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Resilience, Well-Being, and Crisis Leadership Across Organizational Work Systems

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Abstract

Organizational crises expose a persistent conceptual and practical problem: systems may preserve operations while exhausting the people whose effort sustains that continuity. Resilience research has often emphasized survival, recovery, adaptation, or renewal, whereas employee well-being research has examined distress, depletion, withdrawal, and unequal exposure through partly separate theoretical traditions. This integrative review connects those domains and examines how organizational adaptive capacity, crisis-leadership behaviors, employee well-being, and structural responsibility for crisis strain interact across work systems. The review combines conceptual, quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, multilevel, and methodological evidence through a transparent, PRISMA-compatible selection and synthesis process. The synthesis indicates that adaptive capacity is phase dependent and level specific; leadership effects depend on threat conditions, identity processes, task interdependence, autonomy, and support; and operational continuity cannot be assumed to indicate healthy employee adaptation. Evidence also suggests that staffing, work design, employment security, digital arrangements, and resource allocation shape who absorbs crisis demands and who receives protection. At the same time, findings remain constrained by pandemic concentration, cross-sectional designs, uneven multilevel measurement, and frequent separation of organizational and human outcomes. The article contributes an original crisis-resilience framework that treats continuity and human cost as connected but non-equivalent outcomes. It offers bounded governance implications and identifies the longitudinal, multilevel, comparative, and mixed-method evidence required to test, refine, or reject the proposed synthesis. The framework is conceptual, not a validated causal model or universal prescription.

Keywords: Connecting resilience with human well-being, Organizational adaptive capacity, Crisis-leadership behaviors, Employee well-being and human cost, Leadership and governance implications, Research agenda

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Introduction

Crises test more than whether organizations remain open, preserve output, or recover financially. They also reveal how work systems distribute uncertainty, workload, exposure, decision authority, and opportunities for recovery. A system may appear resilient because essential functions continue, yet that continuity may depend on intensified effort, extended availability, suppressed voice, or the transfer of risk to employees. Conversely, a deliberate reduction in operations may protect workers and preserve longer-term capacity even when short-term performance declines. The central problem is therefore not whether resilience or well-being matters more, but how they should be connected without treating either as a proxy for the other. Recent scholarship shows that resilience and well-being are heterogeneous, analytically distinct constructs whose meaning changes with the outcome and level being examined [1–3]. Organizational resilience has been defined through capacities,



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processes, responses, and outcomes, while well-being encompasses more than the absence of strain. This plurality creates a recurrent inference problem: successful adaptation at the organizational level may coexist with exhaustion, insecurity, or withdrawal among employees. A defensible synthesis must therefore distinguish individual experience, team emergence, organizational continuity, and longer-term renewal rather than compressing them into a single favorable label.

Crisis-management and resilience scholarship converge around consequential adversity but differ in their treatment of temporal response, adaptation, stakeholder interpretation, and organizational outcomes [4, 5]. Crisis management often foregrounds acute disruption, sensemaking, containment, and stakeholder judgments; resilience research more often examines preparedness, absorption, adaptation, recovery, and transformation. Connecting these traditions makes leadership behavior and structural work-system choices analytically visible. It also prevents visible leader action from being mistaken for collective capacity or reputational recovery from being treated as proof of employee protection.

This integrative review examines how adaptive capacity, crisis-leadership behaviors, human cost, and structural responsibility are related across organizational work systems. Its contribution is an evidence-bounded synthesis that separates established findings from proposed relationships, preserves contradictions across methods and contexts, and develops a crisis-resilience framework in which continuity and well-being are coequal but non-interchangeable outcomes. The framework is intended to organize questions, mechanisms, and boundary conditions; it does not establish causal validation, universal applicability, or implementation readiness.

