

Review and Prospects of Organisational Resilience Research

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Abstract

Based on a systematic review of existing literature, this paper first explores the definition and connotation of organisational resilience from various theoretical perspectives and summarises the factors influencing organisational resilience, including those at the individual, organisational, and network levels. Additionally, this paper offers an evaluative analysis of the dimensions used to measure organisational resilience. Building on the literature review, several directions for future research are proposed, including the collaborative mechanisms of multidimensional organisational resilience, differences in resilience-building across different types of organisations, processual studies on resilience formation, and the interactions between resilience factors at the individual, organisational, and network levels.

Keywords:Organizational Resilience; Crisis Response; Literature Review

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1.0 Introduction

In the face of global pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and economic uncertainties, enterprises are confronting unprecedented volatility and challenges. The concept of organisational resilience has therefore attracted widespread attention, recognised as a crucial capability for organisations to respond to crises and adapt to change. Organisational resilience enables firms to enhance their survival capabilities during crises through resource integration and strategic adjustment(Ma et al., 2018).

As an extension of resilience theory within the field of management, organisational resilience has garnered significant interest in both academia and industry in recent years. Studies have shown that organisational resilience enables firms to better navigate environmental uncertainties by enhancing adaptability, flexibility, and resource responsiveness, thereby bolstering their ability to withstand and recover from crises(Ishak & Williams, 2018). However, current research lacks a deep understanding of the inherently complex, multidimensional, and dynamic characteristics of organisational resilience. Measurement methods remain underdeveloped and are not yet robust, and the research landscape appears fragmented and piecemeal, lacking a clear and systematic framework(Smuda-Kocoh, 2024). This absence of a consensual framework has, to some extent, hindered the development of empirical research on organisational resilience, providing room for further exploration in this field.

This paper aims to review and critically analyse the current state of organisational resilience research and propose targeted directions for future research, with the intention of offering valuable references for academic scholars and enterprise management practice.

2.0 Data Collection and Literature Description

The study began with a systematic search for relevant literature in the Web of Science Core Collection, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), and WanFang databases. The keyword "organisational resilience" was used for the search, and it was limited to articles published in English and Chinese. For the subsequent literature screening, inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles explicitly addressing organisational resilience, its influencing factors, or measurement dimensions. Articles such as conference proceedings, book chapters, and those not directly related to the concept of resilience within organisational contexts were excluded.

A thematic synthesis approach was utilized to identify recurring patterns, address research gaps, and highlight emerging themes across diverse studies. This method is particularly well-suited for synthesizing findings in a fragmented research field like organisational resilience, where studies often vary significantly in focus and methodology. The selection of years was guided by critical milestones in organisational resilience research, reflecting major global events and corresponding shifts in academic focus.

The search results indicate that prior to the year 2000, research related to organisational resilience was relatively scarce, and the concept of resilience had not yet garnered widespread attention within the business and management domains. At the period, research concentrated on how to maintain organisations' fundamental operations in the face of civil unrest, economic downturns, and natural disasters. It was believed that organisations were closed systems, and that backup planning and resource redundancy were the keys to resilience (Perrow, 2011).

Beginning in 2001, the significant influence of the "9/11" attacks on global security and the heightened awareness of uncertainty ignited a resurgence of academic interest in organizational mechanisms and adaptive tactics for maneuvering through uncertain circumstances. Researchers have started to investigate the significance of dynamic adaptive capacity after realising that traditional static models of response are no longer applicable to modern organisations due to the increase in risk exposure brought about by globalisation and technological change. Since businesses must swiftly modify their structures and procedures through learning in the wake of a crisis, the emphasis has switched to organisational learning and flexibility. The ability of an organisation to withstand shocks and reorganise resources in a constantly shifting environment is known as resilience.

