



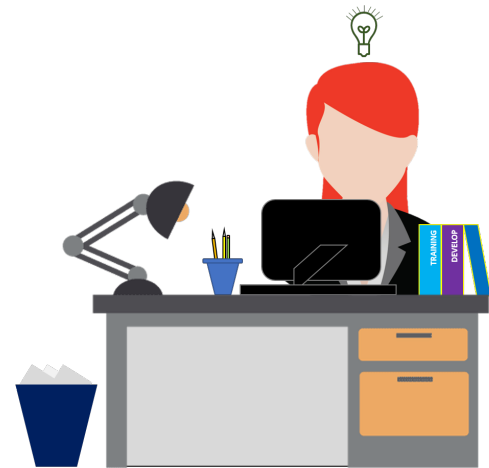
Bringing Resilience to Life in Government: It Starts with Leadership

July 2020

Deloitte Consulting LLP

Introduction

As a pandemic sweeps the world, organizations have adapted to changing work and workplaces at incredible speeds. However, this is not the first crisis to hit the workforce, nor will it likely be the last. For leaders in government agencies, the challenge is two-fold: the need to respond to the immediate situation while preparing their organization for a new future, one in which they are better able to manage uncertainty. Even in the most unpredictable environments, leaders must set the tone and lead by walking in the shoes of their people, staying strong to provide leadership to their teams and organizations. As we unpack the tools needed for leadership success in this environment, let's go on a journey with Winnie, the fictional department head of a large federal agency facing major challenges caused by a public health emergency.



Earlier this year, the heroine of our story—Winnie—was facing a storm of uncertainty. She was concerned with how to handle the increasingly alarming news reports about COVID-19. Winnie knew that the agency's leadership was flexible with letting department heads expand the work from home policy at their discretion, but no other department had done so yet. Winnie knew her staff was anxious and distracted, and she felt she needed to address their concerns quickly. Her mind raced as she considered her options: Should I act or just wait? What should I say? What should I do?

As Winnie thought about what to do, a lightbulb went off in her head. She recalled a training she and several other top performers attended several months ago... something about stress management? Hardiness? Grit? Close, but none of those were fully right. She went back to her notes and it all came back to her—resilience. A smile flashed across her face and she was filled with a sense of calm, knowing what she needed to do next. She had to act now. She had to do the right thing for her people. Winnie took a deep breath and started formulating her plan of action—a plan centered around providing actionable suggestions to respond to her people's immediate concerns and help them adapt to the challenge at hand. And she intended to put it into motion as soon as possible.

Understanding resilience

First, let's talk a little more about what we mean by resilience. We define resilience as the capacity to adapt and bounce back quickly when faced with adversity. Doing this requires perspective to see the potential for positive action and outcomes amidst all the negativity of the current situation.

As Deloitte Global CEO Punit Renjen recently outlined, there are five fundamental behaviors of resilient leadership that enable leaders to navigate their way through crisis so they can come out thriving on the other end.¹

1. **Design from the heart... and the head.** Resilient leaders possess a dual mindset. They empathize with their workforce and the people they serve, while also considering the financial

impacts that accompany disruptions. Leaning too far one way or the other can be risky.

2. **Put the mission first.** Resilient leaders prioritize what matters most to create stability, while also finding opportunities amidst constraints.
3. **Aim for speed over elegance.** Leaders need to quickly take decisive and courageous action, while potentially operating with limited information. In Winnie's case, while other department heads hesitated and anxiety grew within her team, she recognized the need for immediate action.
4. **Own the narrative.** By owning the narrative from the start, resilient leaders are honest in what they know—and don't know—about the current realities, and still inspire others. The important part is to be transparent and provide a perspective to inspire hope for a more positive future.
5. **Embrace the long view.** Lastly, resilient leaders focus on and embrace the long view, anticipating how the future may change. Every great hero story starts with a great challenge. By seeing opportunities to innovate amidst the challenge, leaders can set their organization up to thrive in the new normal.