Integrative review method

The review used an integrative design because the relevant literature includes conceptual models, field surveys, daily studies, longitudinal firm data, multilevel analyses, and methodological guidance that cannot be combined through a common effect estimate. Integrative review methodology supports transparent comparison of heterogeneous evidence when the review purpose, eligibility boundaries, extraction fields, and synthesis logic are explicit [6]. Reporting followed PRISMA-compatible identification and selection conventions as a transparency device rather than as a claim of exhaustive systematic coverage [7]. Searches combined resilience, adaptive capacity, crisis leadership, well-being, human cost, structural strain, work design, resources, governance, multilevel conditions, measurement, and competing-explanation terms across publisher platforms, journal sites, DOI-indexed records, and citation chaining. Eligible articles were peer reviewed, DOI verified, substantively relevant, and sufficiently detailed for claim-level extraction. Records were checked by DOI and title, screened for direct fit, and appraised for construct clarity, design, level, context, limitation, and transferability. Theory-advancing review principles guided the separation of evidence-supported description, methodological interpretation, critical synthesis, and original contribution [8].

The bounded candidate log contained 48 records. No duplicates remained after DOI and title comparison. All 48 were screened and sought; four reports were not retrieved with sufficient completeness, leaving 44 assessed. Eleven were excluded: four failed the relevant current-Q1 criterion, four had redundant or weak incremental claim fit, two were too context specific for a distinct cross-system contribution, and one lacked sufficiently verifiable relevant-category Q1 status. Thirty-three sources entered the synthesis.