Since 2016, globalisation and the speed at which information technology is developing have increased organisational risks such as supply chain interruptions, financial crises, and climate change. From crisis management, resilience research is progressively growing into a multidisciplinary area that encompasses sociology, psychology, and strategic management. The increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment has contributed much to significant advances in the study of organizational resilience. In other words, organizational resilience offers a different framework for understanding how businesses navigate and adapt to changing conditions. Multidimensional resilience—such as technological resilience (e.g., information system reliability), psychological resilience (employee resilience and stress tolerance), and cultural resilience (organisational cultural responsiveness)—has received increased attention in study. Resilient recovery plans, decentralised decision-making, and redundant design are some of the strategies for "building resilience" that are suggested in management practices.

Following 2020, academics are starting to concentrate on ways to increase overall resilience at a systemic level due to the frequency of new infectious epidemics, climate change, and geopolitical crises. Research on resilience has spread beyond individual organisations to supply chain networks, larger ecosystems, and societal levels. With the use of digital technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence, to improve real-time response capabilities and foresee risks, organisational resilience is viewed as a crucial component in attaining social and environmental sustainability. Building a culture of resilience encourages organisations to cultivate a culture of adaptability, cooperation, and creativity. The socio-technical systems viewpoint, which looks at how businesses integrate human, technological, and organisational capacities in the face of systemic risk, is emphasized.

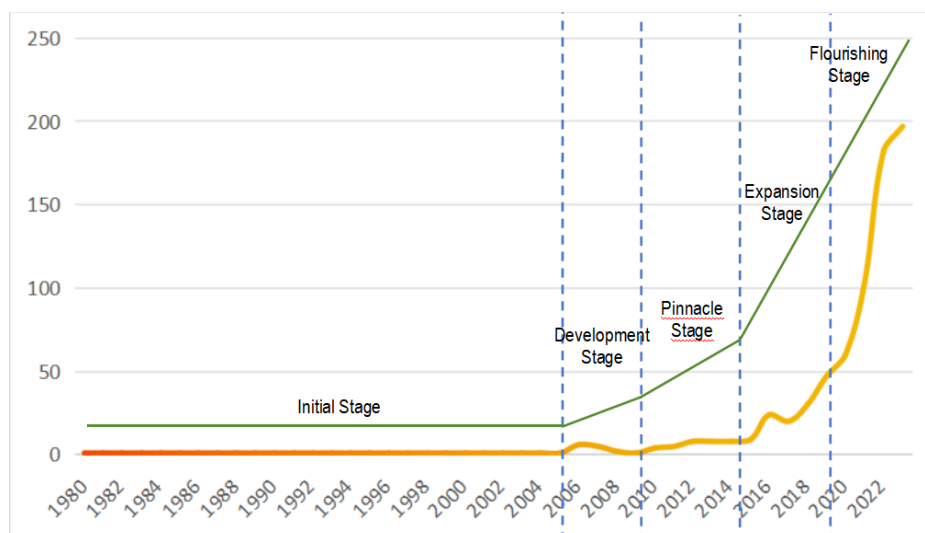


Fig. 1: Trends in the Number of Publications on Organizational Resilience Research
(Source:) Developed by the author

Organizational resilience research has evolved from static resistance to dynamic adaptation and nowadays to system integration, showing an expansion from disaster management to daily strategic management; an expansion from a single technical or organizational behavioural perspective to a multidisciplinary and multi-level integrated perspective; and a research trend characterizing the focus of research from the response to a single event to long-term resilience capacity building and sustainable development.

3.0 The Concept of Organisational Resilience

Since Holling's original 1973 definition of the concept of resilience, the study has multiplied into an interdisciplinary approach through disciplines like ecology, physics, psychology, engineering, and sociology. In the 1980s, researchers Staw (1981) and Meyer (1982) brought the concept of resilience into management and characterized it as a result of primary transformation and single-loop learning within organizations(Meyer , Alan D., 1982) , thus opening a new phase in studying organizational resilience (Bourrier, 2011), organisational learning (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010), human resource management(Zhu et al., 2014), and strategic management (Somers, 2009).

Scholars' definitions of organisational resilience highlight different features due to varying research goals and focuses. Existing research delineates organisational resilience from four perspectives: trait, result, process, and competence.

