

FEBRUARY 2024

# Building Organizational Resilience with a High-Impact Leadership Team

---

Slayton Search Partners



Experienced executives who display traits like agility and accountability are best suited to help businesses navigate dynamic markets and rapid transformation.

The contemporary business landscape is marked by an extraordinary rate of change. As globalization and technological advancements continue to rapidly take shape around the globe, companies face an escalation of operational complexity and challenges that demand agility at every turn. Moving into the future, [Ericsson](#) reports the majority of enterprises expect disruptions—including natural disasters, cyberattacks, and supply chain issues—to grow more frequent and severe.

Amid heightening pressures, organizational resilience has emerged as a defining factor in business survival and success. According to [McKinsey](#), highly resilient companies generated 50% more shareholder returns than their peers when recovering from the COVID-19 recession. Financial preparedness and quick market adaptation were also attributed to top performers in similar crises of the past.

Adept leadership is key to weathering incoming storms. Skilled executives should not only be able to navigate turbulent waters effectively but also inspire confidence and stability across their teams, building organizational resilience that enables long-term business growth.

## Key Traits of Resilient Leaders

Executives of the past—who operated largely in a landscape with gradual market shifts—were often commended for their steadfast decisions as they moved toward unchanging business goals. However, the definition of “strong” leadership has transformed, prioritizing mental fortitude and flexibility over unwavering strategy.

Agility and adaptability have proven to be indispensable leadership traits fostering [business resilience](#) in recent years. As disruption becomes the norm, leaders who embrace change through innovation and timely decision-making have been best suited to steer businesses toward profitability while mitigating risks.

For example, Conagra Brands CEO Sean Connolly has consistently identified and responded to changes in consumer preferences over his tenure. When he first entered his position, he recognized growing demand for high-quality, natural foods and [led the charge](#) to acquire innovative brands that fit the bill. In recent years, the demand for convenience (and steady interest in nutrition) from millennials inspired Connolly and the Conagra team to reimagine

their frozen foods portfolio—introducing chickpea and falafel-based burgers, cauliflower crust pot pies, and balanced sheet pan meals. These initiatives contributed to [\\$1 billion](#) growth between 2017 and 2021.

Similarly, Liberty Mutual—under the leadership of SVP and Property Product Manager Michael Robon—quickly responded to the rising popularity of smart devices by [developing an insurance product](#) with Nest. Customers with Nest Protect smoke and carbon monoxide alarms could save money on their home insurance, enabling Liberty Mutual to enhance its value in an increasingly competitive sector.

Accountable leaders will also be crucial for building organizational resilience. Transparency and ownership inspire trust from both employees and customers—especially in times of crisis, when scrutiny is high. These traits will become paramount to retention as technological advancements increase the accessibility of data and ethics becomes a [key priority](#) for younger generations.

A careful evaluation of each of these characteristics is critical when recruiting executives and optimizing leadership teams.

## Assessing Resilience in Executive Candidates

Experience—to an extent—proves essential to success in times of uncertainty. A [recent study](#) found 26% of highly resilient executives:

- Led global businesses with over 500 employees
- Had 11-20 years of experience in their current role
- Worked more closely with the IT and data analytics or technology and data security departments than the finance department

Effective leaders don't have to perfectly align with this profile—but it is possible to have *too much* experience in a leadership position. Lower resiliency ratings were often attributed to executives with over 20 years of experience in their current role, who may be embedded in tradition and resistant to organizational change. Greener executives could prove more agile than highly seasoned professionals.

Regardless of the length of experience, the traits of resilient leaders will translate into their track record and skills. In addition to asking behavioral questions, businesses must evaluate executive candidates based on their real-life examples of swift adaptation. As technology and consumer preferences evolve, the proven ability of leaders to make data-driven and ethical decisions—while still displaying innovative thinking—may be particularly indicative of potential

for success.

The growing pace and severity of disruptions also demands a leadership team that can tackle concurrent challenges. Executives should have significant experience simultaneously tackling internal setbacks, such as [workforce turnover](#), and external trends like inflation and rising regulations. At the same time, leaders must be forward-thinking, operating with a strategic mindset rather than in [crisis management](#) mode.

Businesses should be equally proactive in their search for resilient executives, developing strategies to attract and engage top talent before new crises emerge.

## **Building a Resilient Leadership Pipeline**

Resilient executives thrive in organizations that encourage growth and innovation. To attract agile, forward-thinking leaders, companies must display their own willingness to invest in change. Businesses can set the stage for resilient leadership by leveraging emerging technologies, developing a culture of experimentation, and providing substantial professional development opportunities to executives and their teams.

[Diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) (DEI) initiatives, such as employee resource groups and mentorship for underrepresented groups, can further support resilience in the C-suite. These initiatives not only widen talent pools—attracting top-performing leaders as DEI becomes a growing priority—but also equip existing leaders with the diverse perspectives and skillsets needed to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, especially as globalization progresses.

[Executive search firms](#) can also play a valuable role in the development of a resilient leadership pipeline. By unlocking access to agile leaders, including passive candidates with niche or high-demand skillsets, these firms streamline the process of recruiting top talent. Additionally, executive recruiters leverage their hiring expertise to effectively evaluate leaders' ability to manage risks and seize opportunities in turbulent times.

How will your organization strengthen its leadership and build a culture of resilience?