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

Resilience, Well-Being, and Crisis Leadership Across Organizational Work Systems

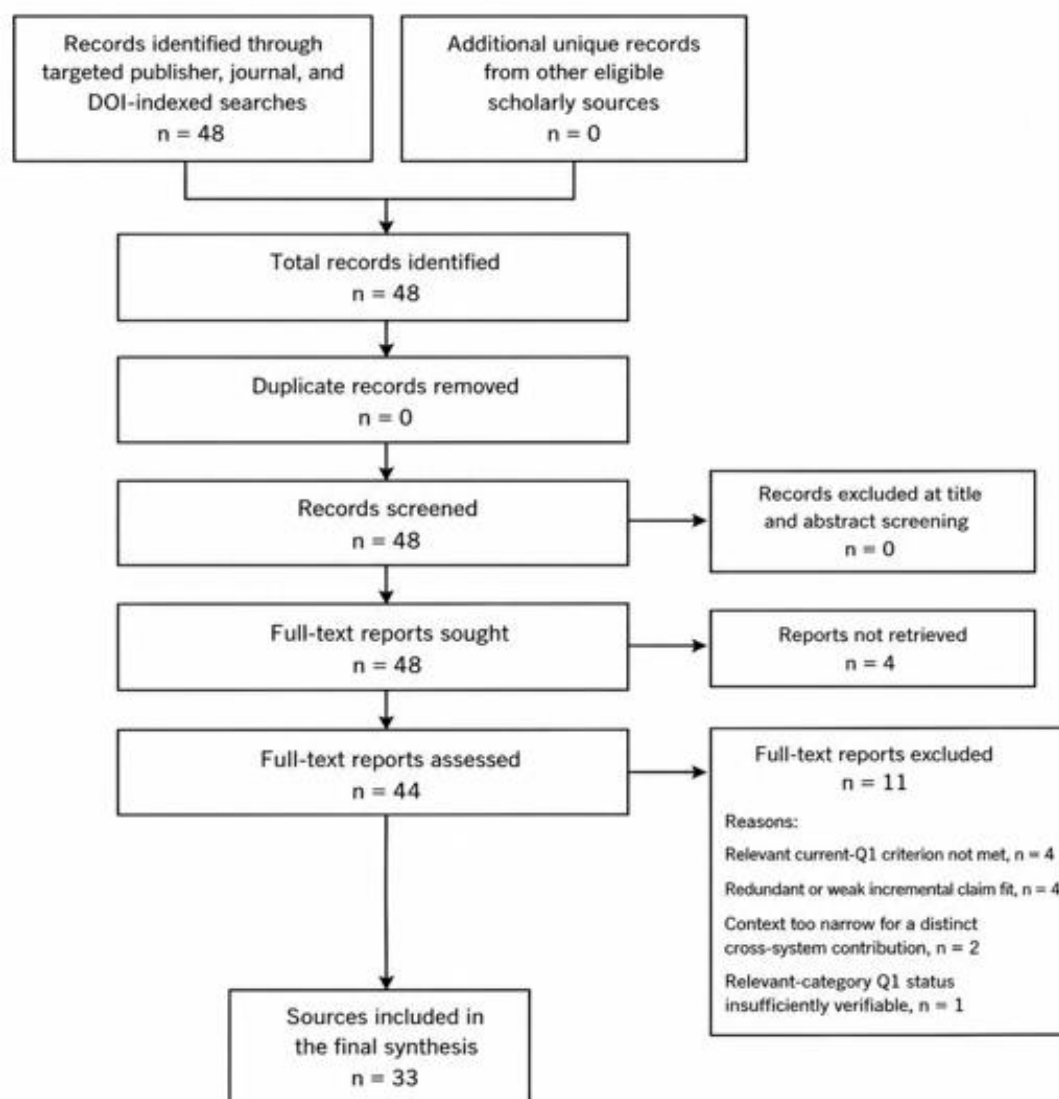


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Evidence Identification and Selection

Organizational adaptive capacity

Organizational adaptive capacity is defined here as a temporally unfolding, multilevel capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and learn from consequential disruption while maintaining or deliberately reconfiguring essential functions. A multilevel review shows that resilience is discussed at individual, team, and organizational levels, but evidence at one level cannot be transferred automatically to another [9]. This distinction matters because employee coping, team coordination, and organizational recovery may move in different directions during the same crisis.

At team level, resilience is better understood as an emergent collective capacity than as the average resilience of individual members [10]. Shared understanding, coordinated action, relational resources, and learning may support team functioning under adversity, but conceptual plausibility does not establish a universal sequence. Teams that appeared resilient may also have entered crises with stronger routines, more resources, or less severe exposure. Selection effects and prior performance therefore remain plausible alternatives.

Organization-level studies likewise suggest phase dependence. Mixed-method evidence indicates that facilitators and consequences change as organizations move through disruption, stabilization, and adaptation [11]. Longitudinal firm evidence further distinguishes initial stability from later flexibility: high-performance work systems were associated with different climate pathways across the initial jolt and recovery period [12]. These findings support a process view, yet sales stability or recovery cannot establish employee well-being, and country, sector, prior capability, and resource reserves constrain transferability.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for resilience, well-being, and crisis leadership across organizational work systems.

Table 1. Review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for Resilience, Well-Being, and Crisis Leadership Across Organizational Work Systems.

Evidence domain or review construct	Review question	Eligible evidence type	Extraction fields	Appraisal or relevance criterion	Synthesis role	Main limitation	Interpretation boundary
Resilience–well-being distinction	Are continuity and human functioning measured separately?	Reviews; empirical studies	Construct, level, outcome, time	Explicit operational distinction	Prevents outcome conflation	Definitions remain heterogeneous [1]	Continuity does not establish well-being [3]
Crisis and adversity process	Which phase and stakeholder processes are examined?	Conceptual; longitudinal; qualitative	Trigger, phase, response, adaptation	Temporal and contextual specificity	Connects crisis and resilience traditions	Phase boundaries vary [4]	Reputation is not operational resilience [5]
Integrative review method	Can unlike evidence be compared transparently?	Methodological guidance	Search, selection, extraction, synthesis	Procedures are reproducible and bounded	Supports heterogeneous synthesis	Coverage cannot be assumed exhaustive [6]	PRISMA reporting does not redefine review type [7]
Multilevel adaptive capacity	At what level does resilience reside?	Multilevel reviews; team theory	Individual, team, organization, cross-level link	Level matches claim and outcome	Prevents aggregation error	Cross-level evidence is uneven [9]	Team resilience is not mean member resilience [10]
Organizational resilience process	Do facilitators differ across crisis phases?	Mixed-method; longitudinal firm studies	Precrisis resources, stability, flexibility, recovery	Design captures timing and alternative explanations	Supports phase-sensitive synthesis	Context and outcome measures differ [11]	Firm recovery does not prove employee protection [12]
Leadership, human cost, and structural strain	Which behaviors and system choices shape exposure and resources?	Later empirical and conceptual evidence	Behavior, support, work design, insecurity, well-being	Direct relevance to planned claim	Defines subsequent evidence domains	Categories are review-organizing constructs	Relationships remain to be evaluated, not presumed

