

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN CAPITAL FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

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Purpose: The study draws attention to the determinants of the growing role of organizational resilience and human capital, which, thanks to its capabilities, skills and flexibility, is an important determinant supporting the resilience of the entities. Thus, the purpose of the study is to identify human capital and its characteristics as determinants of organizational resilience.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was based on critical analysis of literature and internet sources. The subject includes the issues related to organizational resilience and human capital, as a determinant of this resilience that increases the level of acceptance of changes, i.e., the level of adaptability.

Findings: The considerations presented in this study show that resilience is currently a desirable feature of every organization. It is also a feature of human capital and the appropriate use of individual resilience through human capital management can help create organizational resilience.

Practical implications: Theoretical considerations are supported by the results of global research in the field of human capital management. Consequently, it was confirmed that considering a human aspect when making decisions provides companies with better protection against rapid changes. Improving managers' awareness of this situation should help them prepare their companies for difficult operating conditions, and thus enable them to survive and continue to function effectively, despite crises and other threats.

Social implications: Recognizing the determinants of organizational resilience and highlighting the role of human capital in this sphere as well as raising awareness of the importance of effective human capital management may have multi-faceted beneficial socio-economic consequences.

Originality/value: This study shows a specific approach to human capital, which, through its capabilities and individual resilience, shapes the organizational resilience and determines the effective company management in the situation of rapid and unpredictable changes in the environment.

Keywords: resilience, organizational resilience, human capital, flexibility.

Category of the paper: Viewpoint, General review.

1. Introduction

The conditions of the modern economy as well as the transformations and changes observed in the environment mean that the functioning and development of modern enterprises are determined by the synergistic influence of many processes and factors that are responsible for shaping the attitude that will allow for resisting the negative impact of changes in the environment and enable effective operation even in very unfavorable conditions. Experts often refer to the fact that we live in an increasingly complex and changing world. Considering this, companies facing this new scenario need to be agile to adapt to this volatile scenario and not lag behind. This means that companies should work to improve their adaptability, which over time has started to be called organizational resilience.

In such circumstances, resilience is a commonly perceived need and a desirable feature or ability of modern enterprises. Adaptation to unfavorable conditions of functioning of both individuals and organizations is therefore of interest to researchers.

In the light of such considerations, the study presents the basic issues relevant in the context of organizational resilience and the role of human capital in its shaping.

The purpose of this study is to identify human capital and its characteristics as determinants of organizational resilience. Through the study, attention is drawn to the determinants of the growing role of people as factors supporting organizational resilience.

The study was created on the basis of a critical analysis of the literature and Internet sources due to the topicality of the discussed subject matter. The literature review was conducted in a theoretical context, as theoretical approaches interpreting the discussed issues were sought. Polish and English literature was selected based on the key word. The latest publications, i.e., those published in the last decade were chosen. Only in a few cases, slightly older publications related to the analyzed issues were used.

2. The essence of resilience

There is no consensus in the scientific circles on the use of the concept of resilience, as well as on its definition. The English word "resilience" has several equivalents in Polish. In the studies, such notions as resilience, elasticity, agility, flexibility or durability can be found.

The same applies to the definition of the concept of resilience, which is interdisciplinary (e.g., it is used in biological sciences, engineering as well as technical or social sciences) (Soliwoda, 2020).

According to the Dictionary of the Polish Language edited by M. Szymczak (1979), resilience refers to chemical, physical or biological properties. Doroszewski (1969) relates resilience to endurance. In the old definitions there is no reference to socio-economic issues, which is clearly demonstrated by the emergence of a new semantic context today. It is necessary to structure the concept of resilience, and for this purpose, the concept of resilience should be specified, and the following questions answered: "what resilience?", "what is the resilience about?" or "resilience to what?".

Resilience is a concept that has been increasingly used in the last two decades (National Audit Office, 2013; 2014) as the ability to respond to crises, either as return to the initial condition (passive resilience) or as the ability to anticipate and cope with unexpected events through developing new capabilities and creating new opportunities (active resilience).

On the basis of the literature review Martin Linnenluecke (2017) pointed out that resilience functions ambiguously within various fields. It takes on the meaning and definition depending on the area it refers to, and the similarities and differences in the concepts within the areas have not been clearly defined so far, which contributes to the lack of a common, explicit definition of resilience.

