to give the organisation any slack.

Creating organisational resilience

The MAS preferred approach to creating and sustaining organisational resilience is to create a psychologically healthy and safe working environment. Such a working environment provokes the workforce to feel psychologically well, thereby creating a 'fabulous place to work' that the workforce is determined to protect. The workforce will perceive threats as challenges to overcome.

Step 1 – transform managers into leaders.

Most organisations lack leadership. Instead they have an abundance of managers who perceive themselves as leaders.

Managers deal with certainty; leaders deal with uncertainty, such as strategies, vision and health of the workforce.

Leaders guarantee their workforce is in perfect working order, knows where its' going and knows how to get there.

Step 2 – establish a clear and unambiguous purpose

This is the reason for the existence of the organisation. If expressed as a 'big idea' as well as in outcome terms, the purpose is likely to be a stimulant to the workforce to do what it can to achieve the purpose. Members of the workforce whose values are aligned with those represented by the purpose, are most likely to protect the organisation because of the alignment of values to purpose.

Step 3 – establish a clear vision

A vision for the organisation that makes sense and is exciting is going to bind the workforce to the organisation for several reasons – the exciting future; the knowledge the organisation is intending to remain in business for a long time; the opportunity for the workforce to acquire new skills, knowledge and experiences to match the vision.

Step 4 – create an outcomes focused and values driven culture

A culture is the main influence on individual behaviour. If the culture is aligned with the values and beliefs of the workforce, it will bind the workforce to the organisation, and create a strong desire in the workforce for the organisation to succeed. This, in turn, means helping to overcome adversities that might threaten the existence of the organisation.

A culture is made of three types of values – cultural values, those that reflect the triggers for creating a healthy and safe working environment; corporate values that reflect the priorities of the organisation; and ethical values that reflect the appropriate and correct behaviours and decisions taken by the organisation.

Step 5 – implement the adaptive leadership and sharing responsibility approach to leading the organisation.

Recognising that the combined intelligence of the workforce is greater than its leaders, it is the route to resilience and success for leaders to use that intelligence to tackle adversities and ensure the organisation remains resilient.

Ensuring the workforce shares responsibility for the future success of the organisation requires leaders to adopt the adaptive leadership approach to being a leader. This means giving control and not taking it. It means all failures are successes waiting to happen. It means all ideas are good – some may not be possible apply.

The workforce is expected to have independent judgment, to be able to talk freely and without any comeback about ‘elephants in the room’; to be able to openly critique any part of the organisation so long as the critique is aimed at making tomorrow better than today. Routine performance appraisal is informal. Reverse appraisal is expected.

Step 6 – implement Psychological Responsibility

This step is about ensuring the workplace is a psychologically safe place to work.

Psychological Responsibility is an obligation placed on everyone to ensure they do whatever it takes to remain psychologically healthy and well.

Given the other steps are implemented, the environment will be one that is safe and healthy.

This step, however, is further assurance that the organisation takes mental ill health extremely seriously by seeking to prevent people from either experiencing the triggers for ill health or ensuring they are immediately supported properly when they do experience ill health. For this to happen everyone has to feel safe to speak out and ask for help, as well as everyone being encouraged to be on alert to the signs and symptoms of ill health, and intervene when they feel it necessary to do so.

Step 7 – implement intelligent management

Everything up to this point is about creating the working environment that results in a resilient organisation.

Strengthening this environment depends on the routine everyday management practises that echo the working environment and reflect it in the routine approach to management.

Conclusion

Preparing for the future is about strengthening the resilience of organisations and their workforce.

This article has focused on the resilience of organisations and the steps to take to strengthen resilience against adversities.

The approach chosen by MAS is to create a working environment that binds the workforce to the organisation because it is ‘a fabulous place to work’ and is worth protecting and supporting so the workforce can continue to receive the benefits a health and safe working environment provides.

For more information about help to prepare for the way ahead, please contact barbaraleigh@mas.org.uk