Resilient Leadership

A Closer Look at Key Ideas about Resilient Leadership

Balancing Fundamental Needs

Within the context of all relationships, individuals are driven to meet two fundamental needs: The need to be close (togetherness) and the need to be separate (individuality). How well we strike the right balance between these two needs ultimately determines the health and vitality of our relationships. Likewise, the health of any organization is related to how well its members achieve a proper balance between individuality and togetherness. Too much separateness can lead to parts of the organization operating as isolated “silos.” Too much togetherness can lead to “group think” and a diminished capacity for risk-taking and creative problem solving.

The Role of the Leader

Because of the position that the leader occupies within the relationship system of an organization, how well that leader strikes a balance between the two fundamental forces of togetherness and individuality will play a decisive role in the functioning of the entire organization. As the graphic illustrates, the ancient adage that “virtue is to be found in the middle” holds true here as well. Good organizational health—just like good personal health—is the result of finding the middle course between being close without becoming enmeshed, all the while staying separate without becoming isolated. Relationship systems tend to follow their leader in this regard, as in so many other aspects of organizational life.

By monitoring him/her self, a leader can develop greater awareness, not only of how s/he tends personally to manage the balance, but also how his or her way of operating influences the organization as a whole.

Know Yourself

Most of us are unaware of how much our culture has conditioned us to consider as “natural” a certain physical distance we keep when in conversation...
In times of high anxiety, each of us tends to exaggerate innate tendencies towards fusion or cut-offs. Reactivity is always characterized by movement toward extreme positions. Resilient Leaders will want to monitor themselves and those they lead for signs that a healthy balance is being lost, and take corrective action as soon as possible.

- Stay connected to those who disagree with you, and especially those who act in an adversarial fashion. The wise advice about holding your friends close, but your enemies closer, is true!
- Be mindful of which direction you favor under stress (fusion or cut-offs), and develop proactive ways to counter those tendencies in yourself.
- Pay attention to when and how others in your organization tend toward one or the other extreme when anxious, and be quick to intervene (e.g., by drawing them out of themselves if they tend to isolate, or encouraging them to step back and take some time apart before fueling others’ anxieties if they tend to become enmeshed in the reactivity of the group).
- Recognize that it’s easy for anyone to remain calm by withdrawing from an anxious milieu. But that is a luxury leaders cannot afford. Stay connected as a calming presence, and others will follow your lead.