Organizational resilience is the basis for discussion in this paper. Resilience as such is a multidimensional phenomenon, occurring on many different levels. Organizational resilience is therefore one of the types of resilience that is typical of the entity that is the organization (Ingram, 2023).

The starting point for defining it may be the approach in Resilience Alliance (2019), according to which resilience is the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and reorganize. This definition is universal and therefore it can be adapted to an organization.

What exactly is organizational resilience?

According to ISO 22316, resilience is not a specific action or state, nor is there a measure of resilience as such. Organizational resilience is an organization's capability to react and adapt to changes. Resilience enables organizations to anticipate and respond to threats and opportunities arising from sudden or gradual changes in their internal and external context. Increasing resilience should be a strategic organizational goal.

According to the representatives of the BSI Polska - British Standard for Organizational Resilience group, the resilience of an organization means its durability (Kerr, 2016). The concepts of resilience and durability are closely related. Organizational resilience is an organization's capability to anticipate, prepare, respond, and adapt to continuous changes and unexpected disruptions in order to survive and grow. Resilience constitutes protection against danger. The proper organizational resilience to a turbulent environment creates its durability (Krzemiński, 2016). In other words, a sustainable organization is one that has improved (adequate) resilience. Acquiring organizational resilience consists in gradual "learning" by the organization even from small everyday matters. Organizational resilience is a relative and dynamic concept, not a specific action or fixed condition. Factors that increase

organizational resilience are unique to each organization. Organizations can be more or less resilient, and there is no absolute measure or ultimate goal in creating resilience.

Organizational resilience is also an organization's capability to face complex and adverse scenarios and adapt to the changes that these situations require. At the organizational level, it is an emergent property residing in the units, systems, structures, infrastructure, procedures and parameters of the organization (Burnard, Bhamra, 2011). It also represents the organization's ability to return to balance after a period of disruptions.

R. Bharna (2015) is the author of one of comprehensive definitions of resilience. He claims that organizational resilience should not be perceived as only the organization's ability to return to a state of equilibrium from before the disruption. Organizational resilience is an overarching concept that not only allows enterprises to continue their business activity, but also to grow, learn and progress regardless of their environment. Resilience can be a constructive mechanism for building competitiveness of an organization.

Despite being present in numerous studies, the concept of organizational resilience is still defined ambiguously, which is confirmed by many authors (Annareli, Nonino, 2016; Ribeiro, Barbosa-Povoa, 2018). The definitions of resilience contained in this study do not reflect all that are found in the literature, but they are those that, in the author's opinion, illustrate this concept well.

However, in order to illustrate the diversity of definitions presented in the literature, the paper presents the study of F. Odważny (2022) who analyzed the definition of resilience on the basis of literature review. He distinguished 3 features that consider the definitions contained in the analyzed literature:

- organizational resilience focuses on showing the strength of the organization before the disruption occurred; it refers to the organization's predictive capabilities and conscious behavior towards possible disruptions;
- organizational resilience refers to the context of enterprise management during in the period of disruption, in the face of a crisis situation; it emphasizes the organization's capability to function after disruption of system homeostasis;
- organizational resilience in terms of the functioning of the enterprise after returning to balance; it considers the company's capability to learn from disruptions, implement recovery programs and prevent disruptions occurring again;
- R. Bharna's definition that was mentioned before includes all three elements.

Based on the analysis of different approaches to resilience, an attempt can be made to define the characteristics of a resilient organization. A resilient organization should be characterized by special capabilities (Mitchell, 2013, p. 7; Odważny, 2022, p. 31):

- the organization's capability to anticipate disruptions inside and outside the enterprise;
- the ability to absorb shocks - it allows for maintaining the stability and structure of the system, it is often referred to as "resilience" in "traditional" risk management, limited to the risk of natural disasters;

- adaptability, otherwise known as "durability" – it introduces flexibility into the system, leading to gradual changes;
- the ability to transform - implementing significant changes that lead to the transformation of the existing system. This involves technological innovations, institutional reforms as well as changes in the behavior of actors and cultural processes. This capability is often used to develop post-conflict public policy;
- the organization's capability to survive a crisis and thrive in its period;
- the capability of the organization to return to the state of equilibrium thanks to the actions defined previously in the framework of planning business operation continuity;
- the organization's ability to return to the state of equilibrium thanks to spontaneous actions, based on the experience and intuition of the team forming the organization;
- the ability to use available tangible and intangible resources to improve the financial result in the face of potential, ongoing and past disruptions;
- ability to learn from a disruption and willingness to implement remedial actions to prevent a recurrence of the negative impact of a disruption on the organization.
- high flexibility, characterizing the company before and during the disruption, corresponding to the turbulent environment in which the organization operates.

