

Editorial: Managing recovery and resilience in organizations: the impact of employee competence and development on firm recovery – a multidimensional conceptualization

1. Introduction

In recent years, crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical instability and climate-related disasters have severely tested organizations' ability to survive and adapt. These shocks have exposed deep vulnerabilities in strategic planning and underscored the critical need for organizational resilience. While resilience has been widely discussed in management literature and research (Hillmann and Guenther, 2021; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011) at different levels of analysis – individual, organizational and regional – what still deserves attention is the role of employee competence development as a foundational driver of organizational recovery and longer-term viability. Existing approaches often emphasize macro-level governance, regulatory frameworks and capital access (Awan *et al.*, 2018; Pope and Petrova, 2017), yet they tend to neglect the critical micro-foundations of resilience – namely, the people who constitute organizations (Felin *et al.*, 2012).

This special issue (SI) responds to that gap by shifting focus to the processes through which organizations can recruit, develop and retain competent employees to foster resilience across organizational levels (Raetze *et al.*, 2021). Employee competence is more than a static asset; it is a dynamic human capability cultivated through deliberate human resource (HR) practices such as coaching and learning (Akdere and Egan, 2020; Bond and Seneque, 2012) and personal development autonomy (Felin *et al.*, 2012; Teece, 2012). However, the pandemic has shown that these practices must be adaptive and scalable in the face of disruptions and embedded into both leadership and frontline decision-making structures and operational frameworks (Mendy, 2020).

As part of the recent developments, digital transformation and evolving social networks now offer new avenues for competency building (Akgün *et al.*, 2023; Lang *et al.*, 2022). These tools enhance not just individual learning (the people-related aspects of resilience – Rahman and Mendy, 2019) but also collective adaptability, helping organizations to absorb and learn from crises. However, questions remain about how these emerging tools interact with traditional management development to enhance resilience and recovery-building capability, especially in high-pressure work and crises-ridden contexts.

The papers featured in this SI “Managing recovery and resilience in organizations: the impact of employee competence and development on firm recovery” collectively advance a more integrated, multi-level perspective of resilience. Drawing inspiration from our aim to provide a deeper, more holistic appreciation of managing recovery and resilience in a range of organizational, socio-economic, cultural and politically imbued contexts, they highlight the increasing nature, scale and complexity of personal and firm operational and strategic interventions (Verreynne *et al.*, 2023). While these may surface the extent to which organizations seek to enhance resilience-building capabilities and the role of employees' competence and development in strategically doing so (Herbane, 2019), the more nuanced aspects of resilience and recovery also deserve scholarly attention. The SI showcases the socio-political, health, environmental, governance and workplace imperatives giving rise to staff's capacity to develop their potentials and the unfolding, more nuanced processes and



impacts leading to or adversely impacting organizations' overall capacity to nurture recovery and sustain resilience capabilities.

In the following sections, we introduce our theoretical background and provide summaries of how each of the articles has theoretically, methodologically and practically advanced our understanding and knowledge of organizational-level resilience and recovery and propose a future research agenda of organizational resilience for this continuously evolving field.

2. Theoretical background

The scholarly and practical interest for this SI arose from the premise that despite the increasing academic and professional attention on resilience and organizational recovery (Kim, 2020; Duchek, 2020), its conceptualization and the impacts on organizations and society at large remain contested, under-theorized and under-researched in its methodological plurality and complexity. This academic lag offers space for research and theorization. Such gaps are particularly concerning given the increasing calls for resilience at multiple levels: personal, group and/or team, organizational, regional, national and even global (Korosteleva and Flockhart, 2020). While staff are increasingly being required to demonstrate nimbleness, agility and flexibility (as required characteristics of being resilient) in managing daily pressures and/or demands in and outside of the workplace and organizations seek to mitigate the adverse financial and non-financial consequences emanating from geo-political and economic environments under flux, the actual recovery and resilience mechanisms and processes of understanding how to do so are often lagging (Zelčāne and Pipere, 2023). Such individual and collective adversities abound in daily personal and organizational settings (Williams *et al.*, 2017) despite the increasing proliferation and sophistication of technological advancements in workplaces, digital business and inter-firm partnership models, including human-AI interactions, algorithmic solutions, climate change management, risk mitigation models and so on (Van Der Vegt *et al.*, 2015; Belhadi *et al.*, 2022).

