



Building resilient teams: shaping online working behaviour.

By The Belbin Team | 06 Jan 2021

This year is about seizing opportunities for personal growth.

Whatever our challenges this year, we're already in the right place, rising to the occasion, finding strategies and ways of coping. Adversity can provide opportunities for personal growth, discovering new skills and building resilience, even if we feel like we're doing little more than getting by. Resilience is our ability to adapt well in a crisis and to recover quickly from difficulties. It's developing the kind of elasticity that allows us to adapt. It doesn't mean that we're unaffected, it's about our response – and that response can be learned and practised

To develop resilience, we need to understand our strengths.

According to the Bounce Back Project, there are five pillars of resilience: self-awareness, mindfulness, self-care, positive relationships and purpose. When it comes to work, gaining an awareness of our Belbin Team Role strengths can help with some of the other pillars.

When we are able to work to our strengths (and understand the strengths others have to offer), we are able to build more positive working relationships and work with more purpose. We might practise self-care by setting boundaries and switching off at set times without feeling guilty. And we can learn to show ourselves the same compassion we show to others when it comes to the kind of work we struggle with.

We can work with others who have complementary skill sets, safe in the knowledge that they'll not only be able to help out, but might actually enjoy the work in question.

It isn't just us, teams and organisations need resilience too.

Remote working places the responsibility to keep things afloat more than ever on individual shoulders.

Teams working from home are reporting higher levels of productivity but falling engagement. Perhaps more of us feel isolated without face to face contact. Maybe we imagine that if we don't check our emails one more time or take one more out-of-hours call, that the future of the organisation is under threat.

But truthfully, we know that this isn't a long-term solution for remote workers. Tired teams have been sprinting up until now, only to find that we're in a marathon. So how do we help our organisations adapt, and re-energise virtual teams?

Just like resilient people, resilient teams need self-awareness. They need to take a virtual water cooler moment and examine their collective response to different types of challenges.



Three paths to progress.

Researchers have identified three approaches to work which can help managers who are managing a remote team 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 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.

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, especially in virtual work where communication can be hit-and-miss. 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.

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 with how to manage remote teams? If you know of a team's energy that is flagging, we're here to help.

Contact us to find out how: +64 (0) 21 842 893 or email info@leadershipsolutions.co.nz