It takes courage for leaders to achieve these resilient behaviors and to bring their organizations along to make it come to life. However, this courage can pay dividends. Organizations with a resilient workforce have high levels of job satisfaction, work happiness, and organizational commitment.² Through the development of these resilient behaviors, leaders enable their organizations to succeed. As governments and their respective agencies are being called upon to lead critical efforts related to the current COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, resilience can be brought to life for them and their organizations by:

- Cultivating and aligning courageous leaders who rally around their strengths and set the tone from the top
- Enabling high-performance and resiliency amongst (now often virtual) teams throughout the organization
- Bringing leadership and teams together to meet the mission in a time of crisis and beyond

Start with cultivating and aligning courageous leaders

Bringing resilience to life in an organization starts with cultivating courageous leaders and aligning them to tackle the task at hand. An executive leadership team composed of people who are emotionally connected and strategically aligned can operate as one voice. Like an orchestra with unique contributors collaborating to play as a beautiful ensemble, each team member plays an essential role in setting a top-down tone for the rest of the organization. When we align a leadership team and cultivate their courage and resilience, we can set the right tone for high-performance and resilience with teams across the organization – culminating in achieving mission critical tasks in disruptive times and times of steady-state. And, when leaders align and commit to outcomes, this also sets the tone for shared accountability across the entire organization.³

[Deloitte's insights](#), coupled with cutting-edge industry research, have revealed that the secret to high-performing teams is intensely human; it's about nurturing an emotional connection, a sense of safety, and strengths-based resilience.⁴ In fact, a landmark study by Gallup of over 50,000 teams revealed that almost all the variation between high- and low- performing teams could be explained by one statement related to team members using their strengths every day.⁵ High-performing, aligned leadership teams understand their individual and team strengths, are intentional about how they use them to show up for each other, and rally around their common goals.



From the organizational perspective, agencies and groups should be intentional about cultivating resilience at the leadership level, so that leaders can adapt and identify opportunities as they face inevitable challenges and hardships. Interventions such as leadership alignment sessions and a focus on breaking down inter-agency silos to improve collaboration, can help set leaders up to support their teams and their organization's mission. To improve personal resiliency and focus on positive outcomes, leaders may wish to engage in one-on-one leadership coaching and labs with a focus on interventions aimed at improving one's positive affect and levels of mindfulness, both significant predictors of resilience.⁶

To thrive in the long run, organizations can start now by identifying and preparing those individuals who have the potential to be courageous, resilient leaders in the future. With many government agencies facing an aging workforce, preparing for succession is critical. And cultivating capabilities like resilience, that are valuable no matter what the future holds, may even be a safer investment than developing technical skills now that could be outdated in a few years.

Now our story continues with Winnie. We already learned that her organization had invested in trainings for their top performers and future leaders, but how did that help her act courageously in a time of need?

3 Keys to Cultivating and Aligning Courageous Leaders

- **Align your leadership team and help them connect emotionally to the task at hand**
- **Provide leaders with learning experiences to cultivate their courage and resilience**
- **Build a succession plan to identify potential future leaders and develop their resilience to thrive in an uncertain future**

Winnie remembered from her training that resilient leaders must act courageously—which means doing what’s right even when it’s difficult. So, she sent a compassionate email to all her staff emphasizing that their well-being was her personal top priority and stating that she was expanding the work from home policy immediately for anyone in her department who wanted to take advantage of it. She then worked quickly to get her people what they needed to be effective in a virtual environment. Her actions did not go unnoticed by her team or by her agency’s leadership. In response to her swift action, people in her department reciprocated the compassion, showering Winnie with messages of gratitude—not only for enabling them to work from home, but also for acknowledging the situation and showing that she cared.

At the same time, she took time to connect with each of the agency’s leaders and brought them together for an open discussion about how to communicate and support staff when implementing an expanded work from home policy. The leadership team was inspired by Winnie’s passion and positive experience with her team and rallied around their strengths to work together and develop a plan to duplicate Winnie’s efforts across the agency. Winnie was glad that she seized the opportunity presented to her, that she was recognized as a role model for her senior leaders, and most importantly, that she paved a way for her people to be supported and successful during an uncertain time.

Enable high-performing, resilient virtual teams

In every moment, leaders set the tone for an organization. During a crisis, it’s particularly important to set the tone for high-performing and resilient teams who can effectively respond to pressing mission needs, especially when there are changing priorities in a shifting working environment. Drastic changes such as moving to fully virtual work, mixed with uncertainty and fear related to health and well-being, can invariably add stress. Being faced with these challenges may make it difficult to excel in one’s role, and it is critically important for leadership teams to be mindful of their people’s well-being and to meaningfully support them through changes.

