



A Strategy By Fischer
Whitepaper

Resilient5
Communications for the Modern Age

INTRODUCTION



Reflecting back to March of 2020 feels like a bad dream. It is unlikely that we will ever again experience such a severe and immediate disruption to our lives.

Our workplaces were not spared. In the span of just a few dozen hours, companies went from workforces centralized in meticulously designed office environments to employees working in their home closets, a situation exacerbated by the needs of children, spotty internet connections, the demand to be available at all times of the day—not to mention the dread whenever anyone in your home coughed.

It was a very difficult time.

The advice from every pundit was the same: companies needed to focus on their purpose. With all the other trappings stripped away, what did they exist to do and how could they do that under these circumstances?

The simple fact is that companies who had proactively invested in creating a cohesive culture that included all their stakeholders had an easier time than those who had let daily urgency rule their lives.

The latter companies found themselves scrambling to create the meaning and relevance that is the foundation you need when you are rebuilding from scratch.

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Employees at agile companies are also more than 2x as likely to say their business is doing better since COVID-19.

--Adapting in Times of Crisis,
TripActions

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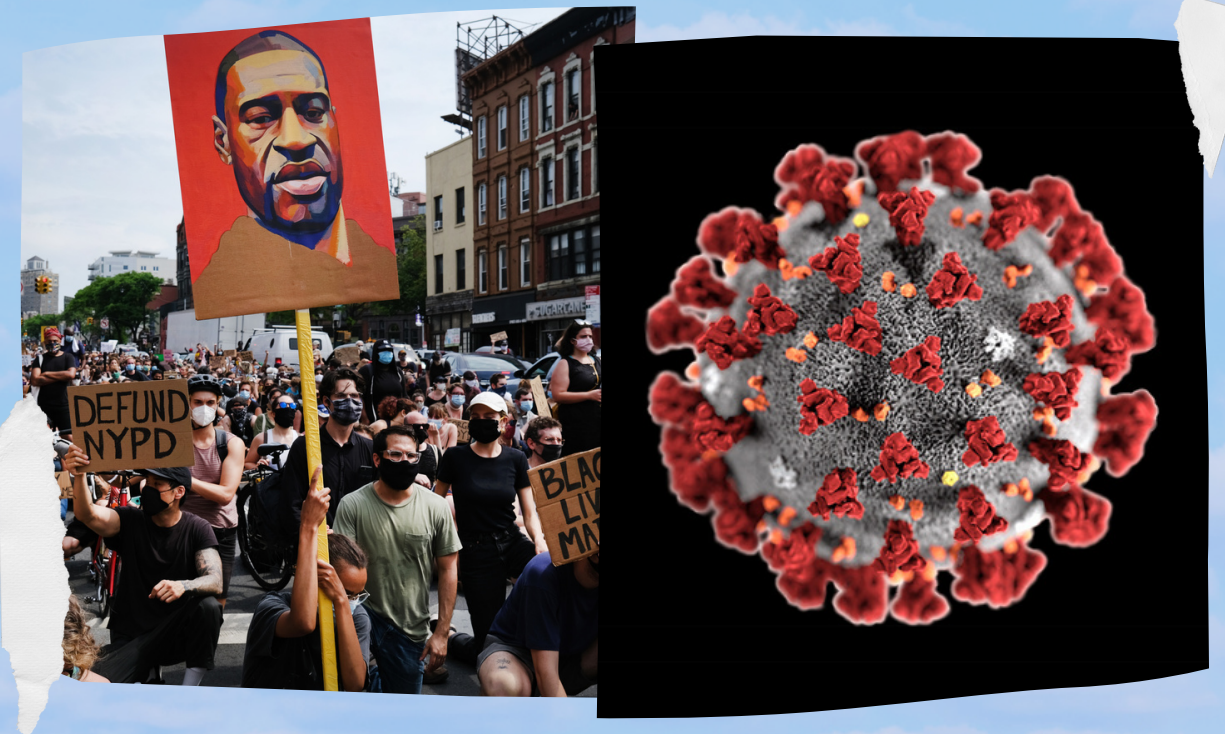
THE MYTH OF RISK ASSESSMENT

We've all been through the crisis planning. What's the first thing we do?