From the "trait" point of view, scholars argue that organisational resilience is an innate characteristic displayed by companies and reflects the interaction between businesses and their environment, and companies with organisational resilience adapt more easily to turbulent circumstances (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

From the perspective of 'outcome', scholars define organisational resilience as an enterprise being able to adapt to adversity effectively, relating to organisational recovery, survival, learning, and growth (Liu & Yin, 2020).

From the aspect of the 'process' perspective, organisational resilience is defined by researchers as a progressive, iterative, continuous process that enables recovery and improvement in adverse times or situations(Anderson & Guo, 2021).

From the capability perspective considers organisational resilience as one dynamic and flexible organisational capability, a combination of predictive, stabilising, and adaptive abilities which firms exhibit in adverse situations (Chi et al., 2023). Organizational resilience, meanwhile, has been researched from a number of angles; however, the most general recognition relates to its definition and representation in terms of capability (Wang, 2022).

More recently, researchers have focused on the dynamic development of organizational resilience, stressing the fact that resilience enables enterprises not only to "bounce back" but also to use crises for the advancement of their businesses, achieving "bounce forward" capabilities (P. Li & Zhu, 2021). This has extended the early definition of organizational resilience, suggesting that it needs to involve the competence to create new opportunities, achieve organizational change, and enhance the growth potential of the organization.

Further, various scholars have defined the static and dynamic features of organisational resilience, extending the concept to include the ability of the organisation to anticipate unexpected events and to implement measures for their prevention (Annarelli & Nonino, 2016). This approach underlines the concepts of "pre-adversity resilience" and "post-adversity resilience".

In conclusion, organisational resilience is a broad, multifaceted notion that includes an organization's qualities, capacities, procedures, and results in the face of changing circumstances and crises. The conventional concept of crisis management is gradually being replaced by a more long-term strategic approach that sees crises as a tool for organisational innovation and transformation.

4.0 Factors Influencing Organisational Resilience

Current research underlines that determinants of organizational resilience operate mainly at individual, organizational, and network levels. As for individuals, these factors manifest themselves as employee characteristics and approaches to leadership; regarding organizations, they cover strategy, behaviors, capabilities, and resources; concerning the network level, the main factor involves types of networks and structures.

Table 1. Antecedent Variables of Organisational Resilience

Factor	Antecedent Variable	Author (Year)
Employee Traits	Employee Loyalty	Jaaron & Backhouse (2014)
	Employee Resilience	Prayag et al. (2018)
		Zhu et al. (2019)
		Liang & Cao (2021)
Leadership Style	Employee Craftsmanship	Duan et al. (2021)
	Entrepreneurial Leadership Style	Zhao (2021)
	Transformational Leadership Style	Zhang & Hou (2013)
		Yang et al. (2022)
		Madi et al. (2023)
Strategic Factor	foresightful leadership	Mxmanus et al.(2008)
	Entrepreneurial Spirit	Li et al.(2021)
	Capturing Strategy, Governance Strategy	Carmeli & Markman (2011)
	Network Strategy	Kim et al. (2021)
	Management Strategy	Lengnick-Hall C A et al.(2011)
	Organisational Culture	Hanson et al.(2014)

		Paunescu et al.(2020)
	Social Responsibility	Lv et al.(2019)
	Management Innovation	Chen et al. (2021)
	Entrepreneurial Innovation	Li et al. (2022)
	Ambidextrous Innovation	Feng & Chen (2022)
		Zhang & Zhang (2022)
Behavioural Factor		Oluwasoye et al. (2015)
		Gao (2021)
	Organisational Learning	Al-Atwi et al. (2021)
		Xie et al. (2022)
		Li & Wang (2022)
	Proactive Boundary Spanning	Wang et al. (2023)
Capability Factor	Relational Conflict Dynamic Management	Jiang (2020)
	Capability	Gao et al. (2022)
	Digital Capability	Liu (2022)
	Network Capability	
		Linnenluecke, 2017
	Information and Technology	(Herbane, 2019;)
		Bustinza et al. (2019)
		(Chowning et al., 2012)
Resource Factor		Wang (2016)
	Redundant Resources	Conz & Magnani (2020)
		Zhang et al. (2020)
	Relational Resources	Lian (2021)
	Digital Technology Deployment	Li et al. (2022)
Network Type	Business Network	Xie et al. (2022)
	Relational Network	Zhang & Zhang (2022)
Network Structure	Dual Network Embedding	Shen & Wu (2023)

