

# *Resilience, wellbeing and HRM: a multidisciplinary perspective*

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## ***Resilience, Wellbeing and HRM: A multidisciplinary perspective***

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### **Abstract:**

Research on resilience has accumulated a vast body of knowledge which has assisted in comprehending complex HRM issues in diverse organizational settings. Yet, the existing studies have hitherto not paid sufficient attention to the multifaceted aspects of resilience and occupational contexts. We join the conversation with resilience, wellbeing and HRM by suggesting that investigating resilience from a multidisciplinary perspective situated in varying occupational contexts can advance our collective understandings of the phenomena in important ways. This paper has three general objectives. First, we show that resilience has been a long-standing issue in organizational behavior and organization studies and provide an overview of the puzzles that underpin and trigger this special issue. Second, we highlight the key insights and contributions of the papers included in this special issue by reviewing their theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches and findings. Finally, we outline a future research agenda on resilience in organizations that can help advance international HRM research.

**Keywords:** resilience, wellbeing, HRM, occupational context, multidisciplinary

## **Introduction**

Resilience has become increasingly important for individuals, organizations and society to flourish in the uncertain, risky, turbulent and ambiguous world we live in today (Van Der Vegt, Essens, Wahlström, & George, 2015). Thus, the study of resilience necessitates a nuanced understanding of its multifaceted aspects in order to comprehend, predict and design the appropriate interventions, so as hopefully to enhance individual and organizational resilience and wellbeing at large (Cartwright & Cooper, 2009). Although the extant research on resilience has accumulated a vast body of knowledge and thereby has assisted us with comprehending these complex HRM issues in diverse organizational settings, we argue that the existing studies have not paid sufficient attention to the multifaceted aspects of resilience and occupational contexts. Therefore, by joining the current conversation on resilience, wellbeing and HRM, we suggest that investigating resilience from a multidisciplinary perspective situated in varying occupational contexts can advance our collective understandings of the phenomena in significant ways.

This paper has three general objectives. First, we show that resilience has been a long-standing issue in organizational behavior and organization studies and provide an overview of the puzzles that inform this special issue. Second, we highlight the key insights and contributions of the papers included in this special issue by reviewing their theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches and findings. Finally, we outline a future research agenda on resilience in organizations that can help advance the international HRM research.

## **The multifaceted aspects of resilience**

The rise of resilience can be corroborated with the movement of positive organizational behavior research (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Positivity has received

significant attention in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), thus providing the theoretical underpinnings for the growth in positive organizational behaviour research (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). The purpose of positive psychology “... is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from pre-occupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). In other words, positive psychology studies the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. A wide range of topics emerged including, among others: positive emotion (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), psychological capital (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009), and resilience (Masten, 2001; Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012).

Intuitively, resilience means bounce back, as both individuals and organizations will face stressful situation, setbacks, or failure during their respective lifecycles. However, people's responses to failure vary widely. Some bounce back after a brief period while others descend into depression. Thus, resilience can serve as an important intellectual concept to understand the variations of organizational actors' bouncing back behaviors. As a multifaceted concept, resilience may be viewed as a static personal trait and capacity, or alternatively as a process from a dynamic perspective (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). Viewing resilience as a personal trait, more recent research identified and recognized resilience as a relatively common rather than a rare trait - suggested in early writing as being held by only extraordinary individuals. And so, reframing of resilience suggests: “that results... from the operation of basic human adaptational systems” (Masten, 2001, p. 227).

When viewing from a dynamic perspective, resilience as a capacity can be enhanced and it occurs in a dynamic process in response to trigger-events. In a similar vein, resilience as a process emphasizes the appraisal of feedback and experiences with adaptation, by which individuals adapt to dealing with risk in their environment. In viewing resilience as a process, risk is a necessary component, because a person who is not exposed to some risk cannot be

said to be resilient. This is particularly prescient as risk has become so prevalent across multiple domains and occupational contexts. Managing risk effectively necessitates resilience (Van Der Vegt et al., 2015). Our working definition of resilience is resilience as bouncing back from setbacks combined with remaining effective in the face of tough demands and difficult circumstances, and moreover, growing stronger in the process (Cooper, Flint-Taylor, & Pearn, 2013; Cooper, 2013). In sum, we acknowledge that the diverse views on resilience are not mutually exclusive but complementary since resilience is multifaceted in nature.

