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Organizational Resilience

Expert Q&A with Anne Hayes, Director of Sectors at BSI Group:
Resilience isn't about staying the same throughout times of crisis,
it's about being able to evolve in order to thrive.

Anne Hayes,
Director of Sectors at BSI Group.

Anne Hayes is Director of Sectors at BSI Group, overseeing the core sectors where standards and standardization can make a significant impact. Anne previously headed the team managing BSI's governance work and worked with the cabinet office on developing the organizational resilience standard.

Anne talks about the challenges and rewards of striving towards better organizational resilience.

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What is a resilient organization?

In my view a resilient organization is somewhere where the organization's future ambition is supported and fed by the experience that they have accumulated. It is an organization that has a very clear purpose, has a very clear idea of how to achieve that purpose, and is able to translate those ideas based on what it's learnt in the past.

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What different things does resilience mean for employees, customers, and leadership?

The key for leadership is that there needs to be clarity on the direction of the organization, and the implications of what could happen to the business in the future are considered when defining its purpose, goals and objectives. For customers it's about the belief that the organization can deliver what they want them to deliver and that they feel part of that organization's journey. And for employees it's about security, motivation, pride and managing reputation; all of those things that sit at the heart of what an organization does.

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Given the importance of learning from experience, is it easier for a mature organization to develop resilience, or do younger organizations have an advantage in terms of agility?

It's about flexibility and adaptability; embracing challenge and change as it comes up and being able to draw on any of your experience in order to cope with that change. Obviously, at the moment the major example is the pandemic; there was a need for different products and services to be out on the market really quickly. People who were originally making automobiles were suddenly part of the supply chain for ventilators. What they learned is that they are more resilient than they thought, they were able to pivot and do something very different, building on what they had in their supply chain and processes. Whether you're a very new start-up, having to respond to things constantly being fired at you, or you're a mature organization, it's about accepting that you can change and that you can grow within that change. Resilience isn't about staying the same, resilience is about being consistent in your purpose but being flexible in how you achieve that purpose.

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How can standards help organizations survive political instability and technological disruption?

I don't think people always appreciate the knowledge that's encapsulated within a standard and how that's generated. It is the best form of consultancy that you could get in that it represents the collective wisdom of numerous people and a distillation of their experience. From that perspective, standards are a solid, peer-reviewed foundation for anybody to move forward. But standards don't restrict you in what you have to do, they enable you to identify what your outcomes need to be, and however you get there is acceptable as long as you can meet the criteria of the standard. Standards provide a framework to enable people to meet the challenges that they face.

What the standards that are out there do is they really challenge people to consider things that they wouldn't otherwise think about. Thinking further than your finances, thinking about your people, your training, viewing your customers as being part of your organizational infrastructure, because without them you are nothing. Standards can be enablers to achieve change, but they also enable you to think in a different way as a leader of an organization.

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What are the positive effects of that focus on the importance of people?

When people feel positive about where they work, who they do business with - your customers and your supply chain - you will have a more successful organization. When you have a people-centric organization rather than a process-centric organization you will find that people are not scared of taking a decision that might alter the way the business is going, so when you identify a risk, you see it not necessarily as something negative but as an opportunity to do something different. Also, being people-centric encourages customer and staff loyalty as well as aiding reputation risk-management. If you really focus on your people and - internal and external - you have a far more positive way of protecting your reputation.

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What does a holistic awareness of resilience look like?

This is an interesting one, if you went into an organization that was deemed to be resilient, would everybody that was employed there have a wholesale understanding of resilience? If your senior leadership and middle management layer are really thinking with a resilience mindset you will really embed that wholesale approach to resilience even if not everybody is aware of it. Whereas if you're a people centric organization, everybody will be aware of organizational resilience.

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Is people-centricity a prerequisite for resilience?

People centricity and resilience are incredibly complementary if you have both you are very strong. Resilience isn't somewhere you'll ever truly get to; you are on a journey that involves constant change. People-centricity is something you can achieve on that pathway and I think that it is very hard to build resilience without developing people centricity.

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Can you give an example of how standards have helped organizations survive the challenges of the past year by improving their resilience?

A good example is the standard that we developed on safe working (ISO/PAS 45005:2020, Occupational health and safety management — General guidelines for safe working during the COVID-19 pandemic.) It was developed very quickly as a result of the government guidance about getting people back to work in a safe environment, which is hugely challenging because nobody had ever done anything like this before. While some businesses let everybody work from home, others needed people to come back to work. It was very unsettling because you might look at your organization as an employee and second-guess your employer's expectations. So, what that standard did was support government advice as well as going further by giving very clear guidance on reassurance to your stakeholders, customers and supply chain; as well as very clear guidance on the importance of engagement with your employees, really trying to make the whole process very people centric. The standard also accepts that businesses need to do things in order to continue to be successful. It went through several iterations, but it does enable all those things to happen.

