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*International Journal of Emergency Services*

*Special Issue: "Organisational resilience: management of emergencies & crises"*

The secret of organisation success: A revision on organisational and team resilience

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### **Abstract**

The concept of resilience has been primarily studied on how individuals respond to a crisis or difficulty. However, resilience is a fundamental quality of individuals, groups, organizations, and systems as a whole to respond productively to disruptive events. Hence, the concept of “resilient organisation” has gained popularity as a concept that might aid organisations survive and thrive in difficult or volatile economic times. Thus, in the present review, we examine and review different conceptualisations of this emergent topic in the management literature taking into account the common features of resilience capacity in organisations and teams. Moreover, there is a growing tendency to use teams as the basic unit of organisation, because the study of work teams, their processes, their experiences and states are crucial to understand and to improve the contribution of work teams to the organization success. Therefore, we also explore the correlates on team processes (e.g. leadership, efficacy, team work) of team resilience at different work settings. In sum, we aim to analyse the existing studies on team and organisational resilience, and the future research challenges on this emergent topic.

**Keywords:** Organisational resilience, team resilience, crisis.

### **The secret of organisation success: A revision on organisational and team resilience**

Organisations have to strive with difficult situations and navigate in an uncertain, rapidly changing and crisis context. Especially in the last years, the capacity not only to survive but also to emerge stronger than before is a key aspect of organisational success. Learning for the past mistakes, making proactive decisions, creating a culture of innovation and collaboration are relevant facets that have been distinguished in the organisational settings to achieve organisational goals. For that reason, in the management of emergency and crises there is a growing interest of knowing which specific facets are needed not only to overcome obstacles but also to achieve a better functioning of the organisation or the team. In fact, building resilience within organisations is of vital importance to understand and respond to crisis situations (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005). Therefore, in this revision, we are going to analyze this concept of resilience in the organisational settings. Focusing, more specifically, on team resilience. To note that there are different perspectives to study organisational and team resilience (for instance economic or ecological perspectives) but we depart from the psychological or behavioural approach to study resilience. Therefore, we review the main factors, according the literature, that boost resilience capacity among work teams. In doing so, our main contribution with this review is to review the team resilience concept and relate it to the factors that contribute to build team resilience from a multilevel perspective (i. e. taking into account organizational and team factors).

Thus, we focus in the highest levels within the organisation, that is the work-teams. Because, the study of organisations should involve not only the analysis of the individual component, but also how individuals organize their resources in a collective

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way to perform their work. Moreover, there is a growing tendency to use teams as the basic unit of organisational research (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, & Wiechmann, 2004).

### *Resilience origins*

The term resilience has originally been widely used and defined in physics as the property of certain materials, especially metals, to resist breakdown by impact or strong pressure and return to its initial shape or form. Later on, psychology has imported this concept to name the ability to bounce back or recover from stress (Smith, Tooley, Christopher, & Kay, 2010).

Most resilience studies come from the area of psychology and mainly they have been focused on individual resilience, especially among children (Harland, Harrison, Jones, & Reiter-Palmon, 2005), and within the clinical psychology (Bonanno, 2004). Recently, this term has been extended to the study of how organizations and communities behave in situations of crisis (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). Especially after September 11<sup>th</sup> disaster, from that point there is a growing tendency on studying resilience in organizations and communities and how they reacted to that crisis (i. e. Gittell, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006). And mainly how the emergency services reacted and recover from that moment (Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003). Therefore, Horne and Orr (1998, p. 31) defined resilience as a fundamental quality of individuals, groups, organizations, and systems as a whole to respond productively to significant change that disrupts the expected pattern of events without engaging in an extended period of regressive behavior. In other words, resilience is not only an individual characteristic, but also a quality that can be studied from a collective point of view (e.g., group, community, and organization).