### **Resilience, organizational contexts and HRM: A multidisciplinary perspective**

Resilience in organizational contexts cover multiple domains, thus a multidisciplinary approach may be conducive to obtaining a nuanced understanding of resilience, well-being and HRM in diverse organizational settings. One recent review highlighted the role of *occupational context* and argued paying close attention to occupational contexts may significantly advance theoretical developments in resilience research (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016). In organization and management studies, resilience can be understood as the skill and the capacity to be robust under conditions of enormous stress and change (Coutu, 2002). In management and business studies, resilience is related to environmental and sustainability management in the face of drastic environmental events (Linnenluecke, 2017). Furthermore, recently scholars began to link resilience with the research stream of conflict management (Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, & Zhao, 2017). In the domain of strategic management, resilience is pertinent to developing appropriate strategy for organizations to survive and thrive in a competitive environment (Carmeli & Markman, 2011).

The different organizational settings also expose a critical perspective in relation to the issue of levels of analysis when examining the antecedents, processes and consequences

of resilience. Most of the existing resilience studies stemming from positive psychology or positive organizational behavior tend to focus on individual-level. For instance, sports players need to correct and put mistakes aside and bounce back rapidly. Entrepreneurs face adverse situations, great uncertainty, stressful events, and difficult circumstances and need resilience in the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities (Bullough, Renko, & Myatt, 2014; Liu, 2018). Increasingly, studies have begun to move the level of analysis so that the importance of team resilience has been recognized for sports activities (Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013) and military training (Seligman, 2011). When moving to the organizational-level, prior research on organizational safety might shed some revealing lights (Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2014). For instance, the research stream on high reliability organizations consists the element of resilience (Leveson, Dulac, Marais, & Carroll, 2009). Recent research identified the importance of resilience for community-level phenomena, such as the resilience of entrepreneurial ecosystems (Roundy, Brockman, & Bradshaw, 2017).

To summarize, the vibrant research activities attest to the fact that in contemporary society resilience is required in a wide range of organizational contexts, and that, examining resilience from a multidisciplinary perspective may engender revealing insights. Such a multidisciplinary approach resonates with the recent quest that multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach is urgently encouraged from scientists - including social scientists - (Trehwella, 2009; Van Noorden, 2015), business leaders and policymakers in order to tackle societal and economic grand challenges facing the global economy today.

### **A brief introduction to the papers in this special issue**

In this section we introduce the seven papers in the special issue. We discuss their theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches, findings and overall contributions to

the study of the resilience, well-being and HRM practices. Table 1 offers an overview of these seven papers along with some key dimensions.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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In the first article, Cooke and colleagues examined the extent to which high-performance work system (HPWS) contribute towards enhancing employees' resilience as well as their levels of engagement. The occupational context of this study is the Chinese financial services industry with a sample of 2040 employees in the Chinese banking industry. This study found out HPWS as a job resource can positively affect resilience and subsequently employee engagement. Thus, the paper sheds some interesting light on HRM interventions, especially the role of HPWS on employee resilience.

By connecting the individual-level and organizational-level, in the second article Branicki, Steyer and Sullivan-Taylor sought to reveal the microprocesses involved in producing resilient organizations. The paper adopted a qualitative method and empirically examined the resilience work of 137 resilient managers from 127 private and public sector organizations from the UK and France. The authors juxtaposed everyday 'business as usual' and extreme events as two scenarios to explore the implications for individual and organizational resilience. This study suggests that micro-processes have significant implications for resilience at both individual and organisational levels.

In the third article, Stokes et al continue the distinction between extreme events and everyday managerial activities by highlighting the micro-moments and dynamics and their implications in constructing and influencing the manifestations of resilience in macro-contexts. Theoretically, this paper connected the literature streams of resilience and



organizational ambidexterity and examined the managerial challenges in handling organizational ambidextrous dynamics and tensions surrounding resilience in relation to individual and organizational stances towards strategic HRM practices. In relation to the occupational contexts, two illustrative cases include a quasi-governmental institution (everyday phenomenon) and an international military organization (notional extreme example).

In the fourth article, Huang, Xing and Gamble examined employee well-being and resilience from a gender perspective. By drawing from the job demands-resources as the theoretical framework, this study examined the differences of male and female employees in foreign-invested retail stores in China and identified that the impact of job security and emotional demands on employees differed by gender. This paper contributed to the resilience literature by borrowing the job demands–resources model and extended this model by articulating the influence of gender on employee well-being and resilience. The emerging economy context also made an additional contribution to the resilience literature.

In the fifth article, Khan and colleagues continued this line of scholarly inquiry with emerging economy context by examining employee resilience in Pakistan. The telecommunications industry has undergone significant transformation and changes in emerging economies at large. What kind of HR practices may contribute to developing employee resilience? Based on qualitative analysis of interviews with managers and employees in one of Pakistan's leading telecom companies, it found out four key areas of HR practices – namely, job design, information sharing and flow, employee benefits, and employee development opportunities – which can enable the development of employee resilience.

