



Resiliency And Resistance: Capabilities Of Change

by Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.



Change demands our attention. Ignoring it can be dangerous and costly. Like the cornerstone of a great building, change is constant and dependable. It anchors our existence; ever strong and present.

Yet, we know other characteristics associated with change; complexity, unpredictability, and imperceptibility. Change can overpower our sensibilities and capabilities leaving us exhausted and vulnerable. Recognizing the paradoxical nature of change may produce uncertainty or indecision concerning how to view or harness the constructive power inherent in change. One perspective is viewing change as a context of conditions; conditions requiring you to use specific change management skills focused on increasing coping effectiveness and decreasing the tension and disability possibility generated by the contradictory nature of change. Three strategies for contextualizing and categorizing our perspectives of change include cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Think of these strategies as perceptual constructs for framing your perspectives toward change.

Cognitively, we can adopt a philosophic perspective when conceiving, perceiving, and engaging the roles of change in our lives. Affectively, we can apply rationality and logic to temper the emotional states we introduce into decision-making and action. Behaviorally, we can align our actions with the spirit and intent of constructive thought and passion for achievement. Using cognitive, affective, and behavioral schemas can be especially helpful in acquiring the knowledge and forging the tools necessary to engage two key conditions associated with managing change; resilience and resistance.

Resilience

The English naturalist and author Charles Darwin wrote, "It is neither the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." Responsiveness to change requires adaptability; our ability to accommodate and adjust to new stimuli in our personal and professional environments. Our adaptability is predicated on the ability to plan for intended action, as well as unanticipated possible outcomes. Adaptability planning is tantamount to contingency or scenario planning. Exploring possible futures and your ability to act and achieve in these environments. For many people, their ability to be resilient remains unknown and untested until crisis summons resilience to be proved.

Resilience is a capacity built through experience over time. It is composed of an unflagging and relentless vision of the future, a nimble and elastic orientation toward the unpredictability and randomness of change, and comfort with situational ambiguity recognizing it as the modes operandi change and changing.

In his 1992 book *Managing at the Speed of Change*, author Daryl Conner wrote, "Resilient people experience the same fear and apprehension as everyone else when they engage change. However, they are usually able to maintain their productivity and quality standards as well as their emotional stability while achieving most

of their objectives." Supporting his perspective, Conner shares Five Basic Characteristics of Resilience indicating that these qualities are characteristic of resilient people's beliefs and behaviors. For this article, we have modified Conner's offering framing the qualities using P's of Resilience associating them with the cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies presented earlier.

Five P's of Resilience

- Philosophy (Cognitive)—Secure, self-assured, and opportunity focused
- Precision (Cognitive)—Strong vision of the future and what goals are to be achieved
- Pliable (Cognitive/Affective)—Pliable and flexible relative to uncertainty
- Planful (Cognitive/Behavioral)—Strategic, continually planning, revising, and re-planning in order to manage ambiguity; and
- Proactive (Affective/Behavioral)—Seeking change; exploring and experimenting with the Five P's of Resilience in order to understand the anatomy and potentials associated with change.

A coach can help you discover your resilience capacity. Knowledge is power. Get powerful; learn more about resilience.

Resistance

Scientist and futurist Dr. Peter Senge shares, "People don't resist change. They resist being changed!" If true, resisting change can be viewed as a condition of cognition, not of the experience of change. Frequently, in response to change people state, "I'm not changing; it's too hard, time consuming, or uninteresting." Whatever the reason, they've made a decision to resist change. Decision-making is a cognitive event. Typically, we gather data, draw from past experiences, and then through employ logic and reason make informed decisions. However, even in the presence of rationality; irrationality, illogic, and emotionality manifest hindering clear thought, in turn quality decision-making.

When people resist being changed, but not change itself, we need to move ourselves and others toward rationality; promoting data-driven discussion, identifying strategies for reducing the ineffective emotionality in decision-making, and encouraging commitment to partnering with change, making it an ally in building resilience and limiting resistance.

A coach can help you explore resistance to change. Resist resisting. Get empowered; learn more about resistance to change. ■

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