Various combinations of these partial capabilities compose the resilience of a particular organization.

3. Determinants of resilience

Any disruptions, both in the organization (including crisis) and in the environment, affect the quality of the functioning of an organization, the results of its activity and adaptive capacity, which at the same time determines the way in which the organization copes with unfavorable conditions. Establishing what determines the ability of an organization (and an individual) to adapt to unfavorable conditions is the issue to be resolved. What are its determinants?

According to BSI representatives, 3 main features determine the resilience of an organization (Kerr, 2016):

- Product excellence, which represents meeting all market requirements by the products offered by a given company. Truly resilient organizations innovate, not just take advantage of the boom, create new products and new markets, always being one step ahead of the competition.
- Integrity of processes, which means that practicing the habit of excellence in the process of creating products and services and introducing them to the market is a key element for success.

- Employee behavior. Resilient organizations aim to achieve a balance between customer expectations and employee engagement. Modern organizations are opinion-makers, they not only set the rules to be followed, but also encourage employees to make their proper behavior in the workplace an integral part of their work and organizational culture. It is the challenge for leaders to understand the values of the organization, talk about them and demonstrate them so that all employees share these values – however, not because they are told to, but because they understand that "this is how this organization works".

Apart from the determinants identified by the BSI, other combinations of resilience determinants can be found in the literature. They include:

- networks of relations defining the enterprise; (Farrar, 2017; Klockner, 2017),
- organizational and management culture, which largely results from staff commitment and leadership skills; (Spiegler, 2012; Hills, 2015),
- change management, closely related to the proactive attitude of the staff (Ates, Bittici, 2011).

When summarizing the above overview, it can be noted that human capital can be seen among these determinants in various approaches. The employees' behavior, their knowledge, skills and competences will affect the perfection of products, reliability of processes, organizational culture and the effectiveness of change management. Thus, it can be indicated that human resources are an important determinant of resilience.

The assumption about the dominant role of human resources in shaping resilience is confirmed by the comparison made by T. Ingram (2023) on the basis of a systematic review of the literature. It indicates that some researchers see the sources of resilience in the organization's resources (Wieczorek-Kosmala, 2022), while paying attention to the role of financial resources in this matter (Undoubtedly, financial resources significantly facilitate adaptation to new conditions through the possibility of introducing new solutions responding to new market conditions). However, the main interests of researchers relate primarily to the management of human resources, i.e., employees, as a resource of the company. Finally, modern information technologies as enterprise resources are the third group focusing the researchers' attention. The results of the conducted analyzes indicate that on the resource side, human resources are most important for the resilience of the organization, followed by financial and information (technological) resources, as indicated by the number of key words (Ingram, 2023).

It can be concluded that resilience increases with the growth of our resources and strengths, which shape the specific capabilities of the company. Therefore, it should be clear that resilience will be determined by various factors. Achieving resilience requires the commitment of the entire organization. Resilience is built on the values, behaviors, culture and ethos of the organization, but human capital will undoubtedly be one of the basic determinants of resilience. Strengthening all factors is the task of the leaders of the organization. However, involvement of employees at all levels is the key to success (Kerr, 2016).

4. Human capital as a determinant of resilience

The considerations above show that organizational resilience is a strategic necessity for organizations if they want to thrive in a dynamic and ever-changing world. An organization's resilience capability can and should be developed through appropriate actions aimed at the development of resources essential for shaping resilience. They include human capital, i.e., qualified, committed and well motivated employees who are increasingly perceived as an important source of growth and development of the company. Well-managed human capital is seen as a source of success, building resilience, and potential benefits for both sides: both employers and employees (Kapitał ludzki..., 2015).

