

Employee resilience: an emerging challenge for HRM

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Given turbulent economic times, the concept of employee resilience is receiving increasing attention in many organisations. This paper brings the discussion of employee resilience into the field of human resource management (HRM). We explore the foundations of resilience in theories of positive psychology and the conservation of resources (COR); we discuss its relevance for HRM and develop a set of testable hypotheses to guide future research. The first key finding of this paper is that the concept of resilience can be developed from strong theoretical foundations. Second, a coherent set of resilience-enhancing HR practices have the potential to contribute to employees' psychological capital, attitudes and behaviour, and to organisational performance not only in turbulent circumstances but also during periods of relative calm. Given the theoretical framing, formal resilience training should be viewed as a single component of a broader, coherent set of resilience-enhancing HR practices.

Keywords: conservation of resources theory, employee resilience, environmental uncertainty, positive psychology, resilience-enhancing HRM practices

Key points

- 1 Employee resilience is a 'hot' topic among HR professionals yet has received little academic scrutiny.
- 2 Theories of positive psychology and conservation of resources are useful frames for studies of resilience.
- 3 A set of HRM practices are identified and hypothesised to enhance employee resilience.
- 4 Environmental uncertainty moderates relationships between resilience-enhancing HRM practices and outcomes for employees and organisations.

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Accepted for publication 9 January 2014.

Despite evidence of a relationship between human resource management (HRM) practices and firm performance (Subramony 2009), in practice HRM has not been viewed as a value-adding component in many organisations because the contribution of the HR function is rarely measured in tangible terms (Guest 2011). That situation is changing, in part because of stresses placed on many organisations by the global financial crisis (GFC). A complementary or additional framing of a bundle of HR practices is located in the notion of *employee resilience*, a concept that has received increasing attention as organisations respond to the uncertainties associated with the GFC. The development of that framing and implications for researchers and practitioners are provided here.

Scholarly definitions of resilience emphasise the ability to recover quickly from disruptions in functioning (Shin, Taylor and Seo 2012). In an organisational context, Luthans defines resilience as ‘the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility’ (2002, 702).

A constantly changing workplace has become the norm for many businesses and research has confirmed that employees play important roles in addressing change (Shin, Taylor and Seo 2012). Specifically, studies indicate that resilient individuals are better equipped to cope with a constantly changing workplace (Shin, Taylor and Seo 2012; Tugade and Fredrickson 2004). As an implication, Luthans, Vogelgesant and Lester (2006) urge human resource professionals to invest in the development of psychological capital and the resilience of their employees.

Research presented in this paper demonstrates that resilience can be developed through a variety of HR practices. To date, much of the focus of HRM practitioners with regard to resilience has been on training interventions (Bonanno 2004). ‘Resilience training’ is a growth area in Australian workplaces, and numerous corporations, government departments and unions are now offering resilience training, for workers ranging from defence personnel (Cohn, Hodson and Crane 2010) to sales teams (Abbott et al. 2009), and education union members (Australian Education Union 2011). In this paper, we suggest that there is potential for a strategically aligned and cohesive set of HR practices that will enhance employee resilience.

We analyse the theoretical foundations of the notion of resilience as developed in research using theories of positive psychology and the conservation of resources. Building on this theoretical foundation, we identify a set of resilience-enhancing HRM practices and develop testable hypotheses to guide future research. To establish the relevance and significance of resilience for the HRM function, we explore the role of environmental uncertainty in the relationships between HRM practices and both employee and organisational outcomes. We present the initial work of generating items to operationalise and measure resilience-enhancing HRM practices. Finally, we identify implications for future research and practice in this emerging and important topic within HRM.

Theoretical foundations

Studies of resilience originated in the developmental and clinical psychology fields (Norman, [Luthans and Luthans 2005](#)), in research focused on the ability of children to

overcome and sometimes thrive in response to traumatic experiences. This research found resilience to be a common phenomenon resulting from normal or basic human adaptation processes ([Masten 2001](#)). Two theoretical approaches underpin research on resilience as applied to individuals in the workplace: positive psychology and conservation of resources theory.

Positive psychology

The concept of resilience and related research into stress and burnout has been embedded in the field of positive psychology and positive organisational behaviour ([Luthans 2002](#)). [Luthans \(2002\)](#) defines positive organisational behaviour as the study of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for improved performance.

A key feature of positive organisational behaviour involves the extension of the concept of human capital to 'psychological capital'. Psychological capital is:

an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success. ([Luthans, Youssef and Avolio 2007b, 3](#))

Resilience is conceptualised as a response in circumstances where an individual: 1) has been exposed to subjectively significant threat, risk or harm; 2) adapts positively; and 3) does not lose normal functioning ([Bonanno 2004](#)).