Note. Evidence-derived entries are cited. The final row identifies review-defined extraction categories and does not assert an established relationship.

Crisis-leadership behaviors

Crisis leadership is defined as enacted behavior through which actors interpret threat, establish priorities, communicate uncertainty, coordinate resources, authorize action, manage boundaries, and support collective learning. A review of crisis-leadership scholarship indicates that these behaviors are temporally and contextually situated rather than fixed expressions of a stable leader type [13]. This process definition shifts attention from charismatic visibility to what leaders and leadership systems actually enable, constrain, or distribute during disruption.

Identity leadership offers one relational mechanism. Leaders may strengthen coordinated action by constructing a shared sense of “us,” representing collective interests, and embedding identity in practice [14]. Yet common threat can itself increase cohesion, and illustrative crisis cases do not establish a general causal effect. Identity work may also exclude peripheral workers or suppress dissent when unity becomes equated with compliance. Shared identity should therefore be assessed alongside voice, legitimacy, and whose experience is represented.

Threat can also narrow leadership behavior. A multilevel event study found that the financial crisis was followed by tighter directive control [15]. Such behavior may accelerate decisions when coordination costs are high, but it may also reduce local information, autonomy, and error correction. The finding documents behavioral change after threat; it does not show that direction was universally effective or harmful.

Virtual crisis work further complicates simple prescriptions. Evidence from service employees links crisis leadership with task guidance, cohesion, autonomy, job tension, and performance under digitally transformed conditions [16]. Direction and discretion may therefore be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Their value depends on task interdependence, employee capability, time pressure, and available support. The evidence remains context bounded and partly perceptual, so favorable leadership ratings cannot be treated as causal proof that leaders produced the observed outcomes.

Employee well-being and human cost

Employee well-being denotes psychological, affective, relational, and functional experience rather than simply the absence of diagnosed illness. Human cost extends the construct to resource depletion, insecurity, isolation, withdrawal, and work–

family disruption that may remain hidden while performance continues. Temporally separated evidence indicates that pandemic disruption reached distress through different pathways for essential and nonessential employees: hindrance stressors were more salient for the former, whereas isolation was more salient for the latter [17]. Occupational position therefore changes exposure and mechanism, although household conditions and prior health remain plausible alternatives. This distinction also cautions against comparing groups only through average distress scores: similar scores may arise from different demands and therefore require different organizational responses.

Leaders are not only providers of resources. Evidence from managers during the early pandemic documented meaningful mental-health vulnerability within the leadership population [18]. This complicates models in which leaders are assumed to possess uninterrupted capacity for sensemaking and support. Role authority may coexist with uncertainty, workload, and emotional exposure, but cross-sectional associations cannot determine whether work conditions independently produced the reported symptoms.

Shorter temporal designs illuminate how costs can accumulate. Among interdependent teleworkers, daily task setbacks were associated with exhaustion and next-day withdrawal, while organizational support conditioned the pathway [19]. Such evidence strengthens temporal ordering but does not establish enduring resilience loss. Broader workplace scholarship likewise shows that crisis consequences vary with occupation, caregiving, inequality, work arrangement, and organizational response [20]. Convergence therefore concerns heterogeneity rather than a uniform crisis effect. The human-cost domain should consequently record both immediate strain and delayed resource loss, because employees may preserve visible performance by consuming recovery time, social support, or future work capacity.