Extant studies on organizational recovery and resilience reveal the significant yet contested and multi-disciplinary nature of the topic (Kuntz, 2020; Mendy and Bal, 2021). While some emerging research highlights how meta-level global disruptive factors (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crises and geopolitical conflicts) have intensified the scrutiny into organizations' increasing vulnerabilities and the urgent need to strengthen their resilience (Lombardi *et al.*, 2021), additional studies have highlighted the significance of exploring the impacts of meso-firm and micro-foundational individual-level factors on resilience-building capabilities (Raetzke *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, while attempts are being made by business and management scholars and practitioners to develop organizational-level resilience as the basis for such survivability capabilities (Fitriasari, 2020; Musa and Aifuwa, 2020), other scholarships have tended to place greater emphasis on the range of regulatory, governance and financial frameworks (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Mendy, 2020; Mendy and Rahman, 2020; Pope and Petrova, 2017) that could boost the recommended survival mechanisms. Despite such attempts, employee-level competence and development often lag (Conz and Magnani, 2020) in enhancing organizational-level recovery.

This SI solicited articles that explored how the recruitment, selection, training and development and retention of employees could facilitate the development of organizational recovery and resilience capabilities. While the intention had originally been to develop a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the multi-level relationships and dynamics that characterize, enhance and/or inhibit resilience capabilities at firm levels, the published articles under this volume revealed some additionally significant developments in the combined field of organizational recovery and resilience as a critical research endeavor. As we opted for quality in favor of quantity, and after rigorous peer-review rounds, this SI comprises three papers (Ataburo *et al.*, 2026; Del Barone *et al.*, 2026; Caputo *et al.*, 2026). In the following section, we will highlight their individual and combined findings, contributions and implications regarding the role of competence management for organizational recovery and resilience.

3. Overview of papers

While previous research had highlighted theoretical and practical insights into organizations' capacities to develop sustainable resilience strategies and surfaced the leveraging of workforce competencies and innovative and adaptive management approaches from a micro-foundational and multi-level adoption and applications (Raetze *et al.*, 2021), our selected articles have advanced further perspectives, extended new methods, tools and measures on resilience and recovery.

For example, the study by Ataburo *et al.* (2026), "Differing associations between organizational training types and operational resilience," examines how dynamic and individual capability training influence firms' ability to absorb and recover from operational disruptions. Drawing on data from Ghanaian firms, the study reveals the significance of dynamic capability training focusing on adaptability and innovation and its stronger role in enhancing resilience compared to routine, process-maintaining training. In addition, the article surfaces how job autonomy moderates these effects on individual and firm-level resilience, demonstrating that organizational resilience is contingent on both individual competence development and workplace structures that enable employees to apply their skills effectively.

This study makes a significant contribution by advancing understanding of how organizational training, as a human capital development practice, relates to operational resilience. Departing from prior research that often treats training without further specifications (Brewis, 2019; Cacioppo *et al.*, 2015), the study introduces a more nuanced conceptualization by distinguishing between ordinary capability training, which focuses on developing skills for current, routine operational tasks and dynamic capability training, which targets higher-order competencies that enable employees to create, adapt and extend organizational recovery processes in response to disruptions. By making this distinction, the study provides a more granular theoretical account of how different forms of training influence resilience outcomes. The authors ground their theorization in the ability–motivation–opportunity (AMO) framework (Paauwe, 2009), using it to explain the mechanisms through which each training type enhances employee ability and contributes to operational resilience. Importantly, the study does not treat these mechanisms as uniform; rather, it introduces job autonomy as a contextual, opportunity-enhancing factor that moderates the effects of training. In doing so, it challenges prevailing assumptions in AMO theory (Paauwe, 2009), namely, that job autonomy *universally* complements ability-enhancing practices like staff's training.