According to [Youssef and Luthans \(2007\)](#), resilient individuals react to adverse circumstances by recognising and acknowledging the impact, and investing the time, energy and resources needed to 'bounce back' to equilibrium. Further, resilience allows the individual to use setbacks as 'springboards' ([Youssef and Luthans 2007, 780](#)), or opportunities to grow. Relatedly, [Luthans et al. \(2008\)](#) suggest that resilience plays a significant role in managing 'positive stress' and that resilience might be characterised as a coping response to both adverse and positive events, such as a promotion or new work responsibilities.

The notion of psychological capital implies a sequencing of efforts to promote resilience and the results of those efforts: the initial efforts can be viewed as investments, with returns accruing in the future, akin to investments in and returns to human capital. [Luthans et al. \(2006\)](#) label relevant resilience practices as 'proactive' such that, for example, organisations investing in HRM practices to enhance psychological capital (and particularly resilience) prior to the GFC should have reaped the rewards of those investments during the GFC. [Luthans et al. \(2006\)](#) also identify 'reactive' practices that promote resilience. An example of a reactive resilience-enhancing HRM practice might involve employee assistance programs and grief counselling for the loss of a loved one, which is of no obvious value if provided years in advance of the relevant event.

There are numerous critiques of positive psychology (e.g. McDonald and O'Callaghan 2008). One criticism is that positive psychology is based on unitarist assumptions; the goals to be achieved are primarily those of the organisation, and by prioritising employer goals, it runs the risk of overlooking the needs of workers. In response, Davidson and Moss (2010) argue that positive thinking and its core dimensions such as resilience are facilitated when the individual has genuine involvement, or empowerment, in the workplace. Hence, positive psychology provides some theoretical foundation for the notion that some HRM practices could enhance employee resilience, which in turn should lead to positive outcomes for employees and organisations.

Conservation of resources theory

Shin, Taylor and Seo (2012) apply conservation of resources theory or COR (Hobfoll 1989, 2010) to the understanding and management of organisational change, and argue that resilience is an individual resource that can be enhanced. Resilience can be used both to reduce the strains and stresses associated with organisational change, and to support employees' commitment to a change. Building on this argument, we suggest that resilience, viewed as a resource, can be valuable regardless of organisational change, and that appropriate HR practices can effectively develop and maintain employee resilience. This resource should contribute to employee outcomes such as job performance, which in turn contributes to outcomes for employers such as improved organisational performance.

COR theory was developed by Hobfoll (1989) to integrate several stress theories into a general theory of psychological stress, based on the assumption that people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and that the potential or actual loss of these valued resources is threatening. COR theory identifies three main categories relevant to individuals obtaining, retaining or protecting resources: instrumental (something that serves or acts as an instrument or means of gaining a resource, e.g. money or shelter), social (resources based on attachments to families and social groups, e.g. social support or status), and psychological (pertaining to the mind and emotions, e.g. self-esteem or sense of autonomy) (Hobfoll 1989, 2010). Early research applied COR theory to the design of social interventions to 'inoculate' against stress in the workplace and elsewhere (Hobfoll 2010). Given COR theory maintains that resource losses have a more acute impact than resource gains, it follows that protecting against resource losses or minimising these offers a potentially powerful intervention strategy (Hobfoll and Lilly 1993). HRM practices could provide examples of workplace interventions that 'inoculate' employees.

Viewed in terms of the COR interpretation of resource losses, it is not surprising that workplace factors such as job strain and job insecurity (König et al. 2010) have strong empirical links to employee outcomes such as burnout (Lee and Ashforth 1996), negative health outcomes (Belkic et al. 2004), negative mental health outcomes (Holden et al. 2010), unsafe behaviours, absenteeism and turnover intention (Deery, Iverson and Walsh 2010). The effect of resource losses, at work and outside of it, has also been assessed, with work-family conflict found to have strong relationships with anxiety and depression (e.g. Freedy and Hobfoll 1994).

COR theory provides an explanation for the value of proactive resilience-enhancing practices. For example, training in general coping skills might yield benefits subsequent to resource loss. Similarly, COR theory helps to explain the value of employee involvement, to the extent such involvement allows employees to prioritise the specific resources to be conserved under adverse conditions.