Table 2 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in resilience, well-being, and crisis leadership across organizational work systems.

Table 2. Cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in Resilience, Well-Being, and Crisis Leadership Across Organizational Work Systems.

Construct, mechanism, or relationship	Representative context	Reported finding	Evidence design	Convergent evidence	Conflicting evidence	Methodological concern	Review interpretation
Occupationally differentiated distress	Essential and nonessential work	Disruption reached distress through different stressor pathways [17]	Temporally separated survey	Exposure is context dependent	No single pathway dominated	Residual personal and household confounding	Crisis strain should be occupation specific
Leader mental-health exposure	Managers during early crisis	Leaders also reported psychological vulnerability [18]	Cross-sectional survey	Authority does not remove exposure	Leader resources may still differ	Directionality unresolved	Leaders are both coordinators and exposed workers
Setback–exhaustion–withdrawal pathway	Interdependent telework	Daily setbacks preceded exhaustion and next-day withdrawal patterns [19]	Daily study	Resource loss can unfold rapidly	Short-term withdrawal may be adaptive	Self-report and brief horizon	Do not equate daily withdrawal with enduring failure
Workplace heterogeneity	Multiple occupations and arrangements	Effects varied across work and nonwork conditions [20]	Multidisciplinary review	Context consistently matters	Evidence designs are not commensurable	Pandemic concentration	Convergence lies in conditionality, not one effect

Note. Entries summarize reported evidence; review interpretations are bounded syntheses rather than pooled findings.

Structural responsibility for crisis strain

Structural responsibility refers to the extent to which organizational decisions configure crisis demands, protections, and recovery opportunities. It directs analysis toward staffing, scheduling, workload, employment arrangements, digital systems, communication, and decision authority without assuming that organizations control every source of distress. HR scholarship suggests that adjustment is shaped by how organizations redesign work and distribute resources during disruption [21]. National policy, household constraints, labor markets, and crisis severity can nevertheless outweigh or interact with organizational action. Structural responsibility therefore concerns controllable contributions and foreseeable distributional effects, not an assertion that every adverse outcome originates inside the organization.

Support illustrates the difference between formal provision and enacted experience. Longitudinal employee evidence linked perceived workplace support during the pandemic with changes in job-related well-being and affective commitment, while

personality contributed to variation in response [22]. The finding supports a resource interpretation but does not show that announcing a policy creates usable support. Access, supervisor enactment, timing, credibility, and employee interpretation remain relevant. A policy that exists formally but cannot be used without stigma, delay, or workload displacement should not be counted as equivalent to consequential support.

Employment security is another structural condition. Integrative evidence characterizes job insecurity as a perceived threat with organizational, economic, and personal antecedents and consequences for strain and work attitudes [23]. Crisis conditions may intensify this threat, but insecurity cannot be inferred solely from exposure to disruption. Structural responsibility is therefore bounded: organizations influence employment signals and work arrangements, while broader institutions and individual circumstances shape how those signals are experienced. The review accordingly separates formal discretion from substantive power to alter exposure, workload, or recovery.

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
Analytical level	Individual, team, organization	Processes differ across levels [9]	Match intervention and outcome level	Shared context may mimic aggregation	Cross-level transfer is restricted	Links remain uneven	Multilevel temporal models
Crisis phase	Disruption, stabilization, recovery	Facilitators vary over time [11]	Reassess resources by phase	Better-resourced firms self-select	Crisis sequences differ	Phase boundaries are porous	Repeated pre/post measurement
Occupational status	Essential versus nonessential work	Distress pathways differ [17]	Avoid uniform support packages	Household exposure may contribute	Categories vary across systems	Within-group diversity	Occupation-comparative studies
Work arrangement	Virtual work and interdependence	Autonomy, support, and setbacks interact [16, 19]	Design coordination with recovery	Prior team quality may explain outcomes	Service and telework evidence	Long-term effects unclear	Linked daily and longitudinal designs
Organizational support	Perceived accessibility and credibility	Support relates to well-being change [22]	Test enacted, not announced, provision	Positive affect may influence ratings	Self-report context	Policy–practice gap	Mixed-method implementation studies
Employment context	Job insecurity and labor protection	Threat is structurally conditioned [23]	Communicate employment decisions credibly	Labor-market conditions may dominate	Institutional variation	Crisis-specific magnitude unknown	Cross-national quasi-experiments