Teams throughout an organization often take their cue from leadership to achieve their critical tasks. To grow a highly effective organization, leaders can help cascade high performance by focusing on strengths and intentionally building trust and an inclusive environment on teams. It is also important to note that every person’s individual situation may differ. Because of this,



activities for laying a resilient foundation for individual team members could range from individual performance coaching to providing well-being support.

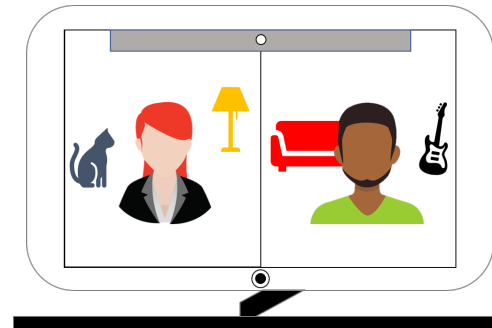
While high-performing teams can be difficult to construct in a normal working environment, many teams are now facing the added challenge of working in a new, virtual environment. Effective virtual teams often require a high degree of intentionality; this “new normal” forces not only new ways of operating, but also new ways of remote learning. Teams may need new tools and skills to achieve virtual effectiveness, making it critical to understand and fill gaps by helping people learn in the flow of work and through providing targeted learning opportunities. Let’s see how Winnie made this work for her organization.

3 Keys to Enabling High-Performing Virtual Teams

- Address individual well-being needs and support adapting to a new normal
- Develop teams’ strengths to drive high performance
- Identify skills and tools gaps, and support managers and teams to operate effectively in a virtual environment

After Winnie's initial response paid off for her team and entire agency, she recognized the need to take steps towards recovering from the disruption and strengthening the performance of her team. Drawing again upon her knowledge of resiliency (and a team effectiveness session she had also attended), Winnie knew that her team needed extra support to adapt and work well, not just survive, in a virtual environment. She took time to have individual check-ins with her team members to better understand their unique concerns and build on their strengths to perform in the new environment.

Winnie also worked with her agency's leadership team to offer outside trainings and resources for well-being management and to develop new critical skills for a virtual environment. She even gave one of her newest team members, who had previously been a part of a remote team, a chance to shine by delivering a series of lunch and learns on leading practices to help the team feel comfortable with the influx of new tools intended to help them work and connect with each other daily. After an initial adjustment period, Winnie's team was working better than ever in a new remote environment.



and intensive learning experiences, leaders can find their way through the toughest problems and help their organizations to keep delivering on the mission. Let's check in on how Winnie helped meet her agency's mission during a time of great disruption.

Meet the mission in a time of crisis and beyond

Aligned leaders and high-performing teams can help mobilize the entire organization to adapt during a time of crisis and move towards a new normal. In addition, leaders and their teams also should prioritize what is most critical to their mission to create stability and help their organizations remain resilient. A focus on legislative support, crisis communications, and context-driven problem solving can help organizations effectively meet their mission.

Government agencies need to be keenly aware of how new legislation impacts their mission. For example, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Congress passed [economic stimulus and emergency appropriations packages](#) affecting a wide range of programs, including food assistance, education stabilization, and targeted payments to individuals.⁷ Resilient government leaders should focus on helping their organizations manage new responsibilities while maintaining essential steady-state operations.

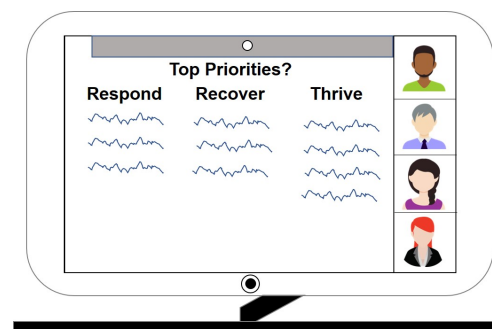
During any time of change and uncertainty, communications are critical. As mentioned in Punin's article, resilient leaders own the narrative through transparent communications and inspiring messages that help people persevere through challenge. To achieve this, organizations can strengthen the communication response skills of their leaders and teams. At the same time, by tracking stakeholder and other critical data across their organization, they can grow situational awareness to be able to respond appropriately.