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### *Defining resilience in organisational settings*

The concept of “resilient organisation” has gained popularity as a concept that might aid organisations survive and thrive in difficult or volatile economic times (Rioli & Savicki, 2003). To note that different approaches may be employed to study this concept, as Mamouni Limnios, Mazzarol, Ghadouani and Schilizzi (2014) suggest. Therefore in the present review we focus in the psychological or behavioral attribute approach, defining resilience as a capacity of organizations and teams.

Different descriptions of what defines and characterizes a resilient organisation exist on the literature, for instance, Tillement, Cholez, and Reverdy (2009, p. 231) define organisational resilience as the ability to manage disturbances of the normal workflow and to regain a dynamically stable state that allows the organization’s goals of production and safety to be achieved. For instance, it can be conceptualized as a resilience potential in innovation contexts (Moenkemeyer, Hoegl, & Weiss, 2012). Whereas, Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007, p. 3418) defined it as the maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging conditions such that the organization emerges from those conditions strengthened and more resourceful. To our point of view, this definition is especially important because not only defends the idea that resilient organizations overcome the crisis, but also encompasses the key idea that they also emerge stronger.

In the same line, different models have been theoretically developed to understand which are the factors that enhance organisational resilience. On the one hand, Lengnick-Hall, Beck, and Lengnick-Hall, (2011) propose that an organisation's capacity for resilience is developed through strategically managing human resources to create competencies among core employees, that when aggregated at the organisational level, make it possible for organizations to achieve the ability to respond in a resilient manner

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when they experience severe shocks (p. 243). They develop the model according to three elements (specific cognitive abilities, behavioral characteristics, and contextual conditions) central to fostering an organization's capacity for resilience. Then they analyse these elements in three different levels: individual contributions of the employees (for instance, sharing information and knowledge widely), human resources principles (i. e., create fluid team-based work and job design), and human resources policies (i. e., teamwork and group based incentives). To know more about this model see Lengnick-Hall et. al. (2011). These authors make an important contribution regarding the description of the three organisational attributes that underlie the path-dependent process of creating a collective capacity for resilience. However due to the complexity of this model, it has not been empirically tested yet in the literature.

On the other hand, Mallak (1998) operationalized the characteristics that configure resilience in organisations. Specifically he argued that the review of resilience concepts leads to the development of principles for implementing resilience in organisations, obtaining the following seven basic principles of resilient workers: 1) Perceived experiences constructively, even if those experiences caused pain; 2) Perform positive adaptive behaviors, that is to respond in a positive and adaptive way to a wide range of events; 3) Ensure adequate external resources, resilience requires a worker to access resources other than those typically used in the course of one's job. Moreover, the worker needs to be shown examples of how to access these resources; 4) Expand decision-making boundaries, resilient workers need the ability and authority to make decisions on the spot in a variety of situations; 5) Practice bricolage, when situations unravel, they proceed with whatever materials are on hand; 6) Develop tolerance for uncertainty, resilient workers has the capacity to make good decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Workers must develop the ability to make decisions with less than the

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desired amount of information; 7) Build virtual role systems. This refers to an advanced form of work team relationships where the team can continue in the absence of one or more members. This continuity comes from each worker's ability to visualize how the entire team functions, not just his or her particular role.

In sum, both Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) and Mallak (1998) principles serve as a guideline in resilience characteristics at work, however they are mainly descriptive. Moreover scarce empirical research has been carried out regarding which factors are necessary to promote resilience at work beyond the individual features, or the human resources principles and policies. In other words, more research is needed to know about resilient work teams.

### *Team resilience*

According to Bennett, Aden, Broome, Mitchell, and Rigdon (2010) resilience may be viewed as much as a social factor (existing in teams or groups) as an individual trait. Moreover, this idea echoes Bandura's (1997) concept of collective efficacy, which suggests that a social group can feel that they have the positive ability to change their environment effectively. In this line, Blatt (2009) highlighted that resilience is an important quality for entrepreneurial teams.