Note. Organizational implications are conditional review interpretations, not validated prescriptions.

Proposed crisis-resilience framework

The proposed framework begins with crisis exposure and preexisting vulnerability. Resource theory suggests that threatened or actual loss can initiate cumulative depletion when employees and systems lack reserves for replacement or recovery [24]. Job demands–resources theory adds distinct health-impairment and motivational pathways, while indicating that resources buffer demands only under relevant conditions [25]. Together, these perspectives explain why equal exposure need not produce equal consequences. They also imply that apparent adaptation may be temporary when continuity is financed by unreplenished employee resources or by shifting demands to less visible groups.

Precrisis organizational practices may also shape later trajectories. Longitudinal firm evidence associates social and environmental practices with lower loss and faster recovery during financial crisis [26]. Archival governance evidence similarly links executive incentives and responsibility practices with resilience to systemic shocks [27]. These findings support preparedness and governance components, but firm-level recovery does not demonstrate employee protection, and unobserved organizational quality remains an alternative explanation. The framework therefore treats precrisis investment as a conditional resource base rather than a guaranteed resilience asset. Its value may depend on whether resources remain accessible during disruption and are distributed to the units carrying the greatest demands.

The original synthesis connects six layers: crisis exposure; structural and governance conditions; enacted leadership behaviors; adaptive processes; dual organizational and human outcomes; and temporal feedback. It proposes that staffing,

security, work design, authority, and resource distribution condition what leadership can accomplish. Leadership then influences sensemaking, prioritization, coordination, and learning, while employees and teams enact adaptation. Organizational continuity and employee well-being are assessed separately because either can improve while the other deteriorates.

Figure 2 presents the original conceptual synthesis for crisis-resilience framework, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