Resilience (in a way) is a natural human trait. It is one of the psychological resources (Zaluski, 2020). Other categories of resources that can be distinguished in humans are: cognitive, social and physical. Resources in each of the above-mentioned areas provide their holders with the opportunity to influence their environment adequately and effectively. In a resource-based approach, ways of "coping" with threatening, adverse situations are explored. The concept of coping coincides with the active aspect of resilience.

Resilience in humans is manifested by the fact that when facing a threat, they usually tend to accept and cope with difficulties. According to Coutu (2002), resilient people have three features in common: they accept reality; have a strong belief that life is important and have the ability to improvise. Referring mental resilience to the work environment, it can be defined as a positive psychological ability to bounce back, recover after failures, experience uncertainty, conflict, failure, and even positive change, progress and increased responsibility (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, Norman, 2007).

Human capital enables organizations to gain resilience by considering the relationship between individual and organizational resilience (Lengnick-Halli et al., 2011). Organizational capability is derived from a combination of knowledge, skills, capabilities, and other attributes at the individual level that are part of a organization's human capital management strategy focused on the capabilities, motivation, and performance of employees. Supporting individual resilience and developing specialist competencies in individuals will increase collective group and organizational resilience (Coutu, 2002).

Reference can be made here to the concept of intellectual capital management (Edvisson, Malone, 2000), in which the authors emphasize that the purpose of intellectual capital management is to transform human capital (assigned to an individual) into structural capital, which is the property of an organization and does not depend on employee fluctuation. This means that individual, personal skills, experience, education of individual employees are transformed and saved in the programs used in the company, tools and concepts that have been developed by this company in order to conduct effective operations.

The situation regarding the transformation of individual resilience into organizational resilience seems to be similar to the transformation of human capital into structural capital. Human capital management (HCM) strategies that develop employee resilience contribute to organizational resilience. Resilience is dynamic and represents both the adaptive capacity of the individual and the organization to absorb uncertainty, develop responses, and engage in transformations to exploit disruptions (Denyer, 2017).

To support the process of building resilience through a human capital management strategy, the following recommendations have been defined: (Douglas, 2021):

1. Emphasis on building capacity first, and then skills. In organizational environments where capabilities are developed and cultivated, employees retrain faster and more sustainably.
2. Employee development should move from the specific needs of employees, focusing on short-term strategies, to cultivating passions to help solve unnoticed and future problems. This means supporting employee motivation to make an impact, seek challenges to improve performance, and promote collaborative environments that build relationships and gain knowledge. This contributes to the sustainable productivity of the organization.
3. Shifting from formal training to learning by experience. Employee development and training should integrate learning into the workflow.
4. Creating incentives that motivate people to constantly learn, adapt and improve.

For the purpose of strengthening resilience, Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003; after Mills et al., 2013) propose to support the competence and efficiency of employees through greater access to and use of resources (tangible and intangible), promoting lifelong learning, as well as supporting autonomous decision-making.

The above implications that refer to changing human capital management strategies to build employee and organizational resilience focus on developing human capital competencies and capabilities, and then on job or task related skills. It is necessary to constantly learn and improve the skills of employees; however, in human capital management strategies of an organization, it is essential to provide employees with the tools enabling adaptation to a range of uncertainties in addition to skills development.

There is one more very important feature of human capital, i.e., flexibility. It is essential in the context of resilience. Human capital is the most flexible element of the organization, hence the development of the concept of managing this resource is currently so dynamic and perceived as a pillar supporting the resilience of enterprises.

Flexibility is one of the determinants of the success of a modern organization. It enables proper performance of functions assigned to management and skillful adaptation to the dynamically changing situation (conditions in the environment) and the company's expectations depending on the existing market situation. Flexibility means the ability to change quickly, i.e., the capability to adapt and react to external impulses that disrupt its current stability.

This means that it is closely related to resilience. The difference between flexible and inflexible enterprises is that the change, i.e., the reaction to the impact of external or internal factors, can take place during the performance of operational activities, without the need to suspend them (Czerska, Szpitter, 2010), i.e., it does not disturb the efficiency. Flexibility is one of the most important features that a company needs in volatile times.

Flexibility should always be part of business management. It is an attribute of an organization reflecting the position of a given entity on the stability-chaos continuum (April 2021). However, nowadays, in the conditions of progressive market deregulation and the effects of the crisis caused by the global pandemic, the importance of flexibility as such and the importance of people who are characterized by this flexibility are increasing.

