

E-ISSN: 3108-4192

APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies

2023, Volume 3, Issue 1, Page No: 100-109

Available online at: <https://apsshs.com/>

Journal of Applied Organizational Systems and Behavior

The Hidden Human Costs of Building Crisis-Ready Organizational Resilience

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Abstract

Organizations are increasingly expected to anticipate disruption, mobilize resources rapidly, maintain continuity, and learn while adversity is unfolding. Yet resilience is often assessed through organizational functioning while the employee effort required to preserve that functioning remains analytically secondary. This critical review examines how adaptive capacity and crisis readiness may generate, relocate, or conceal emotional, cognitive, and relational strain. It uses a transparent, purpose-led review approach to integrate research on organizational resilience, crisis management, work design, human resource systems, employee adjustment, and occupational well-being. The evidence converges on the importance of anticipatory capability, coordinated response, supportive resources, and adaptive learning, but it conflicts in construct definition, level of analysis, temporal framing, and the treatment of employee endurance as either a resource or an outcome. The review therefore distinguishes resilience produced through matched resources and legitimate authority from resilience sustained through intensified demands, boundary erosion, invisible coordination, and deferred recovery. Its original contribution is the Resilience-Burden Redistribution Framework, which organizes how continuity demands may move strain across employees, teams, managers, households, and organizational boundaries. The framework is a conceptual synthesis rather than a validated causal model. Implications concern demand-resource accounting, authority-responsibility alignment, consequential employee voice, recovery protection, and monitoring of delayed or displaced costs. The review remains bounded by heterogeneous measures, context-specific crisis evidence, limited longitudinal and multilevel designs, and uncertain transferability across sectors and institutional environments. Empirical testing is required before the proposed relationships can support generalized organizational prescriptions.

Keywords: Organizational adaptive capacity, Crisis readiness and resource mobilization, Resilience-burden redistribution framework, Structural responsibility and governance implications, Costs, Building

How to cite this article: Zhang W, Hui C, Tan M. The Hidden Human Costs of Building Crisis-Ready Organizational Resilience. J Appl Organ Syst Behav. 2023;3(1):100-9. <https://doi.org/10.51847/EoL01fojnx>

Received: 28 May 2023; **Revised:** 09 September 2023; **Accepted:** 13 September 2023

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Introduction

Organizational resilience is commonly invoked as the capacity to prepare for adversity, sustain critical functioning, respond effectively, and adapt afterward. Crisis-management and resilience scholarship overlap across preparedness, response, adjustment, and learning, although they emphasize different phases and organizational outcomes [1]. This combined perspective usefully moves analysis beyond immediate survival. Organizational crises, however, also unfold through precrisis prevention, response, and postcrisis interpretation, with consequences shaped by organizational action and stakeholder judgement [2]. Resilience is therefore neither a single event outcome nor an uncomplicated organizational virtue.

A central difficulty is that resilience research combines distinct intellectual traditions, constructs, and units of analysis. Management scholarship uses the term for adaptation, reliability, employee strengths, business models, and supply-chain continuity, while workplace research distinguishes individual, team, and organizational processes that cannot be collapsed



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without conceptual loss [3, 4]. When organizational continuity is inferred from visible output alone, the effort, depletion, and relational disruption supporting that output may disappear from evaluation. Employee persistence can then be misread as evidence that organizational arrangements are adequate.

This problem becomes especially visible when resilience is assigned as a role responsibility. Qualitative evidence concerning resilience managers indicates that responsibility for building organizational resilience may itself concentrate demands while leaving those role holders insufficiently supported [5]. The contradiction is consequential: an organization may appear better prepared because particular employees absorb uncertainty, coordinate fragmented responses, regulate others' emotions, and repair breakdowns. Such effort can be organizationally valuable without being sustainably resourced, fairly distributed, or institutionally acknowledged.

