

# WHITE PAPER: **THE RESILIENCE PROTOCOL**

by Jim Haviland

## **NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY WITH STRATEGIC PREPAREDNESS**

Five Steps to strategically prepare for uncertain  
times that are always closer than we think.

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<https://www.impactarchitects.io/the-resilience-protocol/>

# The Resilience Protocol: Navigating Uncertainty with Strategic Preparedness

In the dynamic landscape of modern business, the pursuit of growth, market expansion, profitability, and successful exits often dominates strategic planning. However, an undeniable truth persists: the future is inherently uncertain. Economic shifts, market disruptions, and unforeseen challenges can emerge at any moment, requiring a pivot from solely focusing on expansion to actively building organizational resilience. As the adage goes, "Plans are worthless, but planning is invaluable."



**The Resilience Protocol** is a strategic planning framework designed to equip leadership teams with the tools and processes needed to anticipate, prepare for, and navigate adverse circumstances. This protocol, typically delivered in a full-day facilitated session, comprises five simple components that empower businesses to not only survive but also to sustain progress even when the fog rolls in.

## The Five Pillars: Your Blueprint for Enduring Resilience

### 1. Scenario Planning: Mapping Future Possibilities

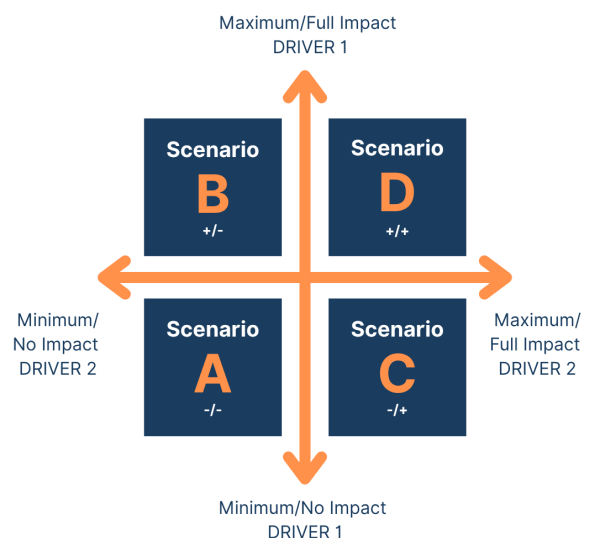
Traditional strategic planning often assumes a relatively stable future economic environment. The Resilience Protocol begins by challenging this assumption through Scenario Planning. This involves a structured exploration of potential future states, moving beyond simple SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to consider the impact of specific future states that might come to fruition in the near term.

A core tool for this is the quadrant methodology. Here, two key potential disruptive factors are identified (e.g., new tariffs impacting trading partners, price increases from foreign competitors, or availability of overseas components).

A 2x2 grid is then used to explore four distinct scenarios:

- Scenario A: Neither factor occurs (the baseline, business as usual).
- Scenario B: Only the first factor occurs.
- Scenario C: Only the second factor occurs.
- Scenario D: Both factors occur simultaneously.

For each scenario, the leadership team crafts a narrative describing what the business environment would look like one year and three years from now. This forces a re-evaluation of current strategic plans, leading to adjustments and the development of four new distinct contingency plans. This mental exercise is crucial for developing organizational agility and preparedness, even if the exact predicted scenario never materializes.



## 2. Revenue Risk Assessment: Protecting Your Profit Engine

Once potential future scenarios are outlined, the next step is to conduct a Revenue Risk Assessment. This involves a deep dive into the business's current sales and services, identifying the most valuable customers and products, and assessing their vulnerability to the disruptions identified in the scenario planning phase.

This assessment often reveals the "brittleness" of existing revenue streams. Businesses built on single government programs, niche markets, or undiversified client bases are particularly susceptible to sudden changes. The goal is to understand if the current business model is solely dependent on specific conditions remaining true.

Beyond identifying risks, this stage also prompts the search for "return on luck" moments (thank you, Jim Collins)—new opportunities that might emerge precisely because conditions are changing. Key outcomes include:

- **Customer Engagement:** Identifying critical customers to engage more closely, potentially sharing risk or discussing eventualities to maintain strong relationships.
- **Product Strategy:** Deciding whether to discontinue, re-price, or reconfigure products to align with new market realities and maintain profitability.

The emphasis here shifts from merely maintaining revenue to maintaining profit and cash flow, which are paramount during times of stress.

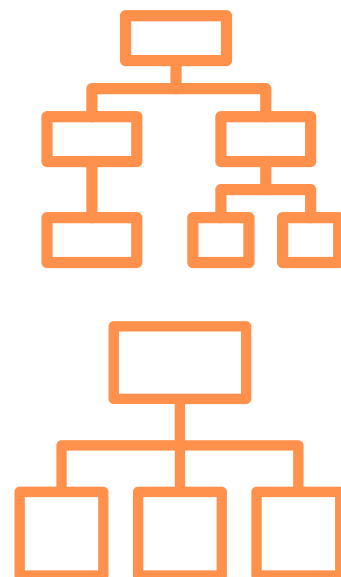
## 3. Workforce Planning: Aligning Talent with Future Needs

The workforce represents a significant cost and a critical asset. Workforce Planning within the Resilience Protocol involves scrutinizing the organizational structure (often through an accountability or responsibility chart) to understand who is truly in charge of what, and how roles and responsibilities might need to shift under different scenarios.