(Source:) Developed by the author

4.1 Individual Level

According to strategic human resource management theory, human resources are essential to organisational resilience, with employee numbers and skill sets being fundamental factors that strengthen this resilience (Bustinza et al., 2019). Loyal employees are more inclined to support organizational goals, thereby contributing to a robust foundation of resilience. In addition, individual employee resilience helps them to handle crises, providing crucial support to the organization in staying alive (Liang & Cao, 2021). Such craftsmanship among employees encourages goal-oriented behavior and helps an organization to recover and rectify any damage. Leaders form a core part of organisational decision-making and play a crucial role in shaping organisational resilience (Sawalha, 2015). Upper echelons theory posits that a manager's traits, cognition, values, and leadership style significantly impact an organization's strategic decisions, growth, and development. Managers, as key figures at the upper echelons of an organization, assume a guiding and motivational role in leadership style, thereby enhancing overall resilience through a clear vision and coordinated actions (Barasa et al., 2018).

4.2 Organisational Level

Strategy, behavior, capability, and resources at the organizational level significantly influence organisational resilience. Carmeli and Markman (2011) believed that resilience emerged when the strategy was implemented in a systematic manner while Kim et al. (2021) believed in the enormous role of linking and bridging strategies in organizational resilience. On the one hand, positive activities of organisational learning and innovation improve an enterprise's adaptability to its environment. Management innovation enhances the flexibility of an enterprise and therefore enhances crisis response capabilities (E. Li et al., 2022), while ambidextrous innovation in high-tech firms enhances organizational resilience (Feng & Chen, 2022). In this regard, effective relational conflict management, digital capabilities, and network capabilities contribute to increased resilience in organisational capability, as noted by Jiang (2020) and J. Liu (2022). In addition, redundant resources act as a buffer that provides the ability for organisations to absorb the impact of sudden events, as indicated by Conz & Magnani, 2020. Where the organisation quickly detects and responds suitably to signals of an external threat, its available resources provide the foundation for implementing response strategies. The efficient mobilization and allocation of internal and external resources improve the organization's adaptability to threats (Zhang & Li, 2020). Organizational structure, communication mechanisms, knowledge management systems, and both tangible and intangible assets, including capital and technology, collectively enhance organizational resilience (Wang, 2022). Technological support, especially through information systems and digital technologies, becomes vital in times of crisis, where digital tools play a decisive role in building organizational resilience in modern contexts.

4.3 Network Level

As a significant influencing factor of organisational resilience, the network dimension centres on the role of the organization's network of relationships with its surroundings. The primary influencing factors are the strength and diversity of the network of relations, the breadth and depth of the business network, and the embeddedness of the network at the local and hyperlocal levels (Xie et al., 2022). An organization's ability to access a wide range of partners is referred to as its breadth, while the quality and strength of those partnerships are referred to as its depth. These two factors directly affect an organization's capacity to obtain knowledge, resources, and assistance, which strengthens its ability to withstand uncertainty. The term "network embeddedness" describes how companies maintain relationships with partners at various levels while integrating into the communities or ecosystems in which they are situated. While hyperlocal network embedding refers to connectedness across regions and even internationally, local network embedding focusses on localised relationships. An organization's ability to withstand complicated surroundings is determined by the combination of these two embedding kinds. Zhang and Zhang (2022) argue that relational networks, whether internal or external to the organization, enhance organizational resilience. Shen and Wu (2023) highlight that local network embedding and supra-local network embedding both enhance the resilience of small- and medium-sized enterprises in complex environments.