Recent crises intensified this concern by changing work design, leadership, inequality, health risks, and work-family boundaries simultaneously [6]. Pandemic evidence cannot stand for every crisis, but it demonstrates why organizational continuity and employee consequences should not be evaluated separately. This article therefore undertakes a critical review of how adaptive capacity and crisis readiness are constituted, how resources are mobilized, and where resulting strain is located. Its contribution is an original framework for examining resilience as both organizational capability and possible burden-redistribution process. The framework organizes evidence and testable questions; it does not establish causality, universal applicability, or implementation readiness.

Critical review method

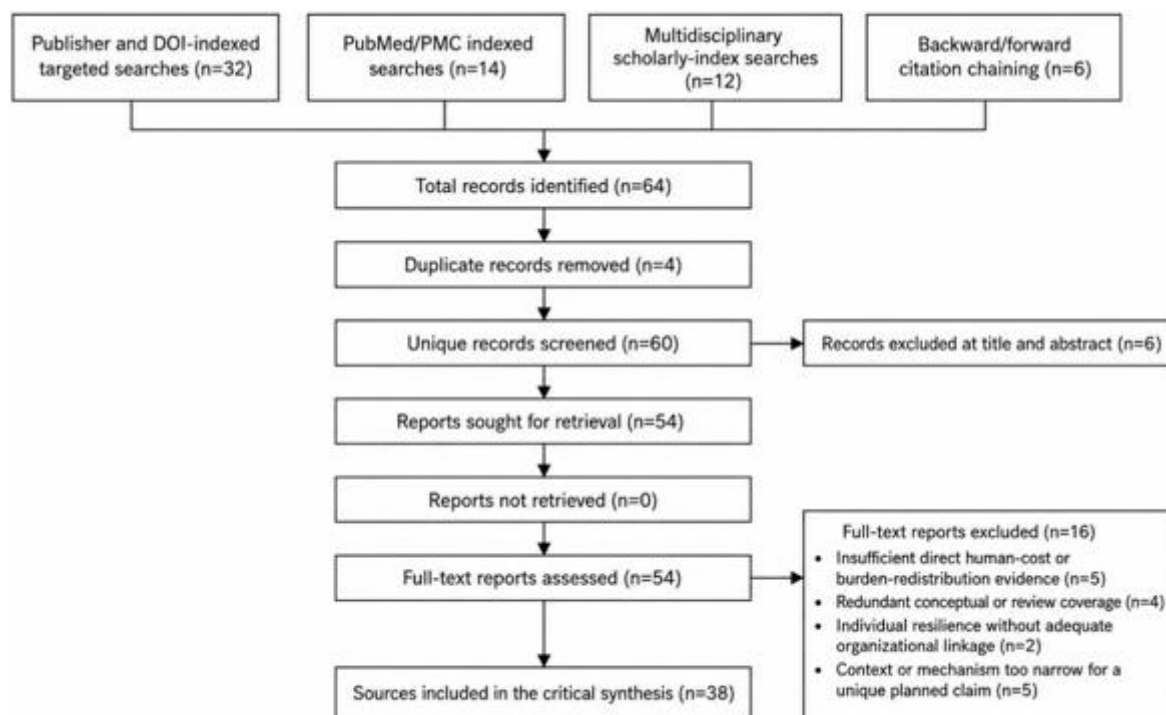
The review used a transparent critical-review design to evaluate assumptions, constructs, methods, findings, omissions, and contradictions rather than to estimate a pooled effect. Methodological choices were aligned with the review's evaluative and theory-building purpose, because review designs should be selected according to their questions and intended contributions rather than by label convention [7]. The guiding questions concerned adaptive capacity, crisis-resource mobilization, cross-level strain transfer, hidden human costs, structural responsibility, alternative explanations, and the conditions under which the proposed synthesis could be challenged.

