

## **Organisational resilience during and beyond the coronavirus (COVID-19) era**

As COVID-19 pushes most Caribbean businesses to scale down their operations and scale up the use of videoconferencing and other technologies, the short-term consequences of physical distancing and quarantining become apparent. What is less clear however, is whether many of these businesses are sufficiently resilient in order to survive COVID-19 and possibly thrive thereafter. To our knowledge, organisational resilience has so far been missing from, or barely considered as part of, media discourse about the implications of COVID-19 and other turbulences. Consequently, we thought it necessary to extend the conversation by introducing the notion of organisational resilience and briefly consider it from a Caribbean perspective.

According to the British Standards Institution, organisational resilience is defined as “the ability of an organisation to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper”. Based on this definition, organisational resilience extends beyond business continuity planning and risk management. It takes a more comprehensive view and considers how organisations not only endure, but also prosper in ordinary and extraordinary times. A focus on organisational resilience is therefore central to the strategic wellness and success of Caribbean businesses operating in this dynamic, knowledge-driven and interlinked world.

### **Organisational resilience through capability building and deployment**

Organisational resilience encompasses, for example, financial, legal, relational, social, cultural, physical and technological factors, the multifaceted nature of which influenced our integrative view and focus on organisational capability. To be clear, by organisational capability we mean the ability or capacity of a business – in this context – to withstand emergency of all kinds and use them as platforms to strengthen and expand its operations. From this perspective, capability building, and deployment are both reflective and progressive in nature, and straddles the foundation and operation of organisational resilience.

While each capability of a Caribbean business could become strategically important for its survival, not all capability reduces organisational susceptibility to threats and increase resilience. To pass the resilience test, a capability must permit business adaptability, acceptability, agility, sustainability and changeability. Organisational capability comprising factors such as stakeholder leadership, situation analysis, change management, innovation and creativity, recapitalisation, effective collaboration, knowledge acquisition/ transfer, breaking silos, strategy formulation and implementation and stress testing underpin organisational resilience. They enable and bolster resilience through purposive interactions with employees, suppliers, customers, citizens and governments.

### **Linking organisational resilience and country socio-economic development**

Organisational resilience and country socio-economic development are intertwined. The extent to which Caribbean businesses, individuum and en masse, can withstand the test of time and grow, is linked to local and regional private sector and socio-economic developments. For instance, there are indications that the more Caribbean businesses increased their resilience over time, the more they innovated, broadened their product and market horizon and created higher value jobs. This was/is the case of GraceKennedy & Co., and NCB Jamaica (foods and banking), and The Voice St. Lucia Newspaper and The Gleaner Company (media) who each

demonstrated substantial resilience by not only remaining in business for over 100 years, but also by excelling in creativity, agility and adaptability in their respective sectors.

Another aspect of the resilience and socio-economic development contributions of the above businesses relate to their stakeholder leadership, knowledge acquisition/ transfer, job creation and collaboration across the region. GraceKennedy & Co., for instance, has twined its resilience and capability sharing with its home country's socio-economic development. The conglomerate hosts an annual lecture in Jamaica exploring key issues that restrict or can enable national development and loaned certain top executives to the government service for designed periods of time. Senator Don Wehby is one such executive. He shared his expertise in finance and business between 2007 to 2009 and helped the Government of Jamaica reform its fiscal accounts and improve its interaction with the private sector. On the regional front, GraceKennedy & Co also collaborated with progressive businesses from St. Lucia, Barbados, and other Caribbean nations. This enabled the firm to create new jobs in Jamaica and across the region, expand its product mix and revenue stream, acquire and share its Caribbean-wide knowledge and ultimately enter larger extra-regional markets.

The acquisition, refinement and deployment of resilience-capability should become the norm and routine of Caribbean businesses. After all, the Thomas Cook case provides evidence that organisational resilience-linked capability is neither static nor permanent. Such capability is dynamic and evolve over time as the physical, political, economic, social, technological, environmental and regulatory environment changes. In sum, we suggest that the capability which enabled organisational resilience in yesteryear may have to be shelved, revamped or expanded, in order to enable resilience in this, the information age.

Organisational resilience can, and must, be built by Caribbean businesses because the future of our communities, economies, and nations depend on it. It is undeniable that events such as COVID-19 increases our vulnerability, and that the projected above average 2020 hurricane season may further exacerbate the situation. Thus, we hope that, as executives contemplate the strategies of their businesses during and after COVID-19, they will dedicate significant time and focus to organisational resilience. Similarly, we hope that our article not only raises stakeholder awareness of organisational resilience, but that it goes further to also stimulate strategic action in relation to business and country resilience testing and capability building. We have developed an organisational resilience diagnostic test to assess the resilience level of Caribbean businesses and stand ready to help them strengthen their existing resilience capabilities and build new ones.

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Joel Allen, PhD – Managing Director, Growth Perspectives Ltd.

Takeese Allen, LLB (Hons.) – Director, Growth Perspectives Ltd and Lecturer at UTech JA.

Leighton Ellis, PhD – Associate, Growth Perspectives Ltd and Lecturer at UWI.

Daniel Campbell, ME (Hons.) – Associate, Growth Perspectives Ltd.

Kemron DuFont, MDisMgt (Hons.) – Associate, Growth Perspectives Ltd.

Please contact us by email at [info@growthperspectives.co](mailto:info@growthperspectives.co) or by telephone at 876-927-2239