

Association of Performing Arts Presenters

APAP On the Road: *Arts Presenting and the New Realities* Seminar
Spring 2010

RESILIENCE THINKING

Resilience thinking is a way of looking at the world. It's about seeing systems, linkages, thresholds and cycles in the things that are important to us and in the things that drive them. It's about understanding and embracing change as opposed to striving for constancy.

- *Resilience Thinking* by Brian Walker and David Salt

When we think about resilience, we tend to think in terms of the ability to bounce back – to come back to the previous mode of operation after a setback of one type or another. While that is one way of thinking about resilience, the one that is more vital for us as arts organizations is to think in terms of **creating an organizational structure and way of working that is able, by its very nature, to absorb shock, recalibrate and continue existing and moving, without substantially changing the underlying purpose of the organization.** So our first shift in thinking is to **understand our organizations as dynamic and flexible entities that work organically to sustain themselves in a constantly changing world** rather than fixed institutions with immutable business models.

The second point of resilience thinking is to recognize that **as arts organizations, we live and operate in social and cultural systems that are inextricably linked with the ecosystems within which they are embedded: social, cultural, political, economic.** As the recent events have shown, we are inextricably linked to this “real world”, and we not only cannot ignore these linkages we need to recognize and adapt to them.

Third is to acknowledge that **the arts ecosystem, as well as the larger systems in which we are embedded, are themselves complex and adaptive systems, just as our organization needs to be.** They do not change in a predictable, linear, incremental fashion. Resilience thinking is about embracing this unpredictability rather than denying or constraining it.

Fourth, **there is no stasis or constancy to aspire to**. Strength comes through chaos and diversity; stability rests in our ability to embrace instability as a way of life. We need to favor a more creative, more chaotic, less smoothly functioning organization which can absorb blows without damaging the core of the organization.

The last component of resilience thinking is **the role of innovation in creating a sustainable organization**. Along with innovation comes the need for bold thinking – not just the crazy new ideas we might generate but the systems and procedures to bring those ideas to fruition – to make innovation happen and happen continuously in order to become an adaptive arts organization, one that responds to the times and presages for the rest of the culture, what is to come.

Resilience comes from our ability to apply these principles to the work of our organizations.

- Ken Foster, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (adapted from *Thriving in an Uncertain World: Arts Presenting Change and the New Realities*, commissioned by Association of Performing Arts Presenters, 2009)