We assess what the risks are so that we can develop a plan for each one. This risk-first approach is not unique to communicators. The process is no different than the one used in any branch of risk assessment; the first step is always to identify what the risks are.

This approach works until something comes along that we didn't anticipate. Take airport security, for example. No one expected people would smuggle bombs in their shoes. Now we all take our shoes off before getting onto the plane. We never stop and admit that the next threat will likely be just as unknown.

To prove the point, how many 2020 crisis plans anticipated this:



THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF CRISIS PLAN



The Medieval Way

We built a tower, we put windows in where we could shoot back at the enemy, and we were prepared to sit and wait and fire back at an attacking enemy.

And this worked pretty well. Except, you couldn't leave the castle. Your crisis response had essentially made you a prisoner, waiting to be attacked.

Our broken model is based on facilitating a response to known threats--and the one thing 2020 taught us is that we cannot predict what disruptions might come our way.

In other words, that tower works...until the cannon is invented.



The Modern Way

Resilient5 represents a different way of thinking about possible catastrophes.

Rather than focus on responding to specific events, we should be like a skyscraper--designed to be resilient in the face of any threat.

People who design skyscrapers have a term for it: *architectural resilience*, which is designing the ability to withstand environmental stress into every facet of the building, from bottom to top and from materials to mechanicals

This is the approach for our uncertain times. We build an organization that is resilient by design, regardless of what threats the environment offers. And we're not hiding in a turret--we're out in the world, doing business.

RESILIENT DESIGN

Resilient design means you are prepared differently. The turret is designed for known threats. A building designed for resilience is ready for anything.

You can design your stakeholder program the same way, not for a specific threat, but with resilience as a strategic imperative, expressed in relevance, engagement and trust created through authentic and honest storytelling.

To make the point, think of the words and phrases many communication plans have contained over the years:

Inoculate
Fortify
Shore up
Secure

Guard
Armor
Arm ourselves
Defend

Now, let's look at how *The Think Big Blog* from Big Rentz describes a resilient skyscraper:

The first method involves placing dampers at each level of a building between a column and beam. Each damper consists of piston heads inside a cylinder filled with silicone oil. When an earthquake occurs, the building transfers the vibration energy into the pistons, pushing against the oil. The energy is transformed into heat, dissipating the force of the vibrations.

Note these words: the dampers are *agile* and *resilient*; they *absorb* the energy, *transfer* it elsewhere, and then *transform* it and *dissipate* it.

What if we were *agile* and *resilient*; when the crisis came, we would *absorb* the energy, *transfer* it elsewhere, and then *transform* it and *dissipate* it.

Read on....



TELL ME... WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH COMMUNICATIONS?

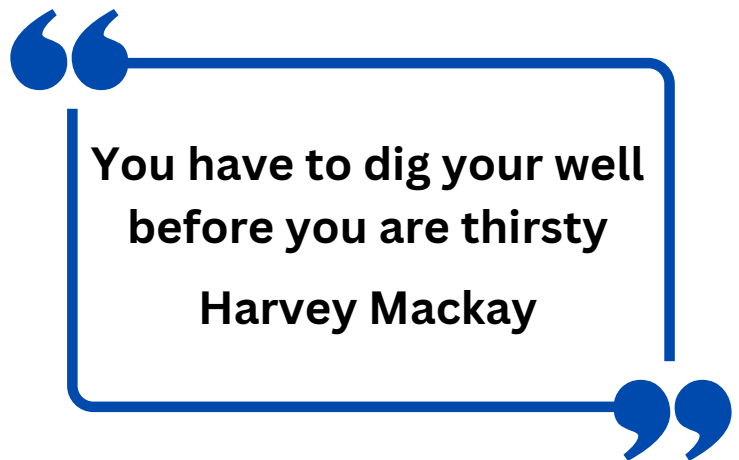
Hop around the web and you'll see many approaches to organizational resilience. The approaches have two things in common.