COR theory further explains why resource gains such as an inclusive and positive organisational culture (Denison et al. 2006), support from supervisors and co-workers (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002), and work–family enrichment (Grzywacz 2000) have positive empirical relationships with employee mental health and subjective well-being. Somewhat differently, COR theory suggests there can be value in loss minimisation, or what Luthans et al. (2006) label ‘reactive’ practices to promote resilience.

Hence, in combination with positive psychology, COR theory offers a robust theoretical foundation for the notion that it is feasible to identify a set of HRM practices that will enable employees to develop and maintain resources and enhance employee resilience. Resilience-enhancing HRM practices can reasonably be expected to lead to positive outcomes for individuals and their employers.

HRM practices to enhance employee resilience

There have been limited efforts to design, implement and evaluate HRM practices to build resilience. Reivich and Shatté (2003) identified two relevant skill sets: ‘know thyself’ and change, based on activity-based training within organisations. Waite (2004) found that, following face-to-face resilience training in government departments in the United States, employees reported improved self-esteem, sense of control over life events, and sense of purpose in life and interpersonal relations. Similarly, Luthans et al. (2010) explored the possibility of increasing four psychological capital constructs (self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience) via brief training interventions. To build resilience, it was deemed important to build an increased awareness of personal assets such as talents, skills and social networks.

Drawing on contemporary scholarship in HRM (e.g. Jiang et al. 2012), it is reasonable to argue that multiple HRM practices are likely to be necessary to achieve an outcome such as enhanced resilience. Hence, we propose that a set of HRM practices could enhance employee resilience. Resilience-enhancing HRM practices may be defined as: HRM practices that are intended, implemented and perceived to offer employees opportunities to ‘spring back’ from adversity and to develop and maintain resources that strengthen the resilience dimension of psychological capital.

Efforts to identify resilience-enhancing practices mainly focus on psychological resources, which makes sense given the emphasis within positive psychology on psychological capital as a resource to promote resilience. The COR framework broadens the resilience lens to include financial and social resources, as discussed earlier.

Based on our review of HRM and resilience literature, it is proposed that the following set of HRM practices will enhance employee resilience:

- 1 Development of social supports at work;
- 2 Work–life balance practices;
- 3 Employee assistance programs;
- 4 Employee development programs, such as resilience training;
- 5 Flexible work arrangements, reward and benefits systems;
- 6 Occupational health and safety systems;
- 7 Risk and crisis management systems; and
- 8 Diversity management.

Social support

Social support has been identified by COR theorists as playing an important role in widening an individual's pool of available resources and replacing and reinforcing other resources that have been lacking ([Hobfoll 1989](#)). Wilson and Ferch (2005) claim that caring relationships, defined as those that involve the dynamic interplay of self and others, play an important role in employee resilience. They propose that resilience in the workplace can be enhanced through such relationships as they provide a means of relating to others in a way that centres upon human development. Freeman and Carson (2006) found that a workplace intervention using peers to assist workers who had experienced trauma led to reduced absenteeism and increased the perceived credibility of returning to work as a healthy action. Examples of organisational development approaches that aim to establish caring, collaborative relationships among employees and managers include: process-focused interventions; open systems approaches or methods involving collaborative enquiry or appreciative inquiry; and work teams.

In work-related analyses of employee resilience, emphasis is placed on the behaviour of managers and leaders ([Luthans et al. 2002](#)). Managers who understand workplace resilience can help employees adapt and survive workplace change (Siebert 2006). While comparatively little is known about the link between leader behaviour and employee resilience, the research emphasises the importance of positivity exhibited by leadership ([Luthans et al. 2002](#)). Building on the COR notion of social resources, these social supports at work are expected to lead to enhanced employee resilience.

Work–life balance

Work–life balance (WLB) practices recognise that employees' work and non-work domains are rarely separate ([Ollier-Malaterre 2010](#)). Work–life programs include formal policies, informal arrangements and cultural change efforts, and aim to support employees to engage in work and non-work domains (Lewis 1997) by providing both instrumental and psychological resources. In recent years, a shift in the focus of work–life practices towards employee health and well-being has triggered interest in psychological capital and resilience in many organisations ([Youssef and Luthans 2007](#)).

WLB practices may enhance employee resilience, as suggested by research regarding WLB effects on employee commitment and performance (e.g. Wood and de Menezes 2010). In addition, some if not all of these practices may be particularly attractive during

periods of organisational change. For example, where WLB practices promote healthy family and community relationships, employees may develop greater social and psychological resilience resources which they can deploy when times are difficult in the workplace, or flexible working time arrangements may promote rapid and smooth adaptation to shifting demands from the organisation or family and personal needs, providing instrumental resources that can be applied to enhance resilience.

