

Managing Political Uncertainty

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Bratislava
September 2026

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Political change create stress

- **Uncertainty is always there. What is new is how we perceive it: too many issues which are unknown today. AI, climate, autocratization,**
- **We have no experience with these changes. We feel out of control. We feel being helpless.**



Political change creates stress because it disrupts predictability

- People cope better with difficult circumstances when **they can anticipate** what will happen.
- **Political transitions and elections temporarily weaken that predictability:** rules, leadership, access, funding priorities, and institutional relationships may all change at once.
- **Uncertainty increases cognitive and emotional load** because individuals must continuously reassess threats and possible futures.
- **Anticipatory stress before an election** and **stress generated by political news** were associated with poorer mental-health outcomes, suggesting that the **uncertainty surrounding an election can matter as much as the result itself.**

Political turmoil increases uncertainty for civil society

Prolonged uncertainty changes the way people think

- **Threat-rigidity theory:**
  - **Under conditions of perceived threat**, people and organisations tend to **narrow their attention**. →
  - More focus on immediate risks → reliance on familiar routines →centralizaion of decision-making → short-term survival.
  - **Routine** may provide **short-term security**, but they can become **dysfunctional** because circumstances **require experimentation and adaptation**.
- **The paradox of uncertainty**: when organisations need creativity and flexibility most, pressure can make them more rigid.

Uncertainty changes beaviour

Uncertainty does not determine behaviour.

- The same uncertain political environment can generate very different reactions:
- **withdrawal — caution — conformity — conflict — mobilisation — experimentation — solidarity**.
- **Behavioural outcome depends** on
  - **how people interpret the situation**,
  - **whether they believe they have agency**,
  - **whether they trust their colleagues** and leadership,
  - **whether resources and supportive networks are available**.
- → Some organisations become rigid, while others innovate and reorganise.
- **Individual perceptions of control** can shape whether uncertainty produces defensive behaviour or greater mobilisation of social networks.

Civil society faces a particular form of political uncertainty

- For **CSOs political turbulence** is not simply an external event. It may affect the conditions of organisational **existence**.
- **Types of uncertainty:**
  - **Institutional uncertainty** — Will laws, regulations or access to decision-makers change?
  - **Resource uncertainty** — Will funding, donors or partnerships remain available?
  - **Legitimacy uncertainty** — Will the organisation continue to be recognised as a legitimate social actor?
  - **Strategic uncertainty** — Should the organisation continue its existing strategy or fundamentally reposition itself?
- **The combination** of institutional, resource, legitimacy and organisational pressures creates different responses: **contract** - **replace resources** + **largely unchanged**, or **fundamentally reframe their work and audiences**.
- **Uncertainty becomes a question of identity**.

Reconsidering sense: *Who are we? What can we safely do? Who are our allies? What remains possible?*

Organisational resilience

- **Resilience** is the **capacity to preserve core purpose** while **adapting structures, strategies and practices to changing circumstances.**
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- **Resilience is a process involving anticipation**, **coping and adaptation**, not a fixed organisational characteristic.

- **Civil-society**: **maintaining core identity and functions** while accepting that the organisation itself **may have to change substantially**.
- **Core distinct question:**
  - **Robustness**: “Can we continue doing what we have always done?”
  - **Resilience**: “Can we remain effective when doing what we have always done is no longer possible?”

Personal and organisational resilience are connected

- **Organisations do not become resilient simply by employing "resilient individuals."**
- **If staff are exhausted, uncertain or afraid** to express disagreement, telling them to become more resilient can **increase individual responses**. It becomes an organisational problem.
- At the same time: **organisations depend on individuals' capacity** to tolerate ambiguity, preserve judgement and **maintain a sense of agency**.
- **People who retain agency, reflection and emotional regulation** make better decisions under pressure and **support organizational adaptation**.
- **Organisational resilience protects personal resilience.**
- **Clear purpose, trust, psychological safety, distributed responsibility and supportive networks prevent uncertainty from becoming chronic individual stress.**

