Corporate Resilience

What does resilience mean?

My definition focuses on the capacity to mobilise corporate, workforce and personal characteristics that go towards forming an attitude to an event. Attitude is a key feature of resilience. Attitude precedes the action that is taken in response to an event.

Corporate resilience is, therefore, ‘the capacity to mobilise characteristics that enable the business or service have an attitude to tolerate, overcome and be strengthened by adverse events and experiences’. So, it’s about survival and growth.

Businesses and services are organisations constructed of people performing tasks to achieve a common purpose. If the individual in the workforce is resilient, the business or service as a whole will be resilient.

Individuals, however, are deeply flawed yet hugely successful! As we are conditioned to survive, we are ultimately motivated by self-interest. Almost everything we do is in relation to these two features of ourselves.

We, therefore, see risks and threats to ourselves, and our businesses as risks and threats to our survival, and address them in terms of self interest. Translating self-interest onto corporate self interest is a significant step to be taken in Strengthening Corporate Resilience.

Risks

The commonly understood risks for all corporate bodies include:
- change,
- reputational damage,
- the effects of the economy and political change,
- workforce management

that spill over into workforce risks:
- culture change,
- dis-engagement,
- skills shortages.
- job losses
These in turn, spill over into personal risks:

- uncertainty,
- fear,
- stress,
- boredom.

It would surprise me if you don’t experience some or all of these risks.

All corporate bodies are different, but some are in a more resilient position than others. A feature of a strong resilient organisation is a well embedded Wellbeing and Performance strategy that actively ensures the wellbeing of all its staff, as this results in high performance for the business.

**Strengthening corporate resilience does require top management to take the issues seriously.**

One of the major challenges for people like me working with people like you is whether you are prepared to devote the time and are sufficiently committed to improving the resilience of your organisation. It is easy to understand all the differing tasks and issues confronting senior managers, but the simple truth is that there would be no business or service without the workforce, and strengthening corporate resilience is about strengthening the resilience of the workforce.

In order to appreciate the type of interventions needed to strengthen corporate resilience, we have to understand what goes on in everyday corporate life that needs strengthening. We experience events constantly – for the most part we deal with them semi-consciously as we have experienced them before, and they pose no risk or threat to our survival. Occasionally, however, we are placed on alert about an event that is unusual, and which causes us to allocate personal resources to understand the meaning of the event before we decide how to react.

All events and reactions take place within a context, and it is our understanding of both the context and the event that helps us decide how to respond. Our personal resilience is needed at the point where we evaluate the event; in a corporate situation it is all the workforce understanding the context and event and evaluating it that determines how strong the corporate resilience is in its response to the event.
So, how do we strengthen corporate resilience?

The principal ingredients of the corporate resilience cake are:

- Commitment,
- Trust
- Engagement,
- Psychological Flow
- Strong psychological contract
- Skills, knowledge and experience
- Effective people management
- Positive working environment
- Personal Resilience

These ingredients are those that promote wellbeing at work, and those that are key to the development of a corporate culture based on Positive principles of commitment and trust between leaders and everyone else. Commitment and trust leads to social engagement, that, in turn, can produce psychological ‘flow’, a strong psychological contract, and together with other features, produce strong resilience against risks and threats.

What does a strong corporate resilient organisation look like?

- A clear, unambiguous purpose, expressed as a simple ‘big idea’, an idea which all staff relate to closely, and are proud to discuss with friends and colleagues.
- An atmosphere of confidence, where all the staff are interested in each other, support each other, and project this confidence towards clients and customers.
- Staff who behave respectfully towards each other, value each other’s views and opinions, work in teams which are places of mutual support, where anything is debated without a hint of humiliation, where the critique of the individual and team work is welcomed, discussed and where lessons are learnt and implemented.
- Staff who ‘go the extra mile’ by providing unsolicited ideas, thoughts, stimulus to each other, and where their interests in their customers and clients offers something that is more than expected, beyond courtesy, and beyond service, offering attentiveness and personal interest.
- Challenges for their staff, that provide opportunities for personal development though new experiences, and which treat everyone with fairness and understanding.
- Staff who are personally driven towards organisational and personal success – intellectually, financially, socially and emotionally.

These are the features of a corporate body that exhibits a Positive Work Culture based on commitment and trust. The test is how close your own organisation comes in relation to this template?
Implementing the interventions that produce a strong corporate resilient organisation requires an agenda – and here is one! The Wellbeing and Performance Agenda. It is formed of three parts – managing my organisation, managing my workforce and managing myself.

This diagram shows the constituent parts of each agenda item.

![Diagram showing the constituent parts of each agenda item.](image)

**Managing my organisation**

Getting the purpose of the corporate body right is an essential first step in strengthening commitment. Here are some examples of the ‘big idea’ succinctly stated –

Plan A because there is no plan B
Just do it
Connecting People
Every little helps
In business for life

Do any of these work for you?

Ensuring that corporate values link closely with the workforce values is another key element that most corporate bodies get wrong. Start by identifying the two or three core values of the workforce, as these are the principal drivers of the workforce. Use these to establish the core values, and therefore the core drivers, of the business or service. The closer the two coincide, the greater the commitment, trust and engagement is the workforce with the business.
Managing my Workforce

Next – in the agenda item managing my workforce – decide the leadership style that should be adopted and applied. One style has a major impact on strengthening commitment, trust and engagement, and this is the Adaptive Leadership style, that is based on shared responsibility for the business or service. When applied properly, this style will make your organisation zoom and give everyone a buzz. It comes highly recommended!

As part of this agenda item it is required to review the rules that are used to make the business or service work. These rules have to be enabling rules, and have to be designed to promote commitment, trust and engagement. The headings in this diagram are the rules that have been shown to have greatest impact on commitment, trust and engagement.

Their content is focused on key elements that promote commitment:
As an illustration – worklife balance is about the response the business has to crisis at home. It’s not about simply allowing people to work from home or flexi-time, but specifically about a response to a crisis. If the business responds positively to support the staff member over something, such as the delivery of the latest deep freeze, the consequences are that the staff member becomes even more committed to the organisation as a result.

Simple! But how many organisations do this?

**Managing Myself**

*Managing Myself* is about strengthening personal resilience. My model is a cognitive based model that strengthens personal characteristics known to be directly related to resilience, combined with the skills of interacting effectively with others.

There is no point in being strong if you cannot interact effectively.

**Conclusion**

Corporate resilience is essential for businesses and services to survive and grow. To strengthen corporate resilience requires strengthening the resilience of the workforce, together with ensuring the cultural environment for the workforce is one based on an embedded Wellbeing and Performance Strategy, clearly linking the wellbeing of individuals to their performance and the performance of the organisation as a whole.
Derek Mowbray is a Chartered Psychologist and Chartered Scientist with a passion for the primary prevention of psychological distress at work. His focus is on corporate culture, workforce behaviour and the behaviour of managers.

He is responsible for the new NHS Manager’s Code based on behaviours that produce commitment, trust and engagement, and has recently been described by one of the largest UK Trade Unions as ‘one of the most refreshingly visionary voices today and EVERYONE should be listening to what Professor Mowbray is saying.’ - Unison May 2011

Derek Mowbray provides a consultancy service in transforming organisations and individuals, which includes workshops, action learning projects and learning sets, coaching and facilitation. His resilience training programme for the workforce has now been rolled out in the US and mainline Europe as well as throughout the UK.

He is the founder of The Wellbeing and Performance Group that includes OrganisationHealth and MAS, amongst several organisations devoted to the prevention of stress. Their client base comes from all sectors and includes major pharmaceutical, banking and service companies.

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