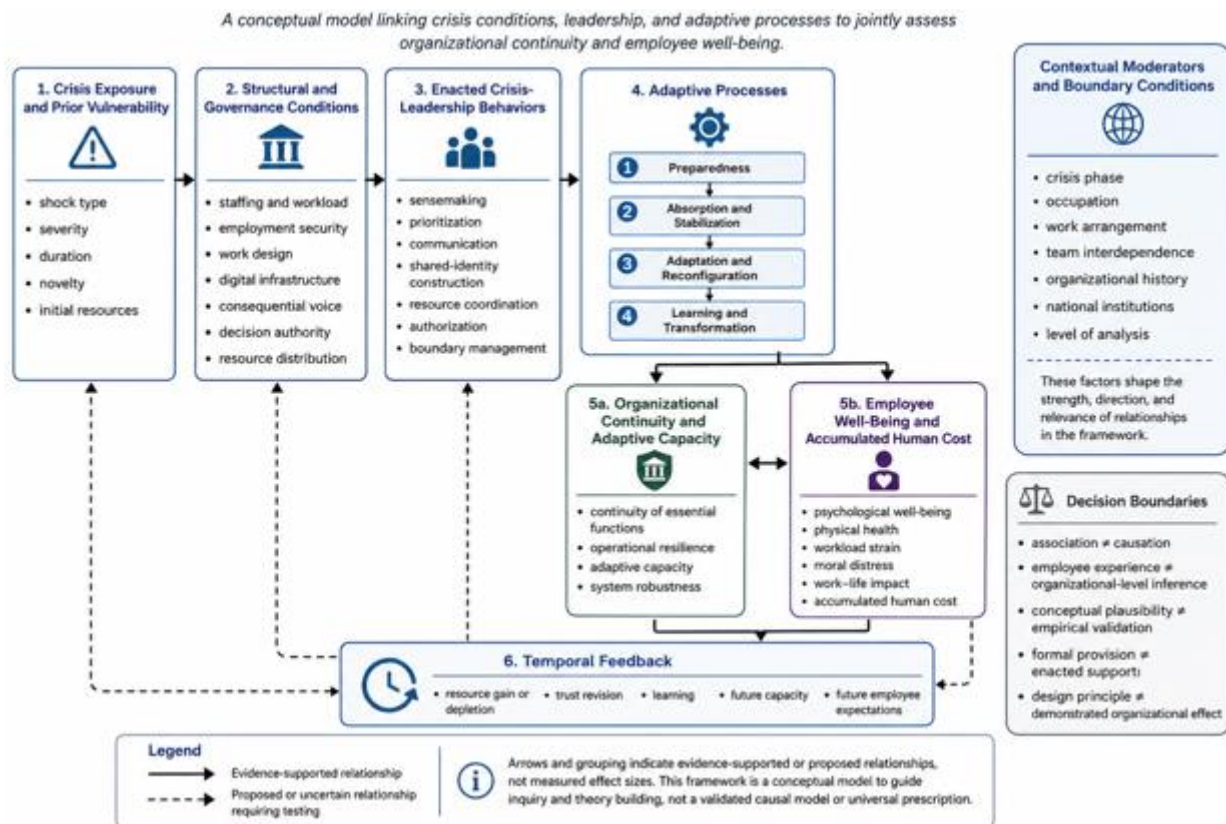


Figure 2. Crisis-Resilience Framework

The framework's central proposition is that a resilience claim is incomplete when adaptation is evaluated without examining who supplied the resources and absorbed the cost. Solid evidence supports the component constructs; dashed relationships represent proposed cross-level and temporal connections. Delayed depletion, trust erosion, and learning feedback require direct longitudinal testing. The same event may generate reinforcing gain cycles for protected groups and loss cycles for exposed groups, making distribution an essential feature of future measurement.

Leadership and governance implications

Leadership and governance implications concern decision architecture rather than a preferred personal style. International HRM scholarship shows that institutional variation, mobility, health protection, and cross-border inequality alter what organizations can require and provide during crisis [28]. Governance should therefore specify which functions are essential, whose exposure is accepted, and which protections remain available across jurisdictions rather than assuming that a uniform response is equitable. These questions require explicit accountability for both action and deliberate inaction.

HR leadership also operates through paradox. Continuity, employee protection, flexibility, fairness, speed, and participation can impose competing obligations that cannot always be maximized simultaneously [29]. Treating these tensions as governance questions makes trade-offs visible, but it should not romanticize contradiction or excuse avoidable underinvestment. Some tensions can be reduced through preparedness, redundancy, credible communication, and additional capacity. Others require transparent prioritization and revision as evidence about exposure and feasibility changes.

Digitalized work systems create another conditional domain. Evidence suggests that high-involvement work systems and digitalization may connect employee and organizational resilience through leadership and employee perceptions [30]. However, technological capability is not legitimate authority, formal participation is not consequential influence, and digital visibility is not reliable evidence of performance or well-being. Directionality and common-method concerns also constrain inference. Digital systems may expand coordination while simultaneously increasing surveillance, availability expectations, or responsibility transfer, so technological continuity should be evaluated against enacted work conditions.