As we have already stated, there is a growing tendency to use teams as the basic unit of organization (DeShon, et al., 2004). Because the study of work teams, more specifically, the study of how they work, their processes, their experiences and states are crucial to understand and to improve the contribution of work teams to the organisation success.

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But resilience is shown after crisis, after the trauma, therefore only allows us to understand the past. It allows us to understand why certain workers have managed to emerge stronger after overcoming a crisis. In this line, recent research about resilience is attaching more importance to "building resilience" that is, active efforts to ensure resources for the individual, teams and organizations to cope with adversity (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005; Somers, 2009). So, the approach of this revision is not to study resilient teams after a crisis, but to understand their ability to adapt and emerge strengthened from difficult situations, and which factors contribute to it. Thus, we understand team resilience as a capacity that teams have in order to overcome crisis and difficulties. This capacity may be built on existing resources that teams possess. This active role in building resilience, although has received little attention in the literature, is crucial since knowing how to build resilience within organisations is of vital importance to understand and respond to crisis situations. So, knowing which factors or resources build team resilience is of special interest for emergency teams.

Therefore, resilience is a capability that can be developed deliberately (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005). In fact, Pollok, Paton Smith, and Violanti (2003) postulated that resilience in emergency teams could be facilitated through appropriate team structure and management. However, to our known, no empirical research has been carried out regarding that specific factors contribute to enhance team resilience. Thus, in this line, the objective of this revision is to deep into the resources existing in the literature, at team and organisational level, which build and enhance work team resilience.

To analyse which factors are related to team resilience, we decided to focus our attention in the study of resources that could have an immediate effect on the perception about the team capability for being capable not only to overcome crisis and uncertainty

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situations but become strengthened once they have passed. Therefore we thought that, according to the literature revision we propose several factors regarding the role they play in resilience. Hence, the literature review further presented follows the logic of the, role played in team resilience by: 1) Their own beliefs (of team members) as a team that they are capable of doing their job properly, 2) Their leader, that is the way the leader present obstacles and difficulties as challenges to employees, and guide them in the right way, 3) Their capacity to work as a team, having the same aim to achieve, and 4) The support provide by their organization, supplying to the team all resources they need to achieve their goal in the healthiest way; deserve to be studied. Thus, each of these team and organizational resources will be presented below.

### *Factors to build team resilience*

To analyse which factors build team resilience, we need to review those resources that previous research has pointed out which are protective resources. These protective resources are mainly studied in the literature at individual level. According to Friberg, Hjemdal, Rosenvenge, and Martinussen (2003) resilient people are more flexible than vulnerable people, besides they cope to adversity by using several protective resources either within themselves or in their environment. These resources are: 1) Personal competence (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, hope, and determination); 2) Social competence (e.g., social adeptness, cheerful mood, and good communication skills); 3) Personal structure (e.g., ability to uphold daily routines, to plan and organize); 4) Family coherence (e.g., family cooperation, loyalty, and stability); and 5) Social support (e.g., access to support from friends and family, intimacy, and ability to provide support). In the same line, Grotberg (2003) developed three category framework for grouping the protective factors of resilience: 1) External support, such as trusted family

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and non-family members; 2) Inner strengths, such as self-efficacy; and 3) Interpersonal and problem solving skills, such as generating new ideas on how to do things.

Within all these protective resources, self-efficacy deserves especial attention, but in its collective way: collective efficacy. We understand collective efficacy as the shared group belief in their joint capacities to organize and to execute the courses of action required to produce certain levels of profits (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997) when facing adverse events, those who retain the belief that they will be able to exert control over themselves are more likely to persevere in their efforts and in the face of difficulties. Moreover, Mallak (1998) pointed out that self-efficacy means a person has confidence in his or her ability to perform a specific task in a particular situation and this is, according to this author, the cognitive side of resilience. Finally, Barreira and Nakamura (2006) also highlighted the relationship between self-efficacy and resilience focusing in motivation, thus, they explained that self-efficacy could be a factor relevant to the motivational mechanism as they tend to establish themselves most challenging and demanding objectives. Following the above reasoning, we are convinced that is crucial for building work team resilience that the team perceives they can perform their work, and they will be persistent in face of difficulties, therefore they perceive they are able to overcome crisis.