The relative benefits for implementing WLB practices in a proactive or reactive fashion are not obvious. For example, it is plausible to believe that organisations with strong WLB practices may develop commitment among employees, which would pay off in adverse situations, but it is also plausible to suggest that organisations implementing flexible work arrangements during the GFC may be perceived as supportive of employee needs. This line of argument suggests that the post-GFC elimination of telecommuting for Yahoo employees (Swisher 2013) may undercut employee resilience – and organisational performance. Whether those effects eventuate is an empirical question at this time.

Employee assistance programs

Research on employee assistance programs (EAPs) has demonstrated that their use by organisations can lead to the development of resilient employees (e.g. Johnson 2008). In part, EAPs include counselling or consulting services that provide employees with coping strategies or training to facilitate the prevention or remediation of personal problems they may experience both personally or within the workplace ([Kirk and Brown 2003](#)). EAPs are utilised by employers to manage occupational or job stress, and use many different interventions including critical incident stress debriefing, trauma debriefing, mediation, change management, individual counselling and management coaching ([Kirk and Brown 2003](#)).

Siebert (2006) discusses practical guidelines for strengthening workplace resiliency which include: support for employee health and well-being, increases in positive feelings, emphasising problem-solving responses, encouraging self-motivated learning and providing a balance of positivity with negativity.

EAPs have high reported levels of success for both employees and organisations ([Kirk and Brown 2005](#)). However, their continued success depends upon managers and their understanding of the role of EAPs, and of their strategic integration within the firm's HR strategy ([Kirk and Brown 2005](#); [Lengnick-Hall, Beck and Lengnick-Hall 2011](#)). Some EAPs may be more consistent with proactive implementation (e.g. training in coping skills), while others may be more effective when implemented in a reactive fashion (e.g. grief counselling).

Human resource development

[Luthans et al. \(2006\)](#) propose two approaches to human resource development (HRD) programs in order to develop resilience. First, a proactive approach involves structuring the organisation to anticipate the need for resilience through reliance on three specific strategies: risk-focused, asset-focused and process-focused.

The second approach is reactive (or supportive) and focuses upon the importance of reminding employees to think positively and find meaning behind negative or adverse events. [Luthans et al. \(2006\)](#) adapt [Bonanno's \(2004\)](#) clinical approach to inform their HRD strategies. This approach builds resilience in leaders, followers and organisations through positive emotions, self-enhancement, attribution and hardiness strategies.

Additional examples of HRD practices that are designed to enhance resilience and psychological capital include training workshops in mindfulness or resilience development techniques. Some elements of HRD strategies are more consistent with proactive and others with reactive implementation. Given that many HRD strategies have historically focused on the development of human capital, the size of the effects of specific programs on employee resilience remains an open question.

Flexible work arrangements, reward and benefits systems

To avoid negative consequences of economic downturns, some firms have implemented approaches to organisational change and re-structuring using HRM practices that are resilience-enhancing, such as changes in reward systems and working conditions to accommodate employee interests ([Cascio 2009](#)). For example, changes to shifts or working hours for the whole workforce may avoid the termination of some workforce members ([Wang, Hutchins and Garavan 2009](#)). It is plausible to believe that these practices, because they demonstrate an organisational commitment to the maintenance of employee resources in the form of employment, are consistent with efforts to enhance or maintain employee resilience.

Occupational health and safety systems

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is recognised in the notion of work systems as described by [Beer et al. \(1984\)](#) and includes HRM practices that are required to comply with regulatory frameworks and to work with systems or processes across the organisation ([Zacharatos, Barling and Iverson 2005](#)). In many firms, HR managers have oversight for OHS systems that focus on protecting and enhancing the safety, health, environment and welfare of all people engaged in employment and work. Despite this conceptual foundation and practical responsibility, [Zanko and Dawson's \(2011\)](#) review concluded that the links between OHS and other HRM practices have been largely ignored by researchers. The study by [Zacharatos, Barling and Iverson \(2005\)](#) is a rare effort to link OHS to a set of HRM practices. HRM practices directly focused on OHS include safety training, health and well-being programs, safety culture promotion, and employment conditions enhancing workers' health and safety. There is a substantial body of literature demonstrating links between OHS practices, employee and organisational outcomes such as reduction of injuries and illness ([Zanko and Dawson 2011](#)). We build on this research and suggest that the use of OHS systems should lead to enhanced employee resilience.