Theory-advancing review work can expose taken-for-granted assumptions, reconcile tensions, and propose new conceptual relationships when prior evidence is kept distinct from the review's own synthesis [8]. Searches combined title variants with terms for organizational resilience, crisis readiness, adaptive capacity, work design, demand-resource processes, recovery, emotional labor, cognitive load, relational costs, employee voice, governance, measurement, and multilevel boundaries. Eligible sources were peer-reviewed journal articles with verifiable DOIs, direct relevance to a planned claim or synthesis category, and sufficient methodological information for bounded interpretation.

For each included source, the review extracted its purpose, design, organizational or national context, unit and level of analysis, time horizon, focal constructs, reported relationships, limitations, and transferability boundaries. Relevance appraisal examined whether the evidence supported a specific claim, exposed a contradiction, clarified a construct, informed a table or figure element, or constrained the proposed framework. The synthesis compared convergence and conflict by design, context, level, temporality, and measurement while separating reported findings from critical interpretation and original conceptual integration.

Targeted searches identified 64 records: publisher and DOI-indexed searches yielded 32, PubMed/PMC searches 14, multidisciplinary scholarly-index searches 12, and citation chaining six. Four duplicates were removed; 60 records were screened; six were excluded at title and abstract; and 54 reports were retrieved and assessed. Sixteen full texts were excluded for insufficient direct evidence, redundant coverage, inadequate organizational linkage, or an overly narrow mechanism. Transparent flow reporting and explicit search documentation support auditability [9, 10]. Their use here is a reporting aid and does not convert the article into a systematic review or establish exhaustive coverage.

Figure 1 reports the verified flow of records through identification, duplicate removal, screening, full-text assessment, exclusion, and final inclusion for this critical review article.



The diagram is a reporting device and does not convert the article into a systematic review or establish exhaustive coverage.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Evidence Identification and Selection

Organizational adaptive capacity

Organizational adaptive capacity concerns the capabilities through which an organization notices emerging threats, coordinates action during disruption, and changes routines afterward. A capability-based account organizes this process around anticipation, coping, and adaptation before, during, and after adversity [11]. This temporal structure is useful because it prevents resilience from being reduced to a favorable endpoint. Yet the sequence is conceptual rather than universally validated, and organizations may cycle between sensing, response, reflection, and redesign rather than progress through discrete stages.

Comparison across studies remains difficult because organizational resilience varies in definition, dimensionality, measurement, temporal framing, and treatment of outcomes [12]. Some accounts emphasize retained functioning; others prioritize recovery, transformation, reliability, or learning. These choices are not interchangeable. A measure of short-term continuity may register success while overlooking depleted employees, suspended development, postponed maintenance, or weakened recovery capacity. Conversely, temporary performance decline may accompany learning and reconfiguration. Adaptive capacity should therefore be evaluated through both what the organization maintains and how that continuity is produced.

The level of analysis is equally consequential. Team resilience is theorized as an emergent property of shared resources and coordinated processes rather than the average resilience of individual members [13]. Collective efficacy, shared mental models, psychological safety, and improvisation may enable coordinated response, but their availability depends on preparation, composition, authority, and adversity exposure. Upward inference from employee coping to team or organizational resilience is therefore unwarranted unless cross-level mechanisms are specified and tested.

Evidence from a high-pressure banking context further indicates that supportive workplace conditions are associated with employee resilience [14]. This finding challenges narratives that locate resilience solely in personal toughness, but its observational and context-specific design limits causal and cross-national inference. The critical question is not whether employees should possess adaptive resources; it is whether organizational systems supply support, discretion, information, recovery, and legitimate authority commensurate with imposed demands.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for the hidden human costs of building crisis-ready organizational resilience.

Table 1. Review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for The Hidden Human Costs of Building Crisis-Ready Organizational Resilience.