By bringing the right people together and leveraging methods such as scenario-based planning, simulations to test potential solutions,

3 Keys to Meeting the Mission in a Time of Crisis and Beyond

- Enlist experts to understand and help adapt to new legislation
- Deliver transparent communications from the top down
- Identify and tackle the most pressing problems aggressively

While Winnie was focusing on getting her team to lead the way in the new virtual workplace, her response efforts also made her a consensus pick by the agency's leadership to serve as a member of an inter-agency crisis management taskforce. As a resilient leader, she wanted to help the organization meet its mission and thrive as quickly as possible. She worked with the rest of the taskforce in determining priorities for success in the future and started developing transparent, empathic communications that would keep the entire agency up to date on the situation and their response.



As the situation escalated, legislation began to pass that would impact the agency and the public—adding to the agency's long list of competing priorities. Winnie realized that although their agency had a wealth of knowledge, an outside perspective may be helpful in navigating their way through the current situation and into the future. Because of this, she suggested enlisting a group of subject matter experts to guide the taskforce. Although Winnie is still unsure of what the future has in store, she knows that she has helped put herself, her team, and her organization in the best place possible to succeed and continue to overcome adversity.

Amy Titus

Amy is a managing director in Human Capital within Deloitte Consulting LLP and is responsible for delivering talent, learning, organization transformation, and change solutions to her clients. She brings considerable industry depth, thought leadership, and international recognition to Deloitte's clients, given her 25 years of global experience. She leads the Government and Public Services Learning Solutions practice. In addition, she is the dean of the Chief Learning Officer Forum and Federal Learning Officers Workshop, both annual events. Amy serves on several committees including the USIP International Advisory Council and CAIEL (The Council for Adult & Experiential Learning) and is co-lead of Deloitte's Greater Washington Area Volunteer Council and also serves as the RightStep Education Champion. She holds a master's degree in Instructional Systems from the University of Minnesota and a doctorate in Adult Education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank **Lisa Andrusyszyn, GR Dulac, Matt LaFortune, Susmita Murthy, Dan Pelton, Jen Rompre, and Jimmy Wyner** for their input and expertise.

Endnotes

¹ Punit Renjen, "The heart of resilient leadership," Deloitte Insights, 2020.

² Carolyn M. Youssef and Fred Luthans, "Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: the impact of hope, optimism, and resilience," *Journal of Management*, October 2007.

³ Sean Morris, Mark Porell, and Susmita Murthy, "Effective leadership starts with the leader," Deloitte, 2019.

⁴ Erica Volini, et. Al., "Beyond reskilling: Investing in resilience for uncertain futures," 2020 Global Human Capital Trends, Deloitte, May 2020

⁵ Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall, "Reinventing Performance Management," *Harvard Business Review*, April 2015.

⁶ Daphne Pillay, "Positive affect and mindfulness as predictors of resilience amongst women leaders in higher education institutions," *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, May 2020.

⁷ Anne Phelps, "CARES Act offers \$100B in relief to hospitals/health systems...what comes next?" Deloitte, April 2020.

Wrap-Up

Embodying resilience within an organization is fundamentally about setting the tone at the top. It starts with aligning leaders around their unique strengths and cultivating traits of courage and resilience to set the right tone for high-performance. The energy and style from leadership cascades down throughout the organization to make resiliency a part of everyday work life—enabling people at every level of the organization to stay focused on mission critical tasks and emerge winning on the other side.

Patrick Nealon

Patrick is a managing director in Deloitte Consulting's Human Capital Practice and has more than 28 years of national government and industry experience helping leaders, teams and organizations improve performance. Currently, Mr. Nealon is working with US national government agencies to improve executive team performance, employee and organizational performance, leadership capability and capacity, employee engagement, and organizational accountability. In addition to his client serving roles, Mr. Nealon is Deloitte Consulting's Cross-consulting Competency Area Leader supporting the growth and development of more than 50,000 practitioners. He was the Chief Talent Officer for Deloitte Consulting's US federal government practice from 2015–2018, the Dean of Deloitte Consulting's APEX Leader Development Academy from 2012–2018, and the executive sponsor for Deloitte Consulting's reinvention of employee performance management from 2016–2018.



This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

About Deloitte

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee (“DTTL”), its network of member firms, and their related entities. DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL (also referred to as “Deloitte Global”) does not provide services to clients. In the United States, Deloitte refers to one or more of the US member firms of DTTL, their related entities that operate using the “Deloitte” name in the United States and their respective affiliates. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting. Please see www.deloitte.com/about to learn more about our global network of member firms.