Group exercise

Resilience bubbles



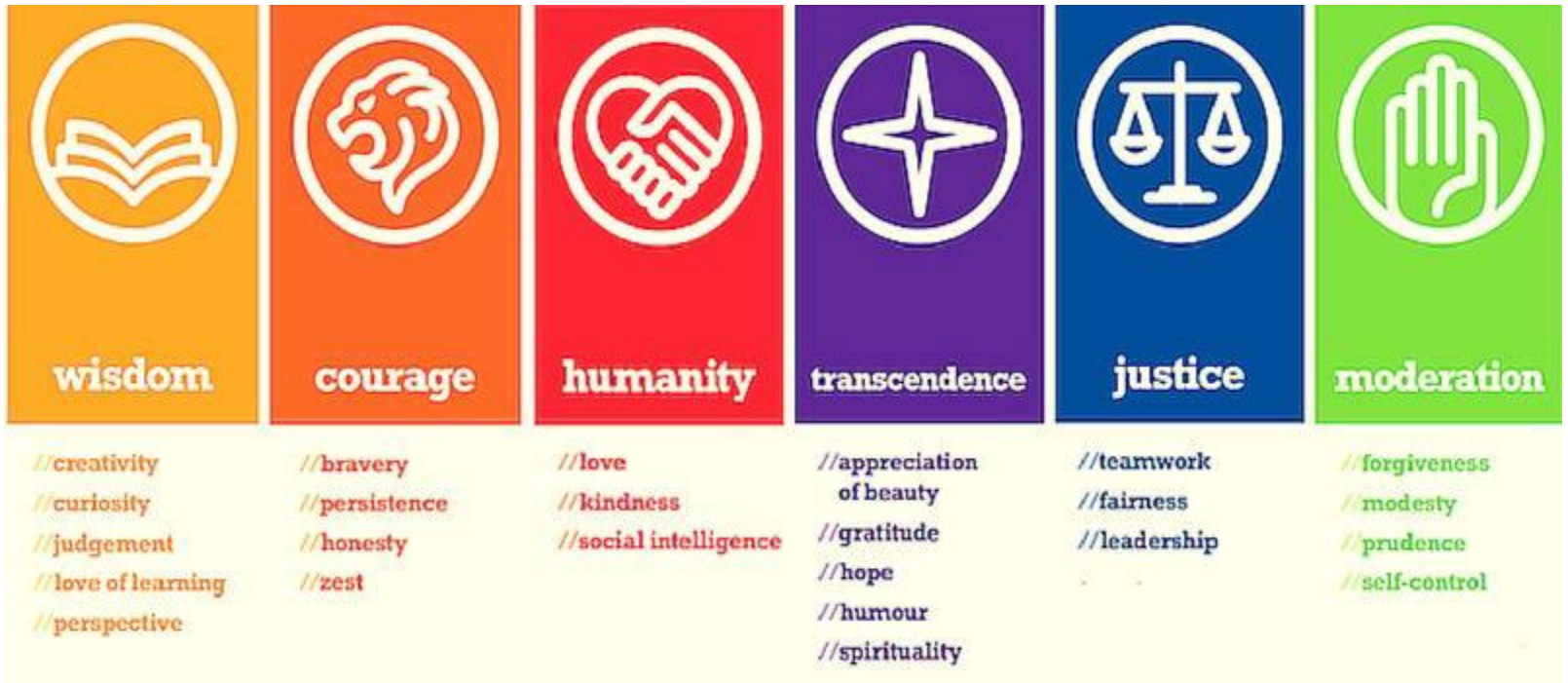
The potential for development

Resilient behavior, or resilience, is based on ***psychological flexibility skills***.

Resilience is ***a way of functioning***: when we are able **to observe and interpret** ***what is going on inside us***, and we are able ***to decide and act*** in accordance with or contrary to these experiences, based ***on our chosen values***.