Evidence domain or review construct	Review question	Eligible evidence type	Extraction fields	Appraisal or relevance criterion	Synthesis role	Main limitation	Interpretation boundary
Critical-review design	How can selection remain transparent without claiming exhaustiveness?	Review-method guidance	Purpose, search logic, appraisal, synthesis	Method matches the theory-building purpose [7]	Separates reported evidence from original integration [8]	Guidance is not topic-specific	PRISMA reporting does not redefine the review
Search transparency	Can record transitions be audited?	Reporting standards	Sources, limits, deduplication, exclusions	Identification and selection are traceable [9]	Supports accountable reporting	Standards were designed for systematic reviews	Used only as a transparency device [10]
Adaptive capability	What capabilities operate before, during, and after adversity?	Conceptual and organizational studies	Anticipation, coping, adaptation, temporality	Capability claims specify process and phase [11]	Organizes temporal analysis	Sequence lacks universal validation	No fixed stage model is assumed
Construct comparability	Are resilience measures conceptually equivalent?	Construct reviews and measurement research	Definition, dimension, measure, outcome	Terms and measures are distinguished [12]	Identifies convergence and conflict	Operationalizations are heterogeneous	No common metric is assumed
Cross-level emergence	When does individual action become team capacity?	Multilevel and team research	Shared resources, coordination, analytical level	An emergence mechanism is specified [13]	Prevents unjustified upward inference	Evidence is predominantly theoretical	Individual endurance is not organizational capacity
Resource provision	Is resilience enabled or merely demanded?	Contextual employee research	Support, discretion, climate, pressure	Organizational resources are examined [14]	Tests employee-carried interpretations	Context-specific observational evidence	Association does not establish causation

Note. Evidence-derived statements are cited. Distinctions concerning employee-carried capacity and the interpretation boundaries are original critical-review specifications.

Crisis readiness and resource mobilization

Crisis readiness is more than possession of a continuity plan. It concerns whether organizations can mobilize people, time, information, authority, technology, and social support quickly enough to respond without creating avoidable secondary harm. International human resource management analysis emphasizes coordinated systems for workforce safety, communication, staffing, mobility, and cross-border coordination [15]. These functions connect operational readiness to employment systems, but the early-pandemic evidence does not provide intervention-effect estimates or establish one optimal configuration.

Rapid mobilization also changes employees' immediate adjustment environment. Crisis-driven work alterations may create uncertainty, isolation, work-family conflict, and well-being demands that require active human resource responses [16]. Such consequences should not be treated as external to readiness. They affect whether employees can sustain attention, cooperate, learn, and recover, although early-crisis conceptual evidence cannot isolate the effects of particular resilience practices. A readiness system may therefore be operationally fast yet humanly under-resourced.

Emotional responses can cross organizational and domestic boundaries. Multiwave evidence indicates that pandemic health anxiety was associated with adverse work, family, and health outcomes [17]. The study does not show that resilience programs caused these outcomes, and pandemic-specific self-report evidence limits generalization. It nevertheless demonstrates that crisis demands are not contained within formal roles. Resource mobilization can draw upon vigilance, emotional regulation, caregiving adjustments, and household accommodation that conventional continuity indicators rarely record.

Remote work provides a parallel work-design example. Its effectiveness during crisis conditions depended on autonomy, social support, workload, monitoring, self-discipline, task interdependence, and home constraints [18]. Technology access alone was therefore insufficient, while autonomy could not be assumed to offset excessive workload or inadequate support. Across these findings, readiness appears conditional on resource-demand fit and on where coordination costs are absorbed. This does not prove a general burden-transfer mechanism. It establishes a bounded analytical requirement: evaluations of crisis readiness should trace not only which resources become available, but also which actors supply hidden labor, accept new responsibilities, lose recovery opportunities, or carry disruption beyond the workplace.