The findings show that the interaction between training and job autonomy is contingent upon the type of training: while job autonomy strengthens the positive relationship between ordinary capability training and operational resilience, it weakens the relationship in the case of dynamic capability training. This suggests that job autonomy may act as a complement in one context and a substitute in another, offering a more differentiated understanding of how competence building helps in shaping organizational recovery and resilience outcomes. Beyond its theoretical contributions, the study enriches the training evaluation literature by focusing on operational resilience as an important but underexplored organizational-level outcome. Whereas traditional training evaluation research tends to emphasize economic or performance indicators such as productivity or efficiency (Arthur *et al.*, 2003; Phillips, 2012; Tharenou *et al.*, 2007), this study situates resilience specifically and highlights how disruption absorption and disruption recovery could act as critical capabilities that training may support. This contributes to the emerging literature that positions human capital as a foundational element of organizational resilience (e.g. Douglas, 2021; Pereira *et al.*, 2020). The study also shows that not all training leads to resilience uniformly. It demonstrates that dynamic capability training has a stronger positive association with operational resilience than ordinary capability training, particularly in contexts of low job autonomy. Furthermore, the research is contextually grounded in a developing country (Ghana), where structural and cultural factors (e.g. collectivist norms and resource scarcity) shape the effectiveness (or otherwise) of training and autonomy in unique ways. As such, the study extends the generalizability of the impact of

employee competence development on organizational resilience to non-Western, resource-constrained settings (Agyemang *et al.*, 2023) and offers important insights for both the theory and practice of organizational recovery and resilience.

The study by Del Barone *et al.* (2026) builds on and deepens existing discussions about the strategic role of human resource management (HRM) systems in fostering resilience (Belso-Martinez *et al.*, 2018; Baptiste, 2008). The study explores the significance of artificial intelligence (AI) integration in HRM and investigates its capacity to enhance organizational resilience in public administrations. Framed using the technology–organization–environment (TOE) framework (Baker, 2012), the research examines the multi-dimensional interactions among technological tools, organizational resources and environmental dynamics in (re) shaping the organizational resilient responses to uncertainty. Through a qualitative methodology contextualized in Italian public administration and based on 43 in-depth interviews, multi-stakeholder focus groups and extensive documentary analysis, the study provides a rich interpretive account of how AI-enabled transformation unfolds in HR.

Interestingly, the core findings reveal that managerial competencies are critical levers for enabling transformational leadership. Furthermore, competencies such as strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, change management and values-based leadership were considered critical in not only facilitating the adoption of AI but also in (re)shaping its strategic use particularly around the fostering of critical organizational resilience building factors, such as employee engagement, crises response and operational efficiency. Moreover, by challenging the traditional depiction of public administrations as rigid or path-dependent systems, the study presents an alternative context-sensitive perspective of the public sector as a dynamic and responsive actor, where resilience is built through the deliberate interplay between technological tools and human agency. The study identifies four key dimensions of resilience development, namely that (1) the integration of AI into HRM can improve recruitment; (2) training and performance management foster resilience; (3) the development of key managerial competencies helps to support effective AI adoption to strengthen crisis response, operational efficiency and employee engagement and (4) overcoming cultural and structural barriers, such as resistance to change and digital skills gaps serves as a maintaining and sustaining aspect for organizational resilience and recovery.