The study does not include a thorough analysis of the notion of flexibility. This is because the concept is widely interpreted in numerous studies (e.g., Krupski, 2005; 2008; Czerska, Szpitter, 2010; Bridges, 2008; Kwiecień, 2018). The author's intention was only to draw attention to flexibility as a feature of human capital and its role in the context of shaping the organization's resilience, necessary for effective operation in a turbulent environment.

The results of the research: Human Capital Study (Report 2019-2020) can be a summary of the considerations on the role of human capital for shaping resilience, and at the same time a confirmation of the role of human capital and its management strategies in strengthening the resilience of the organization. The analyzes presented in the research report allow to conclude that there is a certain configuration of norms, values and tools used for long-term planning, which to some extent makes companies resilient to the crisis and allows them to remain innovative. Companies with a long-term plan of action and personnel development, and those in which the management board focuses on efficient organization and control of the implementation of procedures are particularly resilient in this respect.

Similarly, the Global Human Capital Trends research (GHCT Report, 2020; 2021) conducted by Deloitte in 2020 and 2021 in the area of human capital management confirmed that despite the crisis, people and organizations are able to set and achieve new, often surprising goals by adopting the right attitude. The results from 2021 showed that people-driven decision making provides companies with better protection against rapid changes, i.e., it improves the resilience of the organization.

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If the organization's environment changes faster than its interior, the company may not survive it. Human capital is the factor that can enable enterprises to adapt the pace of internal changes to the pace of changes in the environment.

5. Summary

The conditions for adaptation to the unfavorable conditions of functioning of both individuals and organizations are the subject of interest to researchers in the field of organizational effectiveness. They look for features and factors responsible for the organization's capability to adapt to changes in a turbulent environment.

Resilience is the feature that determines the ability of the organization to accept changes, and its determinants include human capital, along with its abilities, skills, individual resilience and flexibility.

These theoretical considerations are not a comprehensive analysis of resilience development. However, thanks to the literature review, it has been shown that organizational resilience is not a ready-made system that can be bought and applied. Resilience proves to be not just something you are possessed or not possessed. This is a kind of philosophy of action that must be systematically and consistently developed and applied in practice. It can therefore be shaped, individually and organizationally. Resilience is built through everyday work, small events and appropriate actions that consider defined determinants (Krzemiński, 2020). At the organizational level, it is manifested as a mix of behaviors, perspectives and interactions that can be developed, measured and managed (Somers, 2009). Resilience is an organization's capability to respond and adapt to change, allowing it to recover quickly, learn from experiences, and grow.

The key is knowledge of the factors that strengthen resilience and the implementation of programs to build it, verified in terms of effectiveness. The conducted literature review allowed for concluding that human capital is a factor that appears in many areas of creating resilience. Today's extremely dynamically changing environment requires a certain amount of courage, a sober perspective and flexibility, i.e., purely human features (April 2022). This means that human capital is becoming an increasingly important source of enterprise advantage, its value and a determinant of resilience (Kapitał ludzki..., 2015).

Considering various perspectives of the role of human capital for the functioning of modern enterprises, the thesis can be confirmed that human capital is a key resource of the enterprise, and this resource should be taken care of in order to develop it and strengthen its comprehensive positive impact on the functioning of enterprises in today's dynamic market. Any studies on human capital will help to present and understand its key role for resilience and to clarify the idea of research on human capital in the context of shaping organizational resilience. The review of sources on the analyzed issue was selective, however, the considerations in this study allowed to achieve its goal, i.e., identify human capital and its characteristics as determinants of organizational resilience. The subject area related to shaping organizational resilience is extremely vast and can still be explored in a variety of contexts and approaches. Deliberations on the role of human capital in shaping resilience are one of the elements of planned, broader

research in the area of organizational resilience. We are now preparing research on the role of resources in creating resilience, which will be conducted on the basis of a systematic literature review. The considerations presented in this study already allow for showing how important the role of human capital in shaping resilience is and which of its features should be given special attention. The purpose of further research will be specifying the set of determinants of resilience, i.e., identifying internal resources and their role in generating organizational resilience.

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