Apart from personal competences, Friborg, et al. (2003) emphasized the social support competences. Within this group, two main social resources: transformational leadership and teamwork.

The role of leadership has been emphasized in creating a culture of innovation and proactivity responsible of resilience culture in organizations (Teixeira & Werther, 2013). Thus, according to our behavioral approach, the leadership style closer to the

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idea of proactivity and innovation is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership occurs when a leader fosters closer relationships with subordinates that are characterized by having less distance between them despite their power and by an individualized consideration of member needs and capabilities (Bass, 1990). There are a number of authors who have theorized a link between leadership and resilience in different forms. Luthans and Avolio (2003) stressed that developing the capacity for resilience is a vital component of authentic leadership development. In the same line, Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) concluded that leadership could provide insight into the etiology and course of positive adjustment or adaptability under challenging conditions. Likewise, Bass (1990) noted that transformational leaders may convert crises into developmental challenges by presenting crises as challenges that can be overcome by providing intellectual stimulation to promote subordinates' thoughtful, creative, adaptive solutions to stressful conditions, rather than hasty, defensive, maladaptive ones. Moreover, Harland, et al. (2005) tried to answer if leaders make a difference in helping employees become more resilient in the face of difficulties. These authors made a great work justifying theoretically the relationship between each dimension of transformational leadership and resilience. Finally, they tested that all five dimensions of transformational leadership were related with subordinate resilience. In this line, it is easy to think that the same will occur in the case of work team. However, to our knowledge, there is no empirical evidence about the relationship between transformational leadership and team resilience. So, future lines of research on team resilience have to address this unsolved question.

On the other hand, teamwork is understood such as the degree that team members have their objectives clear and they have shared and interdependent goals (Salanova, Cifre, Martínez, Llorens, & Lorente, 2011). Teamwork has emerged recently as one of

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the most important facilitators in achieving positive, cost-effective outcomes in various organisational settings (Procter & Currie, 2004). Whereas specific empirical research linking resilience and teamwork has not been found, Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003) argued that resilience can be fostered through problem-solving networks, social capital, and relationships because the greater usage of respectful interaction can accelerate and enrich the exchange of information and the capacity to process it. So, resilience can be fostered by adopting relational work systems that help to support and sustain the coordination that emerges in response to external threats. Thus, the more team members act as a team, the more resilient they become, in the same way, the clearer their goals, the more resilient they will be.

So far, we have proposed several team factors that may enhance team resilience within the organisation regarding previous research, but organisations are multilevel systems (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). In other words, the organization may be an integrated system, with different levels (i.e., organisation, group, and individual). However past research has not taken this fact into account. Although, there are signs of change since research is moving toward the development of an integrated conceptual and methodological paradigm for organisational science (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

Following this objective of understanding the organisation as an integrated system, we include not only the team level, but also the organisational one. Therefore, when we talk about resources that make teams more resilient, we must not forget that teams are inserted in a particular organisation with its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, team resilience may be affected by the decisions taken at the highest level of the organisation. In this level, the organisational strategies, that affect the entire organisation, are studied. We understand organisational strategies as the extent to which work teams benefit from the positive organisational strategies; those include collective

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strategies, ways of doing, and cultural elements of the organization. They are part of their business philosophy. This idea goes in line with the model of Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011).

Studying organisational strategies is not new in literature since Gist and Woodall (2000) developed a series of organisationally based strategies, in the individual level, to develop, enhance and maintain individual resilience factors. The strategies were focused on the incorporation of information provision, support practices, and on the development of specific skills and resources.