In the sixth article, Bustinza and colleagues argued specific Human Resource Practices (HRPs) can be conducive to developing resilience capabilities. HRPs that build resilience within an organization are needed to implement technological change along with technological capabilities successfully. Based on a sample of 205 manufacturing firms, this study found out that resilience capabilities are a mediating factor between technological capabilities and organizational effectiveness, whilst environment dynamism and competitive intensity are moderators of this relationship. The findings contribute to understanding of the role of resilience in enhancing organizational effectiveness.

In the seventh article, Davies, Stoermer and Froese examined resilience as an antecedent of expatriate work adjustment and turnover intentions. By juxtaposing the expatriation literature and the conservation of resources theory, this study underlined that resilience is positively related to expatriate work adjustment and that these positive effects are more pronounced when expatriates perceive their organizational climate to be highly inclusive. Furthermore, work adjustment mediates the effects of resilience on turnover intentions and that this mediation is moderated by a perceived organizational inclusion climate. The occupational context is expatriates in South Korea.

Collectively, these seven papers potently illustrate the wide scope of the topic of resilience and HRM practices by encompassing occupational contexts ranging from financial industry to retails and telecommunication industry. Theoretically, the wide range of theoretical perspectives - from job demand and resources to ambidexterity and social identity theory - shows that different theoretical views and their combinations are needed to truly understand the nuances of phenomena as complex as resilience. Furthermore, methodologically, the presence of quantitative and qualitative studies demonstrates the broad range of possibilities for scholars to investigate resilience, well-being and HRM practices from many different methodological orientations.

## **Future research directions**

In this section, we will outline several future research directions, namely (1) appreciating the role of context beyond occupational contexts, (2) advancing theoretical development by fostering the multidisciplinary approach, (3) encouraging methodological pluralism, and (4) enhancing resilience through HRM practice and intervention.

First, context is important for the advancement of management studies and, in particular, organizational behavior research. (Johns, 2006, 2017). The role of occupational contexts has been emphasized (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016), and several papers in this special issue examined different occupational contexts, including the retail industry (Huang, Xing & Gamble, this issue), and the telecommunication industry (Khan, et al., this issue). Furthermore, one salient aspect of context is culture. Previous research has explored the influence of culture on resilience (Panter-Brick, 2015; Ungar, 2008) and articulated the impact of cultural differences on manifestations of resilience. However, we urge future research to take a comparative perspective to examine how, and to what extent, cultural difference really matters. On the surface, it may seem divergent yet it may, in essence, share the same underlying mechanisms, such as the shared wisdom between Professor James G. March and Chinese classical thinkers on management and organization (Rhee, 2010).

Second, multidisciplinary approaches may facilitate advancing the theoretical development of resilience. By connecting with adjacent yet vibrantly independent literature streams, resilience research may be significantly advanced. For instance, the recent behavioral micro-foundation movement (Greve, 2013) suggest using psychological micro-foundations to explain the macro-level outcomes (Liu, Sarala, Xing, & Cooper, 2017). In this special issue, two papers (Stokes, et al, this issue; Branicki, Steyer & Sullivan-Taylor, this issue) explored the microprocesses that underpin resilience. In so doing, the authors also offer

an alternative way of reconceptualizing resilience as either everyday resilience, or resilience under extreme scenarios. Furthermore, resilience can be connected to many other domains in management and organization studies, including entrepreneurship (Williams & Shepherd, 2016) and talent management (Davies, Stoermer, & Froese, this issue). We believe multidisciplinary approach can provide generative benefits for future work on resilience.

Third, we have taken an inclusive approach and embraced methodological pluralism when selecting and developing papers in this special issue. Our selected papers include both qualitative and quantitative work. Some conceptual submissions, unfortunately, did not progress past the review process, but we believe there is the demand for conceptual development surrounding resilience, well-being and HRM. In particular, we suggest that some innovative or newly developed research methods may be applied in future studies, such as deploying fuzzy-set approach (Fiss, 2011; Ragin, 2008) and experimental methods in studying resilience (Jackson & Cox, 2013), so as to build better causal relationships. Needlessness to say, qualitative methods carry the power to further advance resilience research, especially in cross-cultural contexts from a comparative perspective (Liebenberg & Theron, 2015).