Theoretically, firstly this article advances the TOE framework (Baker, 2012; Awa *et al.*, 2017) by offering an empirically grounded explanation of how technological capabilities, organizational factors and environmental pressures interact in the digital transformation of public sector organizations. This extension is particularly valuable, as the TOE framework has rarely been applied onto public sector innovation, where institutional inertia and external scrutiny have been understood to create unique implementation barriers (Cordella and Paletti, 2019; Clement *et al.*, 2023; Fischer *et al.*, 2023). Secondly, the paper contributes to resilience theory by conceptualizing resilience as an organizational-level capability that proactively and strategically harnesses individuals' adaptability rather than a merely reactive response to crises (Barasa *et al.*, 2018; Kantur and İşeri-Say, 2012; Conz and Magnani, 2020). In doing so, it partly aligns with emerging views in the literature that resilience is shaped through leadership vision, employee adaptability and the integration of AI-enabled learning and decision-making systems (Linnenluecke, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2024; Rane *et al.*, 2024). These insights are particularly relevant to the context of public administration, where resilience capability cultivation becomes particularly critical in settings often marked by bureaucratic rigidity and limited flexibility. Thirdly, another key contribution lies in highlighting the interdependent role of managerial competencies – such as strategic thinking, change management and emotional intelligence – in enabling successful AI integration and fostering employee engagement. While previous research often treats these competencies separately, this study shows how they collectively support transformational leadership and public service motivation (de Gennaro, 2019; Zheng and Lin, 2024), thereby reinforcing resilience from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Belso-Martinez *et al.*, 2018).

The paper also contributes to the burgeoning AI and HRM literature by illustrating how AI-driven HRM practices (Tyagi *et al.*, 2023), such as automated recruitment, personalized training and predictive performance management, enhance organizational adaptability and evidence-based decision-making (Neiroukh *et al.*, 2024). This is especially pertinent in the public sector, where such practices have historically lagged those in the private sector (Mylona and Mihail, 2020; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2023). Finally, the paper contributes to the discourse on digital ethics and responsible AI governance in facilitating organizational recovery and resilience capabilities. It highlights how public sector managers perceive and respond to concerns related to fairness, transparency and privacy by implementing participatory design processes and institutional safeguards (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Booyse and Scheepers, 2024). This adds a much-needed practical dimension to the normative debates on AI ethics, governance and resilience in public sector management discourse (Kuziemski and Misuraca, 2020; Wirtz *et al.*, 2019).

The third study (Caputo *et al.*, 2026) focuses on the assessment of a model that highlights the effects of strategic sustainable human resource management (SSHRM), including staff well-being, work-life balance and a safe and healthy workplace environment, on organizations' capacity for financial viability during COVID-19. Using data from 132 Italian companies and mixed methods, a variety of SSHRM traits were tested as predictors of organizations' financial performance. By prioritizing employee well-being, sustainable organizations can enhance their resilience capability by ensuring accounting and market valuation performance that mitigates their financial decline. To do so, the authors highlight how varying financial returns on human resource investments can be beneficial. The study further underscores the importance of investigating the sustainability –HRM nexus to contribute to the emerging debates and discussions around socially sustainable HRM (SSHRM) within which organizational –employee relational equitability is fostered for both firm and individual-level resilience and performance capabilities. The study's findings additionally revealed the cruciality of healthy and safe employees in accounting for performance outcomes in the workplace and the critical role of SSHRM in fostering financial viability and organizational-level resilience, especially in crisis environments. Likewise, the promotion of work–life balance policies was found to be critical for resilience building outcomes.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the extension of a combination of SSHRM aspects such as safe and healthy workplace environments, staff well-being and work-life balance by demonstrating how SSHRM impacts organizational financial performance outcomes, firm-level sustainability and individual welfare. Therefore, the study makes key theoretical and practical contributions to our knowledge and understanding of organizational recovery and resilience and the micro-foundational role of people in doing so. First, it enriches Zhang *et al.*'s (2024) research by underscoring the significance of human capital investments in companies' economic performance. By investing in people, organizations enhance their overall capacity to develop resilience during adverse times while maintaining healthy financial performance capabilities. Whereas traditionally the critical role of resilience and financial performance within sustainable organizations has been emphasized (Damiano and Valenza, 2025; Ameer and Othman, 2012), the significance of using SSHRM practices such as human capital investments to foster firm-level resilience was under-explored particularly during crises. By highlighting SSHRM's prioritization of the social dimension of sustainability, the study unveils multiple layers of resilience, namely organizational financial performance, worker well-being, workplace harmony and adaptability. Practically, the study highlights how organizations can foster socially responsible HRM practices and strategies to boost their resilience and consequently recover during crises.