We will analyze one by one. Firstly, we will analyze work-life balance. Cameron and Brownie (2010) found, in their qualitative study among aged care nurses, that that work-life balance is important determinant of resilience. Secondly, we focus on skills development. Skills are a key component of resilience, therefore the development of mental coping, social and cognitive skills are fundamental for building resilience (e.g., Cefai, 2008). Likewise, social skills have been studied previously as precursors of resilience (Friborg, et al., 2003; Grotberg, 2003). Thirdly, we consider career development. It is known that individual resilience is an important factor in the workers' career development (Borgen, Amundson, & Reuter, 2004). But, if we consider career development as an organisational resource, this will allow teams to be in line with their preferences, and competences. Therefore, this strategy may allocate workers to move closer to their own career objectives, hence, the team will be plenty of properly skills and competences, and this may increase their resilience. Fourthly, we include well-being. Chao (2010) affirmed that well-being and resilience are two indispensable factors for coping with adversity and even thriving in spite of it. Moreover, Dunn, Iglewicz, & Moutier, (2008) assessed that helping medicine students cultivate the skills to sustain

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their well-being throughout their careers has important payoffs for the promotion of physician resilience and personal fulfillment. Fifthly, we consider equity. The fact that workers receive fair and commensurate rewards boosts a state of calm in the team with no conflicts about the injustice perception. In addition, this resource, offered by the organization, improve links between workers, which is a protective factor of resilience (Friborg et al., 2003). Finally, we also include communication. A good communication is crucial for the team to enhance their resilience, because communication is essential for finding out what challenges must be faced by team and how many resources they have. For a review on communication and resilience, see Buzzanell (2010). This author explained how the field of communication as a whole and through specific disciplinary areas can contribute to scholarship on and practice in resilience.

### *Conclusion*

In this revision we have analyzed those factors or resources that are related to team resilience. From a psychological-behavioral point of view we posit that there is a lack of research on which factors build team resilience, so this review tries to clarify and relate independent and isolated studies on resilience and taking into account the resources (both at team and organisational level) that build team resilience capacity.

Therefore, from this revision we may conclude that different factors may be related to team resilience. Based on the arguments presented in this revision, we make the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Collective efficacy will be positively associated with team resilience. Thus, the more collective efficacy there is, the more team resilience there will be.

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Proposition 2: Transformational leadership will be positively associated with team resilience. The more transformational leadership there is, the more team resilience there will be.

Proposition 3: Teamwork will be positively associated with team resilience. The more teamwork there is, the more team resilience there will be.

Proposition 4: Organisational practices (such as work-life balance, career development...etc.) will be positively associated with team resilience. The more organizational practices there are, the more team resilience there will be.

We hope, these propositions may be of help in future research regarding team resilience. Studies that confirm empirically these relationships regarding the factors that build resilience are needed.

From a practical perspective, considering team resilience as a capacity, so resilience can be enhanced (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Pollock et al., 2003), with this revision we try to give a clue on which aspects of the organization both research and practitioners should focus on (e.g., collective efficacy, transformational leadership, teamwork, and organisational practices). For instance, to build team resilience, practitioners should pay attention to boosting collective efficacy through managing interventions. Furthermore, practitioners and organizations may focus on how to train transformational leadership within teams, facilitate and improve teamwork through training, or implement organizational practices such as facilitating communication, career development or work-family balance.

Taking into account the relevant role that the above cited organisational strategies play as an enhancing factor regarding resilience, future studies should include

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these facets to study and enhance team resilience. In other words, in future research authors who want to study team resilience, should address other factors (such as organisational ones) analyzing the organization as a whole to have a better understanding of the complex concept of organisational and team resilience. From this revision other questions arise, for instance: resilient organizations are those that have a higher number of resilient teams? In sum, there is still a long way to go in the understanding of this phenomenon of organisational and team resilience.

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