- They all rely on actions you take before the crisis hits.
- They are almost all relationship-driven--and therefore PR-driven.

When something bad happens—whether we are at fault or not—we need to have already made what Stephen Covey used to call “deposits in the bank account” upon which we can draw. People are willing to work with us because we have shown that we work with others. In times of uncertainty, they choose to trust us because we have earned that trust and we can't earn that trust during hard times.

If you can describe your relationship with our stakeholders with these five words, you are ready for anything.

1. Trust
2. Culture
3. Engagement
4. Relevance
5. Common understanding.



**You have to dig your well
before you are thirsty**

Harvey Mackay

That's the essence of Resilient5.

Resilient5 in Action



RESILIENT5 IS GOOD BUSINESS

The good news is that investing in your resilience by creating strong relationships with the stakeholders in your ecosystem is pro-growth even in good times.

Research across all communication disciplines reflects this.

Engaged employees make a company resilient. They also stay in their jobs, increase customer satisfaction and are your most credible talent recruiters. Increasingly, the public wants to spend money with companies who are good employers.

Prospective employees and customers check your social media and website and search your company on Google before you even know they are interested. So does the media, and what they can see shapes a story from the beginning.

Data also shows that media coverage impacts your employee engagement—with negative stories doing more harm than positive stories do good.

And around it goes. Creating and sustaining a strong narrative about your company helps your business achieve its objectives in good times and in bad.

All your stakeholders are inter-related—increasingly so in the digital world—and the rising tide lifts all boats, but a leaky one will sink the whole Navy.

CASE STUDY

A company in a small town uses a material associated with lung disease



Why it matters

The company is the second-largest employer in the county and the only company in the United States working with the material in question.

Driving the news

A six-part investigative series in a local newspaper, 70 follow-up stories, and coverage on ABC's 20/20. Employee families and community members are fearful for their health. Because it has been a defense contractor, the company had been closed to the larger community. Local officials, under pressure to do something, are supporting unsound and damaging policies.

What we did

We created a stakeholder communication program to restore the company's reputation. The stakeholder list was exhaustive, from regulators to the community to the families of our employees. A Community Advisory Panel was formed and a community newsletter was created. We built relationships with each stakeholder group, as envisioned in Resilinet5.

The bottom line

The company regained trust, as measured by surveys. Perhaps most importantly, a few years after the media coverage, a government agency proposed a badly misguided community surveillance program. This time, the community and its leadership fought back on the company's behalf.



THE SECRET SAUCE

#1

Your stakeholders influence each other, creating positive energy that is self-sustaining.

I'm not talking only about the largely mythical "over the fence" conversations we always carry on about. I'm talking about the employee talking up their company to a friend at church or to their high school friend who is a reporter. I'm talking about positive social content from a recent retiree that a potential employee sees or a news story that is shared and seen by current and prospective employees—and customers—to read. Or when a non-profit you partnered with tells the Mayor how important your company is.

When your company is relevant enough to be mentioned in the context of people's daily lives, that's a meaningful landmark on this journey.

When all of that comes together, then your company will begin to stand out.

#2

You've had bosses demanding you measure your PR efforts for years and didn't have much to offer them.


Resilient5 is the right approach for our times because measurement is more accessible than it ever was.

remember when we used to commission a survey to measure our effectiveness, and then wait eight weeks to get the results?

Contrast that with my favorite football team (BGSU Falcons) who sends me a survey the night of every home game and will have good data in 24 hours.

Our ability to use quick surveys and social listening, combined with exposure and click-through rates give us previously unknown ability to track how we are doing.

This includes overall campaigns, and individual pieces of content. It's a new day.



If you feel like today's world is more chaotic and unpredictable than it was before, that's because it is.

The answer isn't to be better at predicting the future.

The answer is to create resilience so you can respond to whatever you need to, whenever you need to.

Every part of every organization will have its own approach to resilience.

This is communication planning for our times—where stakeholder relations and crisis planning merge.

For more information, to sign up for our newsletter or to get in touch with Strategy by Fischer, go to Strategybyfischer.com/resilient5

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Communications for the Modern Age