



SMELLS LIKE TEAM SPIRIT

In a certain and predictable world, resilience would have no value - it is only when we are faced with unpredictability and danger that our survival depends on it. When we start to understand resilience, in systems terms, we see it as an emergent quality of wholeness or maturity.



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All too often, we have highly skilled people in sub-optimal relationships. But HR has the opportunity to broaden understanding of organisational wellbeing, so that resilience is developed at every level. In turbulent times we all need the capacity to adapt, to thrive by meeting the vicissitudes and challenges of life. So, resilience is a characteristic of vital living systems, including persons, teams and organisations, and because organisations and teams are comprised of individuals, resilience ultimately depends on personal individual maturity. By maturity we are not referring to age but how well people have learned to manage their inner states, their passions, energies and ideas in relationship to emergent phenomena. Immature people tend to suffer vulnerability arising from their inability to manage different aspects of their inner being. The resilient person is able to adapt to circumstances because they have cognitive, emotional and physical resources available and deploy them effectively in coping with the unexpected. They do not panic, they do not go to pieces, and they do not blame others. They manage themselves and their circumstances to optimal effect. As they rise above situations they may become role models and celebrated as heroes and leaders.

When a Uruguayan Rugby team and their supporters set off for an international match in Chile in 1972, they had no idea what a momentous trip it would be. In the remote High Andes their aircraft came to grief and, remarkably, of the 45 on board 27 survived. Traumatized and terribly ill-equipped for the severe conditions, they rallied round until help could arrive. Ten days later they were horrified to hear, on a tiny radio receiver, they were presumed dead and the search called off. Two months later, against all odds, two ragged young men emerged from the mountains to summon rescue for the remaining 14 survivors. To stay alive through terrible hardships and calamities they had to resort to eating their dead comrades. Their story, told in the movie "Alive", is one of resilience that is shocking in its implications. We shall see how what they learned might apply to the way we organise. So how do you develop resilience? Do you wait for life to toughen you, hoping you will rise to the challenges, or do you seek out opportunities for personal development that will help you to mature your capabilities before crisis comes? Is it a role for HR to ensure that

people at every level have appropriate developmental opportunities? It is axiomatic that you cannot have a high performing team composed of immature individuals, yet immaturity is all around us. It is lauded in our society because the media feed off its entertainment value - think *Big Brother*. Our economic system exploits people as they enjoy the illusory benefits of being good consumers. Like cattle put out to pasture, we can all be happy with abundant grass, remaining oblivious to the price to be paid.

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Paternalistic, control and command, hierarchical organisations tend to conserve immaturity because manipulation increases dependency. So long as we tell people what to do, they have no need to mature, so we should not be surprised, then, if they show little resilience. Thus we can differentiate between two kinds of leadership; one which manipulates in order to successfully exploit individuals and another which uses the challenges of life and work to develop the capability. Leadership which helps people become whole unto themselves, self-contained and self-directing, brings the rewards of better motivation, self-organisation, self-reliance, resilience, agility, creativity and the prevalence of good sense at every level of organisation. In *The Magus*, author John Fowles tells the story of Nicholas, an archetypal modern person - shallow, selfish, arrogant and judgemental (qualities that might lead to success in the city). Although Nicholas has little grasp of what is happening, the eccentric methods of the mysterious Magus reveal his limitations and, as the scales fall from his eyes, he emerges a better person.

Learning is not all of a kind. Simple accumulation of knowledge does not bring us to maturity and does nothing for resilience. Learning needs to involve every aspect of our being; mind, feelings, motivations and tap into

our *joie de vivre*. In so far as we develop our capabilities in balance, we become less rigid and fragile - indeed we acquire resilience. As it is for the individual, so also for larger units; teams and social groupings. A team is a cohesive whole; a living entity that is somehow more than the sum of its parts. Team members acquire a shared identity as they come together around a shared sense of purpose. For it to really work requires maturity of relationships and open behaviour. A mature team is resilient, able to weather the storms

and seize opportunities. Because of the quality of relationships, the team's best resources can be deployed to match whatever circumstances it meets. The maturing of the team and the people within it are symbiotic processes. Although teams may dissolve, when their work is done the people will have matured through the process.

Looking for what makes for resilience, Dr Hugh Montgomery, consultant physician in Intensive Care Medicine at University College Hospital London, led a medical research team up Everest, studying themselves as they went. Taking account of survivors of extreme events (including the Uruguayan Rugby survivors) his research identified nine factors that make a difference to individual chances of survival: Genetics: What your parents gave you. What you make of this is a function of the other eight factors which are under your control! Attitude: How strong is your will to survive? Physical fitness: How lean and fit are you? Emotional fitness: How well can you manage fear and pain? Mental fitness: Have you the mental agility to reconfigure what makes sense? Humour: Can you laugh at your situation no matter how grim? Right use of imagination: How well you can make believe (literally) in a good outcome? Planning: Can you generate energy and confidence by rehearsing the future? Discipline: Can you

control your energies? Just as individual humans can aspire to be living wholes, so can teams and even organisations.

In times of crisis, the work of leadership is to pull things around so everyone survives in the best possible fashion. Transfer the above human attributes to the organisational or societal scale and we get the following: Genetics: Re-visit your business model and check that resilience is built into it. What was good last year may not be fit for the future. Attitude: Encourage the intent to thrive whatever the danger. Don't err towards either wishful thinking or arrogance. Never stop learning to survive as an organisation - and be prepared to put everything into the melting pot. Physical fitness: Make sure your organisation is slim, lean, and fit for purpose. Remove resistance, redundancy and deadwood. Train and practice. Emotional fitness: Maintain confidence and vigilance. Build strength in leadership and relationships. Impart urgency, pride, and trust. Mental fitness: involve and engage everyone in re-thinking where the organisation is headed, what it is for, and how adaptable it is to changing conditions. Humour: Laughing at yourself helps you through uncomfortable situations and releases pent-up emotions. With humour comes play, which feeds creativity and innovation. Right use of imagination: Help people use imagination to build a narrative of a successful outcome. Enable everyone to create their own role in the story. Planning: Take stock. Envision success and plan how to get there from where you are. Planning prepares minds. Rehearsing the future makes it more likely you will see opportunities and seize them. Discipline: Hone your intent; physical, emotional and mental! Keep to what you have promised. Don't let things slip because there is danger - danger demands you stay alert and keep on top of doubt and uncertainty. Resilience is the key to the survival of any living whole yet on a global scale modern society is vulnerable to the immaturity of individuals. Systems thinkers refer to complex adaptive systems and in these terms the whole of human society is presently lacking resilience, putting all life on earth at risk of catastrophe. ●

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