Overall, organisational resilience is influenced by a multilayered array of factors, with various elements at each level interacting to provide organisations with adaptability in uncertain environments. These factors not only elucidate pathways for enhancing organisational resilience but also offer a comprehensive theoretical foundation for managers in formulating resilience strategies.

5.0 Measurement Dimensions of Organisational Resilience

Exploring the categorisation of measurement dimensions for organisational resilience is a prerequisite for assessing resilience levels within organisations. As organisational resilience has gained increasing attention in management research, scholars have developed corresponding assessment items based on varying research needs, leading to the formation of multidimensional scales for measuring organisational resilience levels (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Existing organizational resilience measurement dimensions

Author (year)	Dimension
Andersson et al. (2019)	Risk awareness, co-operation preference, agility, improvisation
DesJardine et al. (2019)	Robustness, flexibility
Schriber et al. (2019)	Redundancy, flexibility
Wang Y. & Cai Juan (2019)	Scenario awareness, planning capability, adaptability, resilience commitment
Hu et al. (2020)	Firm resistance, firm resilience
Yang, Xiu and Zhao, Chulong (2020)	Restoring homeostatic capability, beyond status quo ante capability
Zhao Jingjie et al. (2020)	Learning ability, adaptive ability
Liang & Cao (2021)	Planning capacity, adaptability
Duan Shengsen et al. (2021)	Adaptation resilience, integration and optimisation capacity
Li Ping and Zhu Jiazhe (2021)	Rebound recovery, beyond improvement
Zhang Xiu'e and Teng Xinyu (2021)	Situational awareness, anticipatory capacity, adaptive capacity
Feng, Wenna and Chen, Han (2022)	Anticipatory ability, coping ability, adaptive ability
Li Xueling et al. (2022)	Adjustment resilience, adaptation resilience
Chi, Dongmei et al. (2023)	Anticipation-Response ability, Defence-Rebound ability, Growth-Rebound ability
Wang et al. (2023)	Forward-looking resilience, improvisation resilience

(Source:) Developed by the author

According to existing research literature, there is yet to be a unified understanding or general consensus among scholars regarding the dimensional categorisation of organisational resilience. However, most researchers recognise that the core dimensions of organisational resilience involve adaptation, recovery, and advancement to a new or improved state.

On one hand, scholars, despite employing varied terms such as agility, redundancy, robustness, and adaptive resilience, essentially focus on the capability to absorb disturbances and quickly adapt. Terms like flexibility, adaptability, adaptive resilience, resistance to change, steady-state recovery, and adaptive recovery essentially describe the organisation's capability to readjust internal strategies

and actions to restore stability. Both aspects fall under the broader concept of organisational resilience, specifically relating to bouncing back capabilities.

On the other hand, expressions such as improvement and optimisation, integration and enhancement, surpassing the original state, and adaptive learning capacity are used to indicate an organisation's ability not only to adapt to changes but to emerge in an improved state, reflecting what can be termed as bouncing forward capabilities. This aspect highlights the organisation's capacity to leverage crises or disturbances as opportunities to thrive in a stronger position than before.

6.0 Discussion

This review highlights several implications beyond the immediate scope of organisational resilience research. Theoretically, the synthesis of resilience factors across individual, organisational, and network levels provides a foundation for developing a more integrated framework. Practically, the findings suggest actionable strategies for enhancing organisational resilience, such as fostering collaborative mechanisms and tailoring resilience-building measures to different organisational types. Moreover, the study's focus on multidimensional resilience offers insights that could inform cross-disciplinary applications, including community resilience and personal resilience. Future research could explore the interactions between resilience factors in diverse cultural or industrial contexts, providing a richer understanding of organisational resilience.