Redistribution of strain across organizational levels

Organizational continuity may be preserved while demands accumulate elsewhere. Job demands require sustained effort and can consume energy, whereas resources support motivation and may buffer demand effects; longitudinal evidence also indicates reciprocal and lagged relationships among demands, resources, burnout, and engagement [19, 20]. These findings do not directly demonstrate burden redistribution. They do, however, provide a mechanism for asking whether crisis-created demands are matched by additional resources or transferred to employees, teams, managers, households, or partners with less discretion.

Work design is the institutional channel through which autonomy, responsibility, complexity, interdependence, and social interaction are allocated [21]. During disruption, rapid redesign may enlarge discretion and learning, but it may also add coordination, availability, or decision responsibility without corresponding authority. The same arrangement can therefore function as a resource for one role and a demand for another. Redistribution should be inferred only when changes in both demands and resources are traced across levels and over time.

Technology can further alter where strain is visible. Algorithmic systems may redistribute direction, evaluation, discipline, and contestability while making managerial authority less explicit [22]. Such systems can assist coordination, yet technical capacity does not confer legitimate authority or prove improved performance. The relevant issue is whether monitoring and automated allocation clarify responsibility or intensify vigilance, opacity, and repair work. **Table 2** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in the hidden human costs of building crisis-ready organizational resilience.

Table 2. Cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in The Hidden Human Costs of Building Crisis-Ready Organizational Resilience.

Construct, mechanism, or relationship	Representative context	Reported finding	Evidence design	Convergent evidence	Conflicting evidence	Methodological concern	Review interpretation
Demand-resource dynamics	Varied occupations	Demands consume energy; resources support motivation [19]	Theory review	Lagged patterns also occur [20]	Magnitude and timing vary	Measures and lags differ	Proposed redistribution requires direct cross-level measurement
Work redesign	Crisis-altered roles	Work design allocates autonomy, complexity, and responsibility [21]	Integrative review	Resources may enable adaptation	Added autonomy may conceal transferred responsibility	Configuration is rarely traced across roles	Redesign may create capacity or cost
Algorithmic coordination	Digitally managed work	Systems reshape direction, evaluation, and control [22]	Integrative review	Visibility can support coordination	Visibility may intensify discipline and contestation	Technology types differ	Capability must be separated from authority
Adaptive capability	Before, during, and after adversity	Anticipation, coping, and adaptation organize capability [11]	Conceptual model	Temporal processes extend beyond survival	Stages may overlap or recur	Sequence is not universally validated	Evaluate process and production conditions
Crisis mobilization	HR and remote-work systems	Readiness depends on coordinated people and work resources [15]	Interdisciplinary synthesis	Work design also conditions effectiveness [18]	Access may remain unequal	Crisis and home contexts differ	Trace resources and hidden coordination together

Note. Evidence-derived entries are cited. “Burden redistribution” and the joint evaluation rule are original critical-review syntheses, not validated effects.

Hidden emotional, cognitive, and relational costs

Emotional cost includes the regulation required to display calm, reassurance, confidence, or empathy while uncertainty persists. Emotional labor is not uniformly harmful; consequences vary with regulation strategy, autonomy, display expectations, and interaction context [23]. During crises, however, repeated regulation may remain invisible because it appears as professionalism rather than as expended effort. Evaluation should therefore distinguish voluntary relational skill from compulsory emotional containment under constrained discretion.

Cognitive cost includes sustained vigilance, interruption, ambiguity management, and the inability to disengage after work. Recovery experiences such as psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control are associated with well-being [24]. Crisis readiness may undermine those experiences through extended availability or unresolved threat, but this pathway remains an inference unless organizational demands and within-person recovery are measured together. Visible continuity cannot establish that cognitive resources have been restored.

Relational cost arises when coordination systems weaken belonging, reciprocity, or informal support. Workplace loneliness can impair relational functioning and performance [25]. Yet loneliness cannot be attributed uniquely to remote work or crisis arrangements; pre-existing relationships, role design, leadership, and personal circumstances may also matter. Relational resilience should consequently be assessed through enacted connection and mutual support rather than communication volume alone.

