

Resilience, what?

The past few years have seen the increasing use of the term resilience and with its increase in use so its definition has become cloudier and cloudier as it has become applied to a range of references e.g. business resilience, organisational resilience, supply chain resilience people and even personal resilience.

So just what is it? I would invite the reader to review the following, not by any means exhaustive, list of the range of 'official' views on this and it may be noted here that even within the UK government there are at least three variations of its meaning.

1. **Resilience**

"The ability of a system to return to its original [or desired] state after being disturbed"

Source: Collins English Dictionary 2000

2. **Resilience**

"Resilience is the capacity of individuals, groups and organisations to maintain the ability to function, relate and grow in the presence of significant disturbance and challenges.

Source: UK Government Civil Contingencies Secretariat

3. **Resilience**

"The ability of a system or organisation to withstand and recover from adversity".

Source: UK Government Critical Infrastructure Resilience Programme,

4. **Resilience**

"The ability of assets, networks and systems to anticipate, absorb, adapt to and / or rapidly recover from a disruptive event."

Source: UK Government A Guide to improving the resilience of critical infrastructure and essential services

5. **Resilience**

"Ability of an organization to resist being affected by an incident"

Source: BS 25999-2:2007

6. **Resilience**

"The adaptive capacity of an organization in a complex and changing environment, as well as protection of critical supply chain assets and processes"

Source: ISO 28002

In my view Resilience is as hard a term to define as Culture which, after much research during my MBA studies, really came down to *"The way we do things around here"*

Where does this leave us? Confused? Yes to a point but we should also grasp on to the single theme which runs through these definitions, that is *'the ability, or capacity, of.....'* and the principle to safeguard or protect. It is too develop such ability/capacity which organisations should strive.

Resilience is not a physical thing you can buy it of a shelf. It is a concept which those who wish can use as an aspiration. An intangible objective which it could be argued is impossible to attain due to the constantly evolving nature of people, organisations and business. So if

impossible to attain why, as many do, try? Fundamentally because the very action of striving to be resilient safeguards business, assets, and most important of all, people!

This striving for resilience involves in it a wide range of component parts all working in harmony to cope with not just every day challenges but in particular during times of high stress. Fortunately within business these component parts are also part of standard operating systems the challenge is to bring together these parts in such a way which enables them to respond to a crisis.



As can be seen from this diagram resilience in an organisation is many faceted and striving for it requires a holistic approach which includes an understanding of both internal and external risks and pressures. Probably most important of all is the existence of a culture which actively encourages this to happen.

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