



BUILDING ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE TO OPTIMISE PERFORMANCE

BY KATHRYN HUME

Increasing global competitiveness, disruptive technology and changing stakeholder expectations are accelerating the pace of change. Organisations need to develop resilience to predict, prepare and adapt so they can thrive into the future. They must be well prepared to use change to their advantage. To continuously improve in order to deliver products and services more efficiently while innovating. To create new business opportunities in the future to achieve and sustain their competitive advantage.

Technological advancement and process improvement will achieve productivity gains. However, the greatest gains will be achieved by putting people first. To attract, develop and retain employees who are able to follow their purpose and passion to drive performance through enhanced employee engagement.

Distinguished psychologist, Mihály Csikszentmihályi, suggests performance will be optimised when people are able to employ their core capabilities to achieve a meaningful goal. This will allow them to enter a state he refers to as 'flow'. He found that operating in a state of 'flow' resulted in improved productivity and greater satisfaction.

Yet the evidence suggests the state of flow that results in optimal performance is not the norm.

The Gallup Employee Engagement Survey reports the number of employees who are 'actively engaged', 'not engaged' and 'disengaged'. Over the past 18 years, the number of employees in the US reporting that they are 'actively engaged' has averaged around 30%. This presents a significant opportunity to drive performance by enhancing employee engagement to build and sustain organisational resilience.

STRATEGY

Building organisational resilience with people at the centre starts with a well-defined, clearly articulated organisational strategy. This strategy must be built on shared values that provide the common goal for performance. This common goal must be something employees believe in and see value in achieving for their own sense of purpose.

The strategy must be based on a comprehensive understanding of the needs and contributions of the organisation's employees, customers and stakeholders, and is communicated and reinforced regularly at all levels of the organisation.

The strategy is one element that remains relatively constant to provide the stability to balance tension when change occurs and supports employees to embrace uncertainty.

CULTURE

Organisational strategy must be evident in the decisions and actions of leadership to build a culture of trust. Employees must have a sense of belonging and believe what they achieve is important. Aligning work to commonly held values will enable employees to derive meaning from their work. This leads to higher levels of engagement and productivity. Psychological safety must be developed and reinforced to allow risk taking without fear of negative consequences. This will encourage creative thinking that promotes continuous improvement and innovation.

STRUCTURE

Building resilience means breaking down traditional hierarchies and replacing them with an ecosystem of dynamic, cross-functional,

high-performing teams, comprised of employees with clearly defined roles. Employees must be accountable for their performance. They should be empowered to work autonomously and deliver in a decentralised structure so they are ready to act when required.

These teams should exist to find innovative solutions to real problems. They will continually form, un-form and reform to meet changing demands by ensuring the right employees are involved and to avoid gaps and duplication. Work needs to be designed to facilitate collaboration to generate ideas that are tested in a safe environment. Outcomes should be evaluated with learning incorporated into future planning and activities.

Employees must be encouraged to work in a way that enables them to optimise their performance whilst allowing them to maintain interests outside of work.

PEOPLE

Attraction and acquisition

Building resilience requires a talent management approach that attracts and acquires a diverse range of people whose values align with the organisation's values to offer a wider range of capabilities. Employees must be encouraged to follow their purpose and passion to continue to develop their capability and optimise their performance.



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Career development

Managers need to seek to understand their employee's career aspirations and actively support them to achieve their goals, by supporting development and promotional opportunities. Roles must be co-designed between employees and their managers to create meaningful opportunities that enhance engagement and productivity.

Performance management

Individual performance targets should be negotiated collaboratively to ensure mutual benefit to the employee and the organisation. Managers need to ensure employees have the resources required for them to achieve the performance targets. Performance targets need to be sufficiently challenging to move the employee beyond their comfort zone but must still be achievable. Measures of success must be established and readily accessible to enable employees and their managers to monitor performance against these measures and adjust if required.

Learning and development

Employees must have, or must develop, generic competencies that can be applied in different contexts to optimise performance. Learning and development must be self-directed but guided, to enable learners to identify capability requirements and engage with resources to develop the requisite capability so they can perform when the need arises. The environment must facilitate learning in the flow of work, allowing employees to seek solutions to problems they are facing, by accessing and engaging with suitable resources to efficiently develop the required capability.

Recognition, reward and retention

Employee recognition must extend beyond acknowledgement for performance. Employees should be asked their opinions, included in conversations and encouraged to bring

their whole selves to work. Managers must regularly seek feedback from employees so they can continue to meet the employee's expectations and address any concerns at the earliest opportunity. Resilient organisations will retain employees by enabling them to follow their purpose and passion. They must monitor the market and offer salaries that reflect the employee's value to the organisation.

Organisations wanting to achieve sustained competitive advantage must build resilience to withstand the accelerating pace of change so they are sufficiently agile to anticipate, prepare, respond and adapt. They must understand the reason they exist and align strategy, culture, structure and people to build the organisational resilience required to optimise performance and thrive well into the future. This will enable the organisation to place people first and empower them to follow their purpose and passion to optimise performance.



FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Change is the New Normal. How Will You Handle It? (Jan Bruce, 2018, Forbes)
www.forbes.com/sites/janbruce/2018/09/05/change-is-the-new-normal-how-will-you-handle-it/#21d635413959

Employee Engagement on the Rise in the US (Jim Harter, 2018, Gallup)
news.gallup.com/poll/241649/employee-engagement-rise.aspx?utm_source=link_wwwv9&utm_campaign=item_245786&utm_medium=copy

Increasing the 'Meaning Quotient' of Work (Susie Cranston & Scott Keller, 2013, McKinsey & Company)
www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/increasing-the-meaning-quotient-of-work



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