Chronic strain creates the strongest warning against treating endurance as a free resource. Prospective evidence links burnout with adverse physical, psychological, and occupational consequences [26]. It does not show that resilience-building necessarily causes burnout. It does establish that persistent depletion can extend beyond immediate output and should not be excluded from resilience evaluation. **Table 3** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for contextual moderators, boundary conditions, and organizational implications.

Table 3. Contextual moderators, boundary conditions, and organizational implications.

Context or level	Moderator or boundary condition	Evidence pattern	Organizational implication	Alternative explanation	Transferability limit	Uncertainty	Research need
Individual and household	Home demands, emotion regulation, baseline resources	Crisis effects cross work and family domains [17]	Track displaced effort beyond formal hours	External threat may drive both domains	Pandemic conditions	Direction of transfer	Paired work-home longitudinal designs
Team and relationships	Shared resources and psychological safety	Team resilience is emergent [13]	Assess coordination and consequential voice	Strong teams may receive better resources	Team designs vary	Opportunity may not equal influence	Multilevel decision-trace studies
Leadership and HR systems	Enacted support and role authority	Support relates to employee resilience [14]	Compare promised with delivered resources	Resilient employees may perceive support differently	High-pressure banking	Causal direction	Prospective policy-implementation studies
Technology-mediated work	Monitoring, autonomy, task interdependence	Remote effectiveness depends on work design [18]	Separate access, control, and legitimate authority	Home conditions may explain outcomes	Emergency remote work	Technology-specific effects	Comparative work-design experiments
Sector and work setting	Performance pressure and home constraints	Support and work-design effects vary by setting [14]	Avoid universal resilience templates	Selection and baseline-resource differences	Banking and emergency remote work	Cross-context equivalence	Comparative sector and country studies

Note. Implications are proposed evidence-bounded questions. Formal support is not assumed to equal enacted practice, and voice opportunity is not treated as consequential influence.

Proposed resilience-burden redistribution framework

Organizational resilience appears to depend on configurations of resources, capabilities, processes, and context rather than one universally effective practice [27]. The proposed framework therefore begins with adversity and readiness mandates, followed by sensing, coping, adaptation, and mobilization. It then asks whether demands are matched by time, information, authority, support, and recovery or instead transferred through intensification, boundary erosion, emotional regulation, invisible coordination, monitoring, or responsibility without control.

Cross-level and temporal distinctions are necessary because resilience processes differ across individuals, teams, and organizations and across phases of adversity [28]. The framework maps potential receiving levels—frontline employees, resilience and middle managers, teams, households, and external partners—without assuming that transfer occurs in every case. Dashed relationships represent hypotheses about movement and feedback, not measured causal pathways.

Employee attributes may contribute to organizational resilience through organizational processes [29]. The framework nevertheless rejects a direct equation between resilient employees and resilient organizations. Conversion depends on work design, collective coordination, leadership, resources, and institutional conditions. Employee capacity is consequently treated as bounded and renewable only when recovery and support remain available.

Crisis evidence also suggests that facilitators and consequences can change as adaptation unfolds [30]. A system may therefore produce bounded resilience when continuity is supported by matched resources and legitimate authority, or brittle resilience when performance is maintained through concealed depletion. **Figure 2** presents the original conceptual synthesis for resilience-burden redistribution framework, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

