



STRATEGIC
EDUCATION INC

How to foster a culture of resilience within your organization



The COVID-19 crisis has created waves of disruption through each sector of the economy. Now more than ever, companies and institutions are looking internally to find solutions to help ease the impact of both the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn.

Many are recognizing the role that organizational culture can play, specifically how resiliency can help their employees navigate periods of uncertainty. In order to foster resilience, companies should look for ways to support their employees through messaging, increased collaboration, and access to valuable resources.



Resiliency defined

One way to consider resiliency is to think of it as a series of tools employees can use to face challenges. According to Kendall Bailey, vice president and head of SEI Labs, “A resilient employee has a wide range of skills and capabilities at their disposal to respond nimbly and strategically when the unexpected happens.”

This includes skills that are directly used in their daily work, but resiliency can also be found in someone’s emotional core. As Terri Radcliff, owner of TerriJRadcliff Consulting and former senior vice president of Talent and Knowledge Management at the YMCA of the USA points out, “Resilience itself is personal. It is the ability to cope well with change, to find one’s inner strength and use it to function and succeed. Everyone’s experience is different.”

Resiliency can also manifest as a value of the company at large. Through preparation and planning, it’s a cultural ethos that can flow from leadership to teams and individual employees. “Organizations should be engaged in real-time strategic planning,” says Radcliff. “They should use a ‘rolling cycle’ approach where leadership is able to shift strategies and revise operating plans as external factors change.”

Given the importance of resiliency in the current environment, it’s useful to examine ways that companies can foster resilience within their workforce.



Make it a core value

As with any element of an organization's culture, resiliency is a value that leaders can designate and promote.

"Leadership's conversations and messaging should engage staff and encourage them to manage change, innovate, and be resilient," according to Radcliff. "And it isn't just about being responsive but also being proactive. This was true even before COVID."

Radcliff recommends that leaders be as communicative as possible during times of change to avoid confusion and help employees have a sense of continuity. She also recommends that leaders listen to their teams and acknowledge the emotional ranges of their employees. "It's all about keeping the lines of communication open and bringing people together," she adds.

Managers can also create learning experiences for their employees that help build resilience. These include workshops to teach individuals how to practice optimism, how to work more efficiently, and how to communicate better. Workshops can also include team-building exercises that focus on connection, trust, and a sense of community among coworkers. As Bailey notes, "Fostering strong and supportive team environments ensures that teams pull together when challenges arise. A team's collective resilience is capable of so much more than any individual can manage in the face of disruption."

To encourage resilience, an organization's leaders must build it into core values. It should be openly discussed and then supported through action.

Set expectations

Resilience can also be created through how an organization define workers' roles. "People want to be good at their jobs, they want to succeed," says Radcliff. "If you show them what is expected and how they can develop as workers, they will flourish in their role."

Setting expectations can happen at the start of someone's employment (during the hiring and onboarding process) or it can be incorporated into annual reviews. The important thing is to establish what the position will entail, what responsibilities are included in the role, and what the benchmarks are for success. Managers can infuse competency models in ongoing conversations with their team. With this information in mind, an employee understands both what their baseline is and how they can succeed in their work. This process is similar to visualization: if someone can imagine what success and growth look like, they are better able to achieve it.

This conceptualization of their own success can lead to a sense of satisfaction in their work, which in turn can help bolster resilience. In other words, an engaged and motivated employee is more likely to draw on inner strength to take change and uncertainty in stride.



“Resilience itself is personal. It is the ability to cope well with change, to find one’s inner strength and use it to function and succeed. Everyone’s experience is different.

“As the job market comes back, the emphasis will be on employee engagement and staff development. Education and programs can help companies keep their good people and remain competitive, even those that are currently pausing their education programs.”

– Terri Radcliff
Owner
TerriJRadcliff Consulting

Encourage new skills

Organizations can also help build resiliency by increasing employees’ skills and competencies. Formal and informal learning opportunities can help as the more relevant skills one has at their disposal, the more flexible they can be when responding to uncertainty.

“Building a robust toolkit of skills is important, as is the learning that comes through broadening one’s capabilities. It can equip you to look at a challenge from multiple perspectives, which can be very valuable when facing anything new,” says Bailey. Education and training can also boost employees’ confidence as they lean on their range of skills when facing new challenges, helping them to approach setbacks calmly.

Bailey also points out that new skills can help prepare individuals for any changes to their roles – which is particularly valuable during the COVID crisis when companies have made personnel adjustments and shifted responsibilities within teams. “Resiliency helps keep us agile as we take on new responsibilities; it can make sure we never get too comfortable or complacent within our current positions. And continued learning prepares us for those increased responsibilities,” Bailey notes.



Looking ahead

While it's difficult to forecast how organizations will evolve over the next few years, there are some guideposts for what leaders can focus on today. According to Radcliff, "As the job market comes back, the emphasis will be on employee engagement and staff development. Education and programs can help companies keep their good people and remain competitive, even those that are currently pausing their education programs."

Given the amount of staffing changes at many companies over the past several months, it's likely that organizations will create broader roles with less specialization. Increased skill sets will be key to succeeding at revised or even combined roles.

During times of increased change, resilient individuals and organizations are more able to adapt to those changes and turn them into opportunities for learning and leadership.





STRATEGIC
EDUCATION INC

Strategic Education, Inc. is dedicated to enabling economic mobility through education. We serve students through a range of educational opportunities that include: Strayer University and Capella University (separate institutions that are each regionally accredited), which collectively offer flexible and affordable associate, certificate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs; a Top 25 Princeton Review-ranked online MBA program through the Jack Welch Management Institute; self-paced college-level, general education courses through Sophia; customized degrees for corporations through Degrees@Work; and non-degree web and mobile application development courses through DevMountain, Generation Code, Hackbright Academy, and The New York Code + Design Academy. These programs help our students prepare for success in today's jobs and find a path to bettering their lives.

Learn more at strategiceducation.com/employers