4. Practical implications and avenues for further research

Both the practical and theoretical contributions to this special issue reveal how employees' training, the development of managerial competence and strategic (and socially) sustainable

HRM practices nurture the recovery and resilience of organizations. The three studies are situated in different contexts and industries, and the practical suggestions provided by the authors should therefore be contextually considered. The studies included in this volume highlight the heterogeneity in approach in terms of the contextual and environmental factors shaping organizational recovery and resilience capabilities. Such considerations beg the question: “Can the results be confirmed in a situation of contextual and environmental equilibrium or can the emerging field of organizational recovery and resilience benefit from a more holistic, more comprehensive conceptualization of the practical implications of the combined studies despite their heterogeneity?”

Several key aspects are worthy of discussion as we attempt to synthesize two crucial trends, namely the “what” and the “how” of organizational recovery and resilience in contextually pressurized and sometimes resource-constrained situations. In terms of the “what”, [Ataburo et al.'s \(2026\)](#) study highlights the importance of training and the structuring of jobs in organizations’ operational resilience, while [Caputo et al. \(2026\)](#)’s work underscores human capital investments as driving forces for financial performance and organizational recovery. Similarly, [Del Barone et al. \(2026\)](#) highlight the criticality of AI-enabled HRM and leadership development in hard-to-adapt public administration systems. By emphasizing investments and AI-enabled HRM systems as a combined organizational resilience driver, they focus on chaperoning how adaptive and data-driven (evidence-based) recruitment, training and performance could provide practical (and efficient) resolution mechanisms for resilience-building capabilities in organizations. However, such measures also need to be complemented by additionally developing managerial competencies via strategic thinking, change management and emotional intelligence to align AI adoption with longer-term public institutional value creation and employee adaptability through uncertainty.

While the three studies appear to concur with the criticality of developing human potential via staff training, human capital investments and management development, [Ataburo et al. \(2026\)](#). have drawn our attention to how such recovery and resilience-enhancing mechanisms should also focus on the notion of dynamism. This is conceptualized via dynamic capabilities (i.e. the ability to create, extend and modify routines) beyond conventionally ordinary capability training for operational tasks ([Bustinza et al., 2019](#)). The conceptualization also includes dynamic-capability programs (e.g. design thinking, structured problem-solving and scenario drills) that help firms to anticipate environmental changes and reconfigure operations quickly during disruptions. By further conceptualizing job autonomy as a moderator for resilience-based training, it is interesting to observe how firms’ reliance on ordinary training has been reconfigured to include not only staff’s task proficiency and their propensity to act fast but also the ability to mitigate disruptions and foster organizational recovery. However, it is also noted how autonomy needs to be reconceptualized as moderated rather than maximal for organizations to realize the optimal value delivered via dynamic-capability training. By using data collected from Italian firms during the COVID-19 pandemic, [Caputo et al. \(2026\)](#)’s. study (2025) could be observed as a way of reconceptualizing human capital investments not only as an HRM mechanism to enhance organizations’ financial value but also as a call for organizational strategies and practices to be more socially and ethically inclusive at the micro-foundational level to boost employees’ innovative engagement in firms’ financial performance during crisis.

Despite the aforementioned practical benefits from heterogenous organizational and managerial interventions, including [Caputo et al. \(2026\)](#)’s. SSHRM, further conceptualization and practical questions remain unresolved. For example, how would SSHRM practices be strategically implemented in non-Western organizational environments and contexts that are not only financially performance-constrained but geopolitically and structurally limited to do so. Additionally, despite [Caputo et al. \(2026\)](#)’s. conceptualization of competencies as resilience-building mechanisms ensuring digital transformation strength, organizational adaptability and employee engagement, perceiving all organizational cultures as resilient raises additional questions on the extent to which digital competence and staff engagement, as