7.0 Conclusion and Prospects

7.1 Study Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it is confined to literature indexed in specific databases (Web of Science, CNKI, and WanFang) and limited to English and Chinese publications, potentially excluding relevant studies. Second, the focus on resilience factors and measurement dimensions may overlook cultural and contextual variability. Lastly, subjective biases in literature selection and classification, despite predefined criteria, cannot be entirely avoided.

7.2 Future Methodological Directions

The review methodology proved effective in identifying key themes and synthesizing theoretical perspectives on organisational resilience. However, future research could enhance this approach by integrating quantitative meta-analysis for statistical precision, combining systematic reviews with empirical studies, and adopting longitudinal or cross-disciplinary frameworks to explore temporal and contextual dimensions. These reflections validate the current approach while highlighting pathways for improvement.

7.3 The Directions for Future Research

First point, multidimensional and cross-level research on organisational resilience. Organisational resilience is inherently a complex concept spanning various dimensions and level. Existing studies often focus on a single perspective—such as trait, outcome, process, or capability—without adequately examining the interactions between these perspectives. Future research could explore the interplay among different dimensions of resilience, aiming to construct an integrated theoretical framework to clarify how resilience operates through cognitive and behavioural coordination. Studies could examine the interaction between rapid adaptation and resource reconfiguration within organizations in response to environmental changes, thereby elucidating the synergistic effects of resilience across various dimensions.

Second point, research on resilience characteristics across different organisation types. Resilience can take many forms and shapes in various organizational types and industries. Supply disruption solutions may differ between manufacturing and service industries, while SMEs and large multinational enterprises may acquire and utilize resilience resources differently. These differences should be discussed in future research with a view to establishing models of resilience specific to specific organizational types. This will make management advice more precise, thus helping several organizations deal and overcome crisis situations in a healthy manner.

Third point, process research on the mechanisms of building organisational resilience. The process of developing organisational resilience is dynamic, intricate, and progressive; it calls for the integration of resources, strategic adaptation, and mechanism shaping in an unpredictable environment. Businesses can improve their flexibility and stability in managing risks by optimising internal resources and integrating external synergy. They can also quickly detect changes and optimise their action paths to preserve their competitive advantages through strategic adjustment and environmental monitoring. Building dynamic capacities and crisis management systems, as well as fostering an open, cooperative, and creative organisational culture, are crucial to forming the internalised resilience mechanism. The ability of an organisation to "bounce back" from a crisis through innovation and change, fostering long-term growth and sustainable development, is just as important as its ability to resume regular operations during a crisis.

Fourth point, interactions among resilience influencing factors at individual, organisational, and network levels. Factors affecting organizational resilience encompass not only the organisation itself but both individual and external network elements. Future study should investigate the mechanisms by which these components interact, with special emphasis on how individual psychological traits, leadership styles, strategic choices at the organizational level, and organizational culture together influence organizational resilience. Furthermore, network-level factors, such as links to supply chains and partner networks, are critical in gaining organizational responsiveness and recovery under unpredictable contexts. A detailed review of network-level factors will lead to the development of a sound resilience model for organizations facing the challenges of the modern business world.

Organizational resilience can, therefore, be seen as an imperative for modern organizations in order for them to successfully navigate turbulent situations and provide significant theoretical and practical benefits. However, as a complex and constantly developing concept, the complexity and diversity of organizational resilience have not yet been satisfactorily unpacked in previous research. Further research should adopt a multi-dimensional perspective, integrating multiple theoretical approaches and using diverse research methods to fully explain the processes of building resilience and models of application. More emphasis should be given to practical value by providing real strategic guidance for management practices that would help an organization achieve both sustainable development and innovation in uncertain situations.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

By providing a thorough synthesis of previous research and elucidating its definition and meanings from a variety of theoretical angles, this paper advances the study of organisational resilience. It provides a multilayer framework for comprehending resilience dynamics by identifying and classifying resilience components at the human, organisational, and network levels. The study also assesses current measuring aspects, fills in methodological gaps, and suggests future research avenues, such as comparison studies, cooperative mechanisms, and resilience creation processes. These revelations open the door for integrative methods to further organisational theory and empirical study.

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