



Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World

Brian Walker, David Salt, Walter V. Reid (Foreword)

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Increasingly, cracks are appearing in the capacity of communities, ecosystems, and landscapes to provide the goods and services that sustain our planet's well-being. The response from most quarters has been for more of the same that created the situation in the first place: more control, more intensification, and greater efficiency. Resilience thinking offers a different way of understanding the world and a new approach to managing resources. It embraces human and natural systems as complex entities continually adapting through cycles of change and seeks to understand the qualities of a system that must be maintained or enhanced in order to achieve sustainability. It explains why greater efficiency by itself cannot solve resource problems and offers a constructive alternative that opens up options rather than closing them down. In Resilience Thinking, scientist Brian Walker and science writer David Salt present an accessible introduction to the emerging paradigm of resilience. The book arose out of appeals from colleagues in science and industry for a plainly written account of what resilience is all about and how a resilience approach differs from current practices. with five case studies of resilience thinking in the real world. It is an engaging and important work for anyone interested in managing risk in a complex world.

Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World Details

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From Reader Review Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World for online ebook

Tomek says

This book has aged remarkably well. It's just short of a decade after this book's publication and the field of resilience thinking has developed and gained wider acceptance (though still far from the governing paradigm in resource management and restoration). Nonetheless, Resilience Thinking still provides a thorough background in the subject and its background in complex systems theory. I contrast this book with Gunderson and Holling's Panarchy, which is more than 3 times as long. Despite it being shorter, I feel as though this book, by avoiding what I consider needless repetition, manages to cover more of the field in a concrete and practical manner without diluting the theory underpinning the applications. It is an enjoyable read written concisely but without glossing over important details. As a result, it can be enjoyed by expert and novice alike. I strongly recommend this for anyone who is studying resource management, conservation, or restoration. By no means is it definitive, as this is a broad topic that extends to social, economic, and ecological systems, but it certainly is helpful and a good foundation for moving forward.

Dick Cheuk says

This book focuses on resilience in macro level of systems (mainly social-ecosystems). A clear difference between social-ecological resilience and personal resilience has been discussed. Important concepts such as thresholds and Complex Adaptive System are clearly presented (I do hope the author can talk a bit more on Complex Adaptive System). Good cases studies to illustrate his arguments. A good book for anyone who is interested in Resilience thinking.

Steve says

This slim volume serves as a good introduction to several concepts of systems theory.

It covers the importance of:

- *looking at problems from a unified socio-ecological framework where people and environment are considered together,
- *being aware of key thresholds that if crossed put the system in a new regime or stable state that may be quite different than before,
- *considering where in the adaptive cycle of growth, conservation, release, and reorganization the system may be and what the implications of that are,
- *and the importance of looking at what's happening at different scales and how they interact.

Taken together, this way of thinking and planning can profoundly alter the way we seek to manage our human and natural resources. The authors provide plenty of case studies to demonstrate the principles discussed, which I think increases the book's effectiveness.

Betsey says

Very well written and accessible. Interesting and relevant to my project.

Michael Burnam-Fink says

Resilience Thinking is a slim book about sustainability and systems in ecology. Structured around five case studies, this volume is both a manifesto and a strong work of popular scholarship. Brian Walker clearly elucidates the failures of command-and-control ecosystem management based on optimizing one part of a system for efficiency. As the case studies in ecosystem management show, human prosperity is based around ecosystem services. Over decades and centuries, human intervention in these systems has disrupted natural cycles, the accumulated damage pushing these systems across a threshold where lakes become stinking stagnant ponds, coral reefs bleached deserts, and forests highly flammable pest traps.

The antidote to fragility and collapse is diversity of response, pluralistic management systems, and recognizing slow changes in key variables, like ground-water salinity. Systems with many species and redundancies perform better under pressure. Long term build up of phosphorus in water, or carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, cannot be easily reversed once a tipping point has been crossed.

There's an element of tragedy to this book. With over a decade since its publication, I can't bear to go and check on how the cases have performed. The logic of capitalism, of maximizing immediate profits and protecting voter interest groups, seems too strong to easily overcome. And as a card-carrying ecomodernist, I wonder how resilience fits in with a program of intensification and decoupling. Still, this is an important book and one that deserves careful attention.

Naomi says

Interesting concepts - some to be argued intensely in communities - this is a contribution to the conversations we need to have to create a sustainable world.

Christopher says

Wonderful concise book containing a really neat tool that I can permanently add to my tool belt as an Environmental Scientist. As an analytical perspective, the concept of resilience is great for describing and analyzing components that are socioecological, i.e., have a human and ecosystem component. The phases described occur in both spheres and are a stimulating way to frame many socioecological problems of the modern day.

I would say the book dwindle down to two overarching concepts: that of thresholds and that of adaptive cycles. Both can seem very theoretical and hard to apply to real life, but the book offers excellent case studies that are thoroughly explored using these models. Overall, the Resilience thinking is a wonderful analytical tool that I'd recommend to anyone in the Environmental field, either relating to the human component or the natural one. A complex adaptive system and thresholds are just as good at explaining

natural systems as they are economic systems! The book offers many morals that I agree with on the principles of my own personal ethic, but that's far from the only reason I'd recommend it.

Lastly, if anyone is out there wanting more, make sure to check out Resilience practice! It is an applied version of these theoretical frameworks and concepts that you can keep in your tool belt for the rest of your career.

