BUILDING RESILIENCE, NOT MAKING RESOLUTIONS

Helping managers manage more effectively in volatile circumstances

Three paths to progress

Researchers have identified three approaches to work which can help managers manage more effectively in volatile circumstances. Firstly, there are organisational **routines**, which are efficient when work is predictable. Many of our established work processes fall into this category. Next, there are simple rules, or **heuristics**. These are rules of thumb that can provide shortcuts, speeding up processes and decision-making and prioritising the use of resources. (Phone triage of patients in general practice is an example which has arisen from the pandemic.) Lastly, there is **improvisation** – spontaneous, creative efforts to solve problems that crop up at very short notice.

The researchers argue that any team will perform better – and crucially, be more resilient – if it is able to move comfortably between the three and understand how the different approaches might interact and morph into one another.

When a situation departs far enough from the team's expectations, improvisation becomes necessary. The team might then develop a simple rule (heuristics), based on their experience of how the improvisation worked. Heuristics are a good middle ground because they allow adjustment to a faster pace, without the team having to abandon their underlying principles. Once the situation stabilises, the simple rule might be developed into a new routine.

Teams and organisations can be actively trained to alter the combination of routines, heuristics and improvisation to meet changing requirements.

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Sounds great, but how do we ensure that we take everyone along with us?

When change is rapid, so is improvisation. This can alienate team members who didn't originate the idea. They might feel left behind – excluded from the decision-making process and disengaged with the purpose of the change. So, in addition to understanding the three approaches, it's crucial to know the strengths of your team members and the behavioural culture of your team. This way, you can predict how others are likely to respond to change and decide who to send into battle at which time. You'll know who needs to be sold on the benefits of heuristics and who will be desperate for the chance to improvise.

Below are a few pointers for handling change and building resilience in your team. Of course, each of us has more than one Team Role, but for ease of reference, we've named each individually.

Plants are great at coming up with new ideas which haven't occurred to others, so would be ideal in a situation where other options have been exhausted and a wholly new approach is required.

Teamworkers are the most adaptable of all Team Roles. They will be ready to support the team's solution and will likely play an invaluable role in delivering it and boosting morale. They will primarily concerned with how others are handling the situation.

When there are numerous competing demands on the team, **Co-ordinators** are needed to prioritise and identify the right people to engage in solving a particular problem. They also need to be able to surrender control, admitting to themselves that improvisation will likely come from a combination of creativity

and expertise within the team, rather than from on high. Co-ordinators will need to empower others, giving them the courage to come forward with the solution that just might provide the key to solving the problem. Additionally, they may struggle to achieve consensus decision-making in a limited timeframe and find that a more decisive approach is required, at least in the short term.

Another hallmark of a crisis is a scarcity of resources, and this is where Resource Investigators come in. Whilst, in evolutionary terms, crises focus us on the threat, **Resource Investigators** are the most proficient at maintaining optimism and searching for opportunities – the silver linings.

Shapers are great change agents, able to respond quickly to changing circumstances. Their decisive approach and determination to overcome obstacles will bring energy and drive to the team when it is most needed.

Most improvisations appear spontaneous, but the kind of creativity they entail relies on a foundation of expertise and training. This is where **Specialists** come to the fore. Their advice needs to be heeded – and it's up to others in the team to elicit the required information and to decide how to translate this into a workable strategy.

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Implementers, the kings and queens of the organisational routine, are likely to be the most resistant to changes which threaten efficiency and the least comfortable with improvisation. Here, it's crucial that Implementers understand why the old process doesn't fit any longer and why change in the short-term will benefit everyone. If they can understand that lessons learnt from improvisation will help develop a more effective simple rule (and eventually a new protocol) then they are more likely to buy in.

Completer Finishers may also struggle if they are forced to compromise on standards in the name of a faster response time. It may be a case of explaining that, in a crisis situation, our best has to be good enough and why delays are likely to prove more harmful than small imperfections.

Monitor Evaluators do not enjoy quick solutions either and may have difficulty backing a course of action that has been improvised. As a result, they may detach themselves from the decision-making process. When the results of the improvisation come in, they can usefully be engaged in evaluating the team's experiment and determining how to develop a simple rule.

The only sanctioned way of finding out your Belbin® Team Role strengths and weaknesses is by completing the official Belbin® Self-Perception Inventory online, and receiving a Belbin® Individual Report.

Over 3 million Belbin® Reports have been generated world-wide for individuals, managers, teams and organisations. Contact us at belbin.com to start your Belbin® journey.

Practice makes perfect

Building resilience and elasticity in our approach is a long-term investment in ourselves and our teams. It requires reflection, self-forgiveness and a whole lot of practice.

Here at Belbin, we think those are the tenets on which to embark upon a new year that is making unprecedented demands on us.

Tired teams? Struggling to manage remotely? If your team's energy is flagging, we're here to help. To find out more about the numerous applications of Belbin (including feeding back Reports and using Belbin to enhance team performance), why not give us a call?

References

https://hbr.org/2020/11/building-organizational-resilience
https://www.bouncebackproject.org/resilience/