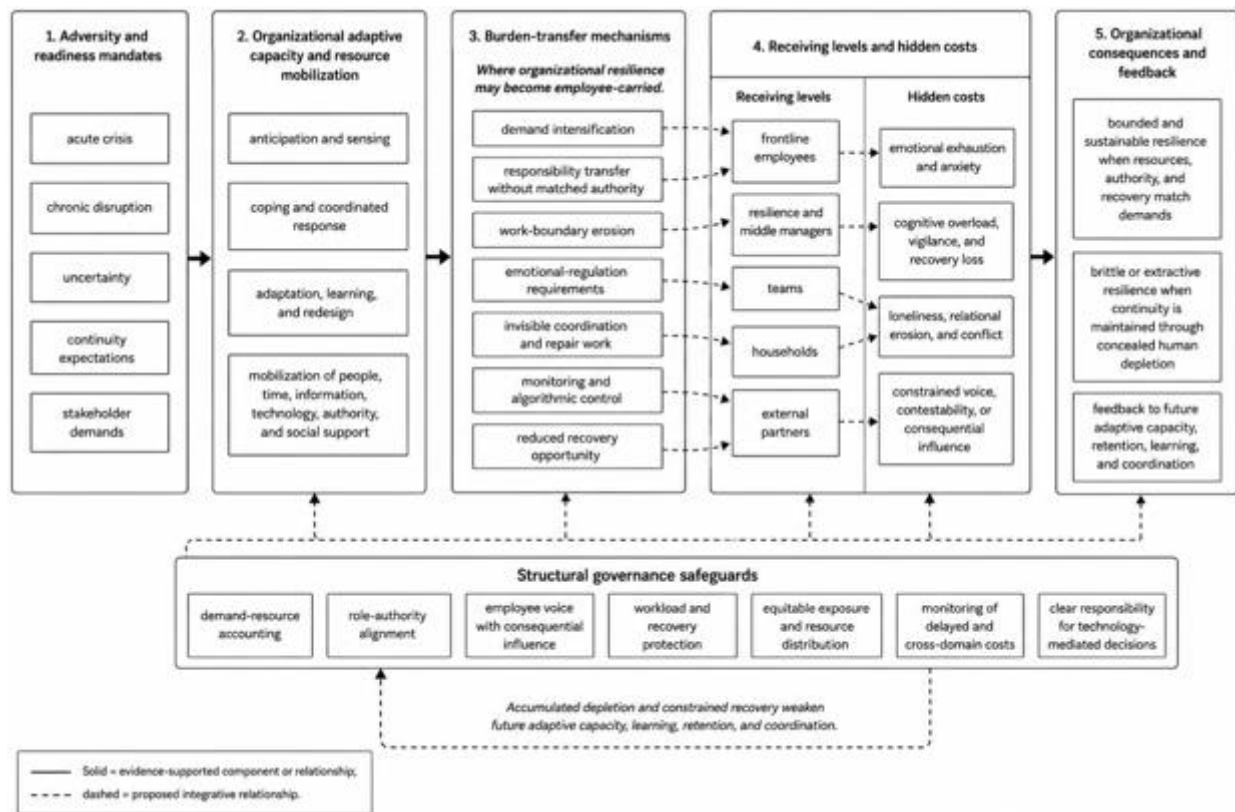


Figure 2. Resilience-Burden Redistribution Framework

Structural responsibility and governance implications

Structural responsibility begins with how leaders shape work characteristics, relationships, and meaning, all of which can affect employee well-being [31]. Governance should therefore examine decisions about staffing, priorities, role boundaries, escalation, and recovery rather than treating well-being as an individual coping problem. Leadership visibility or supportive language is insufficient when employees lack authority to refuse unsafe loads or revise failing arrangements.

A common-good human resource perspective broadens evaluation beyond organizational performance to employee and societal well-being [32]. Applied to resilience, this is a normative criterion rather than an empirically proven intervention. It asks who benefits from continuity, who supplies the adaptive labor, and whether costs are acknowledged, compensated, reduced, or transferred outside organizational accounts.

Empirical evidence indicates that sustainable human resource practices can support employee resilience and outcomes when common-good values are enacted [33]. Formal policies, however, cannot be presumed to reflect everyday access. Governance requires evidence of usable resources, fair exposure, protected recovery, and routes through which employee input changes decisions.