Troy says

Nice, but broad scope with a few case studies to enhance the material. Good, quick read but not a must-read environmental book in my opinion.

Torsten says

Excellent concise introduction to resilience thinking.

Debra says

I read this book in an effort to consider how resilience thinking might be applicable to congregational development. The book, of course, is written with ecological/environmental concerns in mind. In other words, much translation is required. However, what is clear is that optimization approaches --- being more efficient at what we've always done or pouring more resources into a single program --- while aiding a congregation in the short run may prove to have an adverse impact on longer-term sustainability. Looking to the broader systems of which a local congregation is a part and building social capital across those systems will do much more to creating a resident church.

If you are willing to engage in the cross-disciplinary work of translation, I recommend this book. If not, you may want to seek out an author who has targeted his application of resilience thinking to church life or a more closely allied field.

Lan says

Excellent introduction to the subject, particularly for the non-academics or for anyone looking for an easy and enjoyable to read primer to the key concepts of resilience thinking. However, I would have liked to see more discussion on limitations, problems and future developments of the resilience framework.

Jay Kovach says

This book introduced some new concepts and expanded on some that I was unfamiliar with. The writing style wasn't as inviting as it could be, but this is a familiar issue when dealing with intellectuals and specialists. There is a great video that expands on this:

http://www.ted.com/talks/melissa_mars...

Anyway, I enjoyed the book and can see myself using it as a reference at a later date. I really liked that the writers ask for reader input at the end of the book and there is a "further reading" section. The case studies in it are also very interesting. So again, I recommend giving the book a shot.

Kenneth Ng says

Wonderful book on the importance of properly defining scale and scope before developing a solution. Applicable in team building, project management and political life.

Eleanor With Cats says

A good introduction to things I haven't read about before.

The authors write: "*Resilience Thinking* arose out of appeals from colleagues in science and industry for a plainly written account of what resilience is all about, and how a resilience approach to managing resources differs from current practices. 'Don't give me complicated theory, just give me five good case studies, then I'll know what you mean' was the explicit request from one industry colleague. So that's what we set out to do." (xiii)

This book definitely does that, I almost found myself wishing for some of that complexity. This was definitely a very interesting book though.

Veronica says

I thought this book was a wonderful introduction to systems thinking. Also, this book is not a difficult read. Terms are explained, and plenty of examples are given. So, even if you do not understand everything that follows, you CAN learn from this book.

Resilience thinking is characterized by a few key terms: diversity, thresholds, adaptive cycles, ecological variability, and modularity.

"Resilient social-ecological systems have the capacity to change as the world changes while still maintaining their functionality." (p. 12)

Resilience thinking remembers that we are of nature, and are not separate or outside of the system. Biodiversity, redundancy, ecological variability, and modularity of a natural system enhances the overall resilience of the system - it is less likely to fail when met with a disturbance.

What does this all mean? An oversimplified example: a fast moving waterway is able to push toxins, nitrogen, and phosphorus downstream from agricultural run-off. The waterway is the system in this case, and it is affected by the farmer (who is also part of the system). If the waterway is dammed for irrigation purposes, the resilience of the waterway is limited and eutrophication (phosphorous build-up leading to algae growth leading to less oxygen leading to less fish leading to less food for birds and other animals) can occur. It has crossed a "threshold" into a less desirable state when a new equilibrium is reached. The book goes on to describe "basins of attraction" and the equilibrium of a new "regime".

(It is easier for a system to cross a threshold into an undesirable state of being when diversity is decreased and ecological variability is limited.)

BUT THERE IS SO MUCH MORE.

I would recommend this book to 1.) anyone looking to keep the world we inhabit livable for future generations; 2.) anyone looking to live in balance with the natural world we are a part of; and 3.) anyone going into the sciences or land management.

Sarah Clement says

Really good basic overview, though I personally think this is more useful for the practitioner than the academic. It was an easy and enjoyable read, but from the perspective of someone looking to apply resilience thinking in a rigorous research programme, I think the book is of limited use. The resilience literature is still really light in the area of social systems, which is evident particularly in the approach presented for scenario planning. I understand that there are different schools of thought about how scenario planning exercises should be done, and I realise that Walker and Salt approach them as something that builds resilience in the community, without necessarily caring about the likelihood of the scenarios. However, I think ending up with something like a "Refugee Revolution" scenario for the Northern Highlands Lake District is limited in its usefulness, and I question the notion that scenario planning contributes very much to building resilience in social systems. I also would have liked a more thorough discussion of when resilience is negative - not just in ecological systems but in social systems. The latter in particular only received cursory attention. With all that said, this is a great introductory book, written in an approachable and engaging style, which is exactly what the authors intended.

Rebecca says

Good for anyone interested in social ecology and systems thinking

Rosie says

Systems Thinking and how that ties in with ecosystems- I enjoyed the use of case studies to explain the concepts. I could create an entire course around the content of this book.

Patrick says

Not an easy read for non-ecologists, but the best introduction on socio-ecological systems resilience that I can find.

Alison says

This is an interesting book with good examples, but I found it difficult to read because it is simplistic and redundant. In general it was poorly written; there were many paragraphs that could have disappeared without affecting the book's message.

Overall I would say good message, bad messenger.

Also: I now hate the word "resilience."