A bounded governance approach would jointly monitor operational continuity, resource depletion, insecurity, voice, recovery opportunity, and differential exposure. These are proposed decision dimensions, not validated thresholds. **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
Separated organizational and human outcomes	Continuity may conceal depletion	Firm studies rarely measure worker well-being	Multilevel longitudinal linkage	Continuity, strain, recovery together	Sectors with unequal exposure	Do not infer one level from another	When do gains coexist with human loss?
Weak temporal baselines	Resilience implies change	Many studies begin after disruption	Precrisis or rapid-onset panels	Resources, demands, trust trajectories	Acute versus prolonged crises	Avoid retrospective success labels	Which trajectories represent adaptation?
Policy–practice gap	Formal support may be unusable	Perceptions and provision are often conflated	Mixed-method process study	Access, timing, credibility, use	Remote, hybrid, frontline work	Distinguish permission from power	How does support become consequential?
Governance attribution	Visible leaders receive excess credit	Distributed work is poorly observed	Network and event-based designs	Authority, coordination, voice	Centralized versus distributed systems	Visibility is not performance	Who actually enables adaptation?
Context concentration	Pandemic evidence may not transfer	Crisis types and institutions differ	Comparative and quasi-experimental studies	Exposure and institutional protection	Countries, occupations, shock types	Preserve contextual boundaries	Which mechanisms generalize?
Framework validation	Proposed links may be incorrect	No study tests the complete synthesis	Phased multilevel program	Dual outcomes and feedback	Multiple crisis stages	Permit rejection and rival models	Which links survive stringent tests?

Note. Research priorities are original proposals grounded in the identified limitations; they are not claims of demonstrated methodological superiority.

Research agenda

Research should first replace static recovery labels with temporal trajectories. A temporal model distinguishes return, persistence, and transformation and implies that the meaning of resilience depends on sequence and path dependence [31]. Studies should begin before disruption where possible, or use rapid-onset panels, archival baselines, and repeated measures that separate initial absorption from later adaptation and renewal.

Team research must identify the adversity trigger, duration, teamwork process, level, and outcome rather than classifying successful teams retrospectively as resilient [32]. Multilevel designs should connect daily employee depletion, team coordination, leadership behavior, organizational decisions, and operational outcomes without assuming aggregation. Comparative studies are also needed across occupations, institutions, work arrangements, and crisis types. Such comparisons should test measurement equivalence before interpreting differences as stronger or weaker resilience.

Crisis-leadership research should challenge heroic and gendered prototypes that attribute collective outcomes to unusually visible individuals [33]. Network, observational, and event-based designs could identify who supplies information, authorizes exceptions, protects recovery, and converts voice into consequential influence. Competing models should test whether centralized, distributed, or hybrid authority is more appropriate under specified conditions.

Finally, the proposed framework requires measures that capture continuity and human cost simultaneously. Studies should also examine delayed effects, because short-term stabilization may precede later exhaustion, turnover, or capability loss. Credible tests must allow its pathways to fail, reveal reverse directionality, or show that rival explanations better account for adaptation.

Conclusion

This integrative review connects organizational resilience with human well-being by treating them as related but non-equivalent properties of crisis response. Adaptive capacity is multilevel and phase dependent; crisis leadership is enacted through contextual, relational, and resource-coordination behaviors; and employee strain is shaped partly by structural choices concerning work design, support, security, authority, and recovery. Accordingly, operational continuity cannot by itself demonstrate healthy adaptation.

The proposed Crisis-Resilience Framework organizes these domains around crisis exposure, governance conditions, leadership behavior, adaptive processes, dual outcomes, and temporal feedback. It also makes visible where adaptation depends on resource transfer, whose costs may emerge only after the immediate disruption has passed. Its central contribution is a decision boundary: resilience claims should identify both what the organization preserved or changed and how the associated demands and protections were distributed.

The synthesis remains limited by heterogeneous definitions, concentrated crisis contexts, incomplete baselines, uneven multilevel evidence, and frequent reliance on perceptual or nonexperimental designs. The framework therefore offers a testable conceptual organization rather than causal validation, universal prescription, or implementation-ready governance model. Its value depends on whether future evidence can discriminate among its pathways, boundaries, and credible rival explanations.

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