BS65000 Guidance on organizational resilience:
Describes what resilience means for organizations and explains how organizations can build and enhance their resilience. The standard highlights the key components of resilience, explains how resilience can be measured and gives guidance on good practice.

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How can BS65000 help organizations looking towards post COVID-19 recovery?

BS65000 asks questions of organizations that they wouldn't normally necessarily ask themselves. It doesn't just consider the bottom line; it really challenges organizations about how resilient they are. If you really question yourself on each point in the standard you can make some very clear decisions about changes you might want to make. But it is up to organizations themselves to take responsibility for how much they're going to challenge themselves. I don't think there are many other standards, products or models that rival it.

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What lasting changes in the way organizations operate that you foresee resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic?

You will never avoid things happening, part of BS65000 and the whole concept of resilience is that when things happen, you're able to deal with it. That's what a truly resilient organization will do. It is absolutely about accepting that your organization will face challenges and considering how to ensure your people are OK, ensure your customers and your suppliers are OK and ensure that you can flex to deal with it.

2020 forced many organizations to take part in a mass experiment with remote working. What lessons do you think have been learned from this experience, how can leadership make sure that remote working is sustainable?

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For the sake of argument, let's assume that we embrace new working practices. From a completely operational point of view, it's about having the right tech with the right people so that everything works smoothly, while ensuring that your people are supported with training and whatever they need to make them feel comfortable. However, I think a truly resilient organization will go further and consider the benefits of remote working against the benefits of having everyone come together and ask how to get the best for both parties. That does require compromise, and I think a truly resilient organization is able to sometimes say that something isn't going to work for them. The answer will be different for every organization, but if they do it in consultation with their people, suppliers and customers they will end up in a better place.

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Considering lessons learned from the past 12 months, how do standards need to evolve to reflect new working practices?

We won't necessarily be so focused on process; we'll be more focused on principle-based approaches to the challenges that are faced. Standards have a real opportunity to support organizations and people. Standards need to prove their own resilience by taking on board the needs of the people involved; staff within standards bodies and the end users.

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How do you expect the way that standards are developed to adapt to the changing world?

It will change dramatically over the next few years. I think that's going to be driven both by technology and by social expectation. Is it right that you have lots of people flying around the world to develop international standards given the climate change situation? How much consideration should be given to the positives of people getting together to really collaborate? How do you ensure those that feel isolated in an online environment can be part of a community? I think there's a real mix, but inevitably how standards are developed and how they're consumed will change. Standards have a huge part to play in enabling solutions to the challenges that we face globally, and they are very well positioned to do that.

Key Organizational Resilience standards

Governance:

BS ISO 37000 Guidance for the Governance of Organizations.

BS ISO 37001:2016 Anti-bribery management systems. Requirements with guidance for use.

BS 25777:2008 Information and communications technology continuity management. Code of practice.

BS ISO 37301:2021 Compliance management systems. Requirements with guidance for use.

BS ISO 37002 Whistleblowing management systems. Guidelines.

BS 13500:2013 Code of practice for delivering effective governance of organizations.

Environmental management:

BS EN ISO 14001:2015 Environmental management systems. Requirements with guidance for use.

BS EN ISO 26000:2020 Guidance on social responsibility.

Risk management:

BS ISO 31000:2018 Risk management. Guidelines.

BS 31100:2011 Risk management. Code of practice and guidance for the implementation of BS ISO 31000.

Occupational Health and Safety:

BS ISO 45001:2018 Occupational health and safety management systems. Requirements with guidance for use.

BS ISO 45003:2021 Occupational health and safety management. Psychological health and safety at work. Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks.

Business continuity management:

BS EN ISO 22301:2019 Security and resilience. Business continuity management systems. Requirements.

BS EN ISO 22313:2020 Security and resilience. Business continuity management systems. Guidance on the use of ISO 22301.

Crisis management:

ISO/CD 22361 Security and resilience. Crisis Management. Guidelines for developing a strategic capability.

Security management:

BS 16000:2015 Security management. Strategic and operational guidelines.

Information security:

BS EN ISO/IEC 27000:2020 Information technology. Security techniques. Information security management systems. Overview and vocabulary.

Supply chain management:

BS ISO 28000:2007 Specification for security management systems for the supply chain.

Resilience:

BS 65000:2014 Guidance on organizational resilience.

How can I access standards?

bsi.bsol

British Standards Online (BSOL) – Our standards management system

BSOL is a simple online tool that acts as your standards management system. You can view and download standards with multiple user access, across all your sites, facilitating the easy distribution of knowledge throughout your business.

BSOL contains British Standards and international and European standards that have been adopted as British Standards. It also includes ISO, IEC and ASTM standards that haven't been adopted as British Standards as well as PAS.

You can subscribe to our pre-built modules or build a personalized standards collection, tailored to your organizational needs. Reduce risk within your organization and instil trust with your clients – to learn more about BSOL.

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