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Organizational Thriving
Building Your Culture

Recently, I was invited to give a keynote to a university library's employees titled "What helps an organization thrive?" As I pondered the topic, I discovered I have been speaking and writing on the elements of thriving without calling it by that term.[1] Many library publications discuss best practices. The foundational culture for best practices to be accomplished is a thriving organization.

I used three resources to inform my thinking: Robert Glazer's 2023 book, *Elevate Your Team*,[2] Minal Bopaiah's 2021 work, *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives*,[3] and Paul Swanson's 2021 article titled "Building a Culture of Resilience in Libraries."[4] This essay summarizes the key points of each of these works.

Glazer's Framework

Glazer's framework for organizational thriving has five components: outcomes, communication, growth, reflection, and resilience. The first, outcomes, need to be clearly articulated for teams, helping them dedicate time toward those outcomes, and measuring people against those outcomes as key to creating a thriving organization. Secondly is communication for turning sharing into actionable insights, which strengthens relationships. The third key to a thriving organization is to grow people and bring them along. This is a mutually beneficial outcome that allows team members to lift each other and the organization up as they improve their knowledge and abilities. Building a culture where your employees are coached to improve and are given the tools and resources to make improvements creates an organization that will continually rise to meet the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.

The last two items in Glazer's framework are reflection and resilience, which focus on investing in your employees to help them gain clarity on who they are at their core and empower them to develop their own authentic leadership style. Emotional Intelligence helps to identify what we can control and what we cannot and provides pathways to consider our reactions. Glazer states, "Organizations with low emotional capacity are regularly flattened by failure and adversity because they focus on what they don't or can't control. Organizations with high emotional capacity focus on what they do control and respond to adversity with resilience, accountability, and innovation."[5] Swanson mentions this concept as two-way decision-making. To summarize, Glazer's framework for a thriving organization is one that focuses on outcomes, communication, invests in employee growth, gives time for reflection, and is resilient in knowing what is within the organization's control and what challenges can be withstood due to the thriving culture created within the organization.

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Two-Way Decision-Making

Swanson also focuses on resiliency, stating "a resilient organization can make the conscious decision to absorb the problem, make a change that can be rolled back when the time is right, or even make it permanent."[6] He calls this two-way decision-making. Its key components incorporate "flexibility is what you do, resilience is what you are," considering what impacts a decision might have that could cause you to roll it back, and that we need to incorporate both the how and the why into our change management process, not just express a need.[7] Swanson states,

> Absorb the change that has happened and will continue to happen. Don't be reactionary or fight for your own personal work needs. Be confident problem solvers and work together for the strength of your library and for the needs of your patrons. Instill reliance in the work that you do and the services that your library provides and it will help you to endure through whatever may come next.[8]

This resonates with Glazer's focus on creating a thriving organization that allows your group to be preparing for tomorrow, not just reacting to today.

Wisdom from Bopaiah

Creating an equitable organization is creating a thriving one where everyone has what they need to thrive and participate fully. The organization does not fault people for being different, but makes room for difference and then leverages it. Everyone has an equal chance to do work that fulfills them, live authentically, and contribute their strengths to the organization. Equitable solutions allow for different approaches based on different needs. Inclusion without equity creates organizations that talk about how to make people feel included without doing the systems redesign to achieve inclusion. Just as Glazer says a thriving organization is one where everyone is heard and valued, so does Bopaiah: "Equity recognizes our interdependence and uses our collective power to create an environment where we all thrive and contribute our strengths."[9]

Bopaiah's describes three concepts:

1. Value differences—where differences are valued so long as not dehumanizing or oppressive of others.
2. People with power see systems and how they influence opportunities for others.
3. People with power want to use power to create more opportunity for others so everyone can thrive with their differences intact.

Bopaiah discusses communication in terms of focusing on bright spots, using framing, and not forgetting the "how," which reverberates with Swanson's "how" and "why" in decision-making. Bopaiah asks, how does *X* achieve thriving? How does *X* limit thriving? Explain causal links between ways of thinking and results. Move to action via targeted messaging—explain systemic causes, not individual agency.

Using the same growth concept as Glazer, Bopaiah states, a framework for growth has individuals seeking to enhance their ability to address and negotiate differences. "People with more monocultural mindsets either deny differences among groups or engage in polarization—an orientation in which they are either overly critical of other cultures or their

own culture."[10] She also points out that phrases such as "we are more alike than different" silences groups that are different and forces conformity to dominant group characteristics. Encouraging an adaptation mindset **"**require[s] courage not to be threatened by differences. A mindset of acceptance embraces cultural and group differences and asks how those differences can contribute to the collective good. People with adaptation mindsets alter their behavior according to the cultural context and abandon the notion that there is only one right way to do something."[11] Those in an organization who value difference are no longer threatened by others who think differently or disagree with them. There is a kaleidoscope of perspectives, and grasping this concept helps an organization be equitable and thrive.

Conclusion

An organization that thrives sets outcomes for their teams, helps dedicate time and resources toward those outcomes, and measures people against those outcomes. It is one where people feel valued and their differences are appreciated as they contribute to the overall outcomes of the organization. It is an organization where risk taking and the opportunity to fail are not viewed as failures, but rather as learning and growing. Thriving organizations have outcomes that are created by everyone and all contribute to realize the outcomes. ✄

Notes

1. Stephanie Beverage, Kathleen DeLong, Irene M. H. Herold, and Kenley Neufeld, "Mindful Leadership Defined and Explained," *Management and Leadership Innovations* (July 2014): 21–35; Irene M. H. Herold, "The Mindful Library Leader," *Library Issues* 33, no. 6 (2013); Irene M. H. Herold, "Human Capital For Your Library," *Library Issues* 36, no. 2 (2015); Irene M. H. Herold, *Leading Together: Academic Library Consortia and Advocacy* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2021).

2. Rober Glazer, *Elevate Your Team: Push Beyond your Leadership Limits to Unlock Success in Yourself and Others* (Naperville, IL: Simple Truths, 2023).

3. Minal Bopaiah, *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2021).

4. Paul Swanson, "Building a Culture of Resilience in Libraries." *Information Technology and Libraries* 40, no. 3 (September 9, 2021), https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v40i3.13781.

5. Glazer, *Elevate Your Team*, 155.

6. Swanson, "Building a Culture of Resilience in Libraries," 1.

7. Swanson, "Building a Culture of Resilience in Libraries," 1–2.

8. Swanson, "Building a Culture of Resilience in Libraries," 3.

9. Bopaiah, *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives*, 9.

10. Bopaiah, *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives*, 51.

11. Bopaiah, *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives*, 51.