Last but not least, we encourage future research to examine HRM practices and intervention that can enhance resilience. Understanding resilience is the first step. Knowing how to design appropriate HRM practices and intervention may generate significant benefits for managers and HR practitioners (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). In reality, different types of resilience training prevail in the workplace. A systematic review highlighted the importance of resilience in the workplace for employee well-being and performance (Robertson, Cooper, Sarkar, & Curran, 2015). This review examined the impact of resilience training on personal resilience and four broad categories of dependent variables, including (1) mental health and subjective well-being outcomes, (2) psychosocial outcomes,

(3) physical/biological outcomes, and (4) performance outcomes. It identified that resilience training can improve personal resilience and is a useful means of developing mental health and subjective well-being in employees, such as stress, depression, anxiety, and negative mood/ affect/emotion. However, because different studies tend to measure resilience in various ways, it is rather difficult to draw conclusions on the impact of resilience training on other dependent variables. This suggests future research needs construct clarity with regards to this line of inquiry.

In conclusion, understanding the multifaceted aspects of resilience through the multidisciplinary perspective can assist in better understanding and predicting antecedents, outcomes, and contingencies related to resilience at multiple levels. We invite other scholars and practitioners to join the debate and to move forward this interesting research agenda.

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**Table 1.** An Overview of the Papers in this Special Issue

<b>Authors</b>	<b><u>Theoretical perspectives</u></b>	<b><u>Methodological approaches</u></b>	<b><u>Key findings</u></b>	<b><u>Focus on resilience</u></b>	<b><u>Level of analysis</u></b>	<b><u>Occupational contexts</u></b>
Cooke, Fang Lee; Cooper, Brian; Bartram, Tim; Wang, Jue; Mei Hexuan	- High-Performance Work System (HPWS) -Job demand and resources	Quantitative	-HPWS contributes towards enhancing employees' resilience as well as their levels of engagement. HPWS as a job resource can positively affect resilience and subsequently employee engagement.	Employee resilience	Individual	Banking
Branicki, Layla; Steyer, Véronique; Sullivan-Taylor, Bridgette	- Conceptual taint -Dirty jobs	Qualitative	-Juxtaposed everyday business as usual and extreme events as two scenarios to explore the implications for individual and organizational resilience. This study suggests that micro-processes have significant implications for resilience at both individual and organisational levels.	Everyday resilience and resilience under extreme event	Individual and organizational	Private and public sector organizations from the UK and France



Stokes, Peter; Smith, Simon; Wall, Tony; Moore, Neil; Rowland, Caroline; Ward, Tony; Cronshaw, Sue	-Ambidexterity theory -Critical management studies	Qualitative	- Distinction between extreme events and everyday managerial activities by highlighting the micro-moments and dynamics and their implications in constructing and influencing the manifestations of resilience in macro-contexts.	Everyday resilience and extreme events	Individual	Quasi-governmental institution (notional everyday phenomenon) and an international military organization (notional extreme example).
Huang, Qihai; Xing, Yijun; Gamble, Jos	-Job demands-resources -Social identity theory	Quantitative	-Workload and employee participation in decision-making had a similar impact on the well-being of both male and female employees.  -Impact of job security and emotional demands on employees differed by gender.	Resilience and well-being	Individual	Foreign-invested retail stores in China
Khan, Zaheer; Rao-Nicholson, Rekha; Akhtar,	- Positive psychology -HR practices	Qualitative	-Four key areas of HR practices – namely, job design, information sharing and flow, employee benefits, and employee development opportunities – can enable the	Employee resilience	Individual	One Pakistan's leading telecom company

Pervaiz; Tarba, Shlomo Y.; Ahammad, Mohammad F.; Vorley, Tim			development of employee resilience.			
Bustinza, Oscar F.; Vendrell- Herrero, Ferran; Perez- Arostegui, M <sup>a</sup> Nieves; Parry, Glenn	-Ambidexterity theory	Quantitative	<p>- Resilience capabilities are a mediating factor between technological capabilities and organizational effectiveness.</p> <p>- The above relationship is moderated by environment dynamism and competitive intensity.</p>	Resilience capabilities	Organizational	Manufacturing firms
Davies, Samuel E.; Stoermer, Sebastian; Froese, Fabian Jintae	-Expatriate management -Conservation of resources theory	Quantitative	<p>-Resilience is positively related to expatriate work adjustment and that these positive effects are more pronounced when expatriates perceive their organizational climate to be highly inclusive.</p> <p>-Work adjustment mediates the effects of resilience on turnover intentions and that</p>	Expatriate resilience	Individual	Expatriates in South Korea

this mediation is moderated  
by a perceived organizational  
inclusion climate.

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