additional intervention mechanisms (“whats”), could always boost transparent communication, participatory decision-making and inclusive leadership practices. It is also opined in the study that resistance would be overcome, that trust would be maintained and that workforce commitment would be enhanced when public sector organizations digitally transition practices and initiate a culture shift. While such practical interventions are important for organizational transformation, the enabling of collective capacity to adapt in the face of crisis or disruption could be far more challenging. The conceptual line of argumentation follows that while it may be organizations’ desired goal to close employees’ digital skills gaps as a pathway toward enhancing resilience, additional “whats” (e.g. tailored training, microlearning of modules and peer mentoring programs) and “hows” (e.g. workforce agility and AI-confidence boosting resilient behaviors) may surface responsible governance and ethical safeguards’ challenges. The question regarding how the new AI-enabled HRM resilience and recovery measures would actually work across multiple organizational and country-specific settings remains unanswered.

While [Ataburo et al. \(2026\)](#) acknowledge that too much freedom can diffuse effort, foster uncoordinated improvisation and undermine collective response to resilience and recovery, especially in cultures with higher power distance (notably African and Asian, as per [Hofstede’s \(1980\)](#) cultural dimensions model), surmounting such an implementation challenge could go beyond the institutionalization of dynamic training programs with clear guardrails, decision rights, and playbooks. Reconceptualizing budgets that provide greater (yet more calibrated) autonomy for both the change agents (implementers) and recipients (staff) could be a way out. Additionally, while it may be prudent to conceptualize organizations seeking to implement modest increases in decision latitude as a pathway toward greater resilience building, ordinary upskilling and simple governance (escalation rules and thresholds) would benefit from a further reimagining of what dynamic-capability programs (e.g. a rebalancing of “what” to learn, “how” to learn and “when” to learn) would be beneficial for employees’ autonomy and resilience-driven innovative activities as individuals, teams and entire organizations resilience-proof their operations.

On a methodological note, [Caputo et al. \(2026\)](#)’s study reminds us about the importance and benefits of evidence-based, longitudinal data collection, but the additional issue regarding whether firms would adopt similar recovery and resilience competence-building behaviors a few additional years after a crisis. Likewise, the centrality of HRM as a change-driving force and how socially and ethically their practices are perceived by all staff remains unresolved. While such scholarly awakenings serve as clarion calls for more longitudinal studies and experimental designs beyond traditional cross-sectional research in resilience and recovery studies ([McKinley et al., 2020](#)), studying how organizations evolve their recovery and resilience approaches to competence development is becoming even more necessary, particularly as poly- and/or multi-crisis environments continue to evolve ([Lawrence et al., 2024](#)). Conceptualizing such developments alongside the designing of appropriate implementation mechanisms and/or recommendations for resilience-driven organizational change is particularly vital for context specificity to avoid being conceptual. Therefore, more rigorous, context-sensitive research on organizational recovery and resilience capabilities would be needed to clarify potential causality and generalizability. Such emerging studies would need to look for trends and recurrent patterns among existing studies, revisiting and critiquing what has been researched so far about competence development and resilience not only via systematic reviews and meta-analysis of the literature but also via empirical macro- and micro-level foundations. For instance, how does managerial competence in recovery and resilience-building contexts evolve over time and space? How do psychological, contextual and organizational factors influence the impact of competence development on macro- and micro-level recovery and resilience? How do various geopolitical turbulences across different regions affect competence development effectiveness and its influence on contemporary firms’ recovery and resilience?

5. Conclusions

By bridging micro- and macro-level perspectives, the contributions in this volume have respectively and collectively advanced our theoretical, practical and methodological understanding of resilience as a dynamic, multi-faceted process that requires continuous investments in methodological plurality, human capital, contextual and environmental alignment and strategic management. However, by adopting a problematization approach, we highlighted the multi-dimensional methodological and conceptual possibilities (as well as the problematics) that abound in theorizing and practicalizing organizational recovery and resilience within crisis situations. The investigation of such facets in future and emerging studies on recovery and resilience could provide novel discoveries on various ways of conceptualizing and practicalizing multifaceted recovery and resilience-building capabilities as firms continue to be adversely challenged contextually, environmentally and geopolitically.

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