Leadership and organizational practices may foster employee and organizational resilience, but tourism-sector evidence illustrates the importance of context and careful cross-level measurement [34]. Governance principles should therefore be treated as testable design propositions. **Table 4** organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for evidence limitations, unresolved questions, and future research priorities.

Table 4. Evidence limitations, unresolved questions, and future research priorities.

Evidence gap	Why it matters	Current limitation	Required design	Measurement priority	Comparative context	Interpretation safeguard	Future research question
Direct burden accounting	Continuity may hide who receives added demand	Cross-level transfers remain undertheorized [28]	Cross-level panels	Demand, resource, authority, recovery change	Roles and partner boundaries	A gap is not proof of harm	When does mobilization redistribute rather than resource work?
Temporal inference	Costs may be delayed or reciprocal	Crisis trajectories are context-sensitive [30]	Before-during-after panels	Lagged functioning and depletion	Crisis phases and sectors	Avoid causal claims from association	Which sequences produce sustainable or brittle resilience?
Recovery processes	High demand may suppress restoration	Recovery is associated with well-being [24]	Within-person intensive	Detachment, sleep, workload, availability	Occupations with different schedules	Do not infer diagnosis	Does protected recovery preserve

Voice and authority	Speaking may not alter decisions	Algorithmic control can complicate contestation [22]	longitudinal study			Human and algorithmic coordination	Voice is not consequential influence	later adaptive capacity?
			Decision-trace and intervention studies	Escalation, reversal, response, authority				When can employees contest resilience demands effectively?
Governance interventions	Policy labels may conceal uneven enactment	Sustainable practices require enactment [33]	Quasi-experimental evaluation	Resource access, exposure, equity, outcomes	Countries, sectors, workforce groups	No universal best practice		Which safeguards reduce cost without weakening adaptation?

Note. The research questions and proposed measures are original synthesis. Designs must be capable of refining, challenging, or rejecting the framework.

Limitations and future research

The reviewed evidence is heterogeneous in construct definition, measurement, crisis type, occupation, sector, and analytical level. Psychosocial work factors are related to common mental-health problems, but observational designs and heterogeneous exposure measures limit causal attribution [35]. The review therefore cannot determine that resilience initiatives cause particular health outcomes or estimate the prevalence of hidden costs.

Psychological safety is associated with voice, learning, engagement, and performance [36]. Future studies must go beyond perceived permission to speak by tracing whether employee input changes workload, technology, staffing, or recovery decisions. Consequential influence is an original distinction requiring measurement rather than an established property of psychologically safe climates.

Temporal evidence is especially important because employees may need recovery most when high demands make recovery least likely [37]. Studies should combine organizational event histories with repeated employee, team, and household measures before, during, and after disruption. Such designs could test accumulation, delayed effects, reciprocal relationships, and recovery without presuming the framework is correct.

Finally, ambiguity, complexity, and inter-agency collaboration can relate negatively to employee resilience [38]. Collaboration and complexity are not inherently harmful; effects may depend on authority, coordination quality, institutional conflict, and resource sufficiency. Comparative multilevel research should therefore test when adaptive complexity becomes a resource and when it becomes an uncompensated demand.

Conclusion

Crisis-ready resilience should not be evaluated solely by whether an organization continues to function. Continuity may reflect well-resourced adaptation, but it may also depend on intensified work, transferred responsibility, emotional containment, invisible coordination, boundary erosion, and deferred recovery. This critical review integrates these possibilities without treating human cost as inevitable or organizational resilience as inherently extractive.

The Resilience-Burden Redistribution Framework offers a vocabulary for tracing demands, resources, authority, receiving levels, hidden costs, and feedback to future adaptive capacity. Its value is analytical: it makes the production and distribution of resilience contestable. The framework remains an original synthesis, not a validated causal model or universal prescription. Progress requires longitudinal and multilevel evidence capable of distinguishing sustainable capacity from continuity maintained through concealed depletion.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of interest: None

Financial support: None

Ethics statement: None

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