Rather than a generic "what if revenues are cut in half" exercise, the revenue risk assessment provides a more granular view. If certain customer segments or product lines become unprofitable or are lost in a new scenario, how would the workforce need to be adjusted? This involves:

- **Staffing for Scenarios:** Determining optimal staffing levels and skill sets for each of the four identified future scenarios.
- **Skill Coverage and Cross-Training:** Identifying gaps in skill coverage, opportunities for cross-training, and how departments might be re-divided to maintain essential functions.
- **Defining Protocols:** Establishing clear staffing plans for each of the four scenarios (e.g., "Protocol C") that dictate immediate workforce adjustments when a specific scenario is triggered. This allows for rapid, pre-planned responses rather than reactive, chaotic decisions.

This proactive approach ensures that the business can quickly adapt its human capital to changing demands while preserving core capabilities.



## 4. Process Documentation: Safeguarding Operational Knowledge

Business operations rely on well-defined processes. Process Documentation focuses on identifying and mitigating operational risks, particularly those related to intellectual property (IP) and undocumented workflows. This pillar addresses questions like:

- Where are we exposed due to a lack of documented procedures?
- Where are critical processes known only by a few individuals?
- Where do we lack cross-training to ensure continuity?

This pillar is about more than just risk mitigation; it's an opportunity for improvement. Bringing "new eyes" to existing processes through appreciative inquiry can uncover more efficient, cheaper, or faster ways of getting things done. While the underlying motivation might be resilience, the outward message can be framed as an initiative to enhance operational excellence and efficiency, yielding immediate benefits regardless of future disruptions.

## 5. Defining the "Death Line" Trigger: Knowing When to Act

The final, crucial element of the Resilience Protocol is establishing clear "Death Line" Triggers. Inspired by concepts like Jim Collins' "death line," this involves defining specific conditions or quantifiable metrics that, when met, signal the need to activate a pre-planned resilience scenario.

These triggers should be specific enough to prompt decisive action. Examples include:

- **Financial Metrics:** A sustained drop in the sales pipeline, a specific decline in revenue per employee (falling below a predefined "Goldilocks zone" where profitability is maintained without overworking staff), or a reduction in cash reserves.
- **Market Conditions:** Specific industry events, competitor actions, or broader economic indicators.

The purpose of these triggers is to eliminate ambiguity and emotional decision-making during crises. When a trigger is hit, the organization knows exactly which scenario plan (from step one) to activate and has a rough, pre-determined course of action (e.g., "we will make these kinds of cuts," "we will reduce staff to this many people").

## Implementing the Protocol: A Shift in Mindset

The Resilience Protocol is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing commitment to preparedness. During periods of high uncertainty, like the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the protocol advocates for a fundamental shift in planning horizons. Instead of rigid annual or quarterly plans, businesses can adopt monthly planning cycles. This allows leaders to focus on immediate actions to "thrive in this moment," ensuring the business continues to make progress and remains viable until the path ahead becomes clearer. This adaptive approach acknowledges that a clear view "all the way to the horizon" is often an illusion. When the "fog rolls in," and visibility is limited, the focus must shift to ensuring immediate survival and steady, albeit slower, progress towards long-term goals.

## Conclusion

The Resilience Protocol is a proactive, strategic investment in your business's future. By systematically addressing potential disruptions through scenario planning, revenue risk assessment, workforce optimization, process documentation, and the establishment of clear triggers, leadership teams can transform uncertainty from a paralyzing threat into a manageable challenge. Implementing this protocol ensures that your business possesses the agility, foresight, and underlying strength to navigate any storm, emerging not just intact, but stronger and more adaptable. It's about being ready, not just for growth, but for whatever the future may hold.





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Jim Haviland has spent decades unlocking the keys to healthy entrepreneurship. With experience owning or leading over a dozen entrepreneurial companies—both triumphs and hard-earned lessons—he is passionate about helping business owners build thriving companies while avoiding the pitfalls that often derail them.

Jim's diverse career spans engineering, media production, technology leadership, and business coaching, giving him a rare depth of insight. As an electrical engineer, he contributed to NASA satellites, digital media innovation, and medical education technologies, earning patents and peer-reviewed recognition. His work as a media producer has played a role in Grammy, Oscar, and Emmy-winning projects. As a global technology executive, he has presented in over 100 cities, working with some of the world's most recognizable brands to drive innovation and efficiency.

Now, as a business coach, Jim helps entrepreneurs and executives apply proven tools and disciplines to create more productive, humane, and resilient organizations. Whether you're looking to scale, streamline operations, or navigate the challenges of leadership, Jim provides the guidance and strategies to help you succeed with confidence.

Let's build a stronger business together.

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