Use your skills and strengths

When we encounter difficulties, we easily lose hope and optimism. It is precisely at times like these that we need to be aware of our own strengths.



1. Nurture a positive self-image

What is the mood in your head? Do you constantly focus on problems and troubles, your weaknesses? Or are you able to see your strengths?

Do you take time to care for your soul and body? Do you nurture your positive self-image?

Here are some simple ways to nurture your self-confidence:

- Reinforce positive experiences every day
- Acknowledge your feelings and emotions
- Meditate, write in a journal, and/or pray
- Exercise regularly
- Do activities that bring you joy

2. Take steps towards your goals

- ***Set ambitious goals for yourself!***
- ***Break down your goals*** into smaller steps. Create simple processes that promote a sense of positive progress, making it more likely that you will achieve your goals. (Such as a simple to-do list!)
- How does this work? When you believe you can achieve your goals and ***see yourself making progress***, you are more likely to achieve them.
- ***Start each morning with a simple question:***
- What are three things I can do today to get closer to my goals? They can be simple things (such as emptying my email inbox, writing in my journal for 15 minutes, or making a doctor's appointment), and even the simplest actions will help you build your confidence.

3. Accept that change is part of life and be willing to innovate

When you accept that ***you cannot change certain circumstances***, it helps you focus on what you can change, renew, and improve.

The difficulty lies in finding the line between the two, the difference.

4. Build relationships

According to the Harvard Education Panel, every child who has had ***at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult*** wound up dealing with trauma better.

It is worth surrounding ourselves with people who ***encourage***, ***support***, care for, and appreciate us. All of this strengthens our ability to persevere.

How many friends do you have? Do you devote enough time to nurturing your relationships?

At certain stages of life (children + work), it becomes difficult to maintain relationships, but it is important!

5. Zooming out

In stressful moments, it can be helpful to look at our own situation in a broader context and recognize its true significance, or lack thereof.

6. Challenge perspective instead of victim mentality

- ***Victim mentality***

According to the challenge-hindrance stressor framework researched by Cavenaugh et al. (2000), people who view problems with curiosity are more likely to solve the issue and move forward, rather than be defeated by the issue itself. **Victim mentaility**: when confronted with a problem, many people view it as an attack on themselves, or as a roadblock that prevents them from a goal. Embodying this type of mindset sets people up for failure, which also means additional challenges may break a person rather than fuel them forward.

- ***Challenge perspective***

People with a challenge perspective view the problem as an ***opportunity for growth*** and as a chance to improve themselves. Unlike a hindrance perspective, a challenge perspective allows people to see their problem as something that has happened "for you" rather than to you.

In some cases, the challenges themselves—especially with hindsight—are actually what provided people with meaning and the passion to persevere. This victor mentality encourages growth, which creates a ***positive feedback cycle*** by boosting resilience.

(E.g., when criticized, we can try to understand what we did wrong, think about how we can improve, and perhaps ask for advice, etc.)

7. Act decisively

The key to ***perseverance*** is decisive action.

"Take as much action in unfavorable situations as you can. ***Act decisively***, instead of completely distancing yourself from problems and stress, wishing they would just disappear."

The result of Emmy Werner's thirty-two years of research:

- Several psychological factors predict perseverance the most relevant being decisive action.
- Resilient children tended to "meet the world on their own terms," they had an ***internal locus of control***: they believed they, and not their circumstances, affected their achievements.
- We cannot avoid difficulties, but we can ***control*** how we respond to them.

8. Focus on Progress, not Goals

When people report their progress publicly or even physically record it, they are more likely to continue towards their goals.

It is important to resist the urge to compare your goals with others.

Acknowledging your progress, no matter how small, sends dollops of dopamine to your brain, thus rewarding yourself for your actions. This reinforces further action so when setbacks arise, we are much more likely to move past them.

In a sense, your sense of resilience thrives on progress. So remind yourself of the strides you've made, what fuels you forward, and how you've embraced challenges along the way.

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