Crisis management systems

An increasingly important activity of the HR function, particularly for firms in global markets and operating in volatile environments, involves risk and crisis management

(Wernick 2006). HR managers may need to implement policies and practices related to areas such as: risks associated with natural disasters, emergency and disaster preparedness, workplace violence, industrial theft and sabotage, investment in technologies to improve security, and ‘hardening’ facilities to enhance in-house security. Future research might develop understanding of the particular roles, expectations and responsibilities that HR managers may be called upon to incorporate into their portfolios.

Diversity management

Depending upon how it is implemented, diversity might either promote or reduce employee resilience. If diversity only involves hiring a diverse workforce, then conflicts may arise due to, e.g. cultural differences, and those conflicts may undercut employee resilience. However, if diversity management is used in conjunction with inclusive practices (Childs 2005), employees may develop strong bonds with other employees, supervisors and managers, and those bonds may serve as a resource, thereby facilitating resiliency.

Overall, the identification of a set of resilience-enhancing HRM practices is an important initial step in the development of research to bring resilience into the domain of HRM. Building on positive psychology and COR theory, we identify a set of HRM practices that should enhance resilience. Hence, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: The use of a set of resilience-enhancing HRM practices will be positively associated with employee resilience.

Resilience-enhancing HRM practices, the employee and the organisation

Perceptions of the practices and employee outcomes

A dominant approach in previous HRM research has been to assess the use of HRM practices by relying on reports from HR managers; such reports tend to reflect the HRM practice as it is intended, which may differ from the way the practices are perceived by employees across the organisation ([Kehoe and Wright 2010](#)). [Bowen and Ostroff \(2004\)](#) have argued that HRM practices are likely to lead to desired employees’ attitudes only to the extent that there is consistency between the way HRM practices are designed (or intended) and the way in which they are perceived by employees. Therefore, it is important not only to investigate the use or implementation of HRM practices but also to investigate employees’ perceptions of those practices.

Studies indicate that resilient individuals are better equipped to deal with workplace change ([Tugade and Fredrickson 2004](#); [Wanberg and Banas 2000](#)). Resilient individuals are more emotionally stable when faced with adversity, more open to new experiences and flexible to changing demands ([Tugade and Fredrickson 2004](#)). Similarly, psychological capital (including resilience) has been related to employee well-being ([Avey et al. 2010a](#)). However, [Wanberg and Banas \(2000\)](#) found that resilience is not predictive of a more positive view of workplace changes. Instead, it appears that resilience increases the likelihood of individuals accommodating workplace change, even though the person may not

prefer the change. Furthermore, it is possible that some types of HRD enhance both human capital and employee resilience by, for example, improving both the competence and the perceived competence (i.e. psychological resources) of employees.

Research exploring relationships between resilience and other work-related factors suggest there are both static and dynamic benefits to employers. Static benefits emerge from the finding that resilience is strongly related to both job satisfaction and organisational commitment ([Luthans et al. 2007a](#)). Further, [Luthans et al. \(2008\)](#) found employee psychological capital contributing to job performance, while other studies find resilience is related to reduced absenteeism (Avey, Patera and West 2006). Combining this with previous research related to HRM practices, we postulate that resilience-enhancing HRM practices will have a direct positive association not only with the resilience dimension of psychological capital but also with positive employee outcomes such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and job performance. Hence, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of resilience-enhancing HRM practices and employee resilience.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of resilience-enhancing HRM practices and organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job performance.

The practices and organisational performance

A trend identified by Gunnigle, Lavelle and Monaghan (2013) is that the HR function is under increasing scrutiny and pressure to demonstrate delivery of value to organisations. As the HR function has shifted to a strategic focus on the HR function as a source of economic value to the firm, a major objective of the HR function is often the linking of employee job performance and organisational performance ([Paauwe 2009](#)). To the extent HR practices support improvements in individual performance by promoting employee resilience, the HR function will be in a stronger position to respond that not only are employee outcomes enhanced but also organisational value is indeed being created and sustained.

Recent studies find that resilience is linked to enhanced employee performance in stressful or turbulent environments (Avey, Nimnicht and Pigeon 2010c). More generally, advocates of positive psychology suggest that organisations that build or develop resilience in their employees will be more adaptive and successful over time ([Luthans et al. 2002](#)). Focusing on the HRM function, Lengnick-Hall, Beck and Lengnick-Hall (2011) suggest that a strategic approach to HRM can create competencies among employees, enabling the organisation to improve and more successfully adapt to change and adversity. They conclude that, with resilient employees, the organisation itself becomes resilient and gains a competitive advantage. These dynamic benefits suggest the following:

Hypothesis 4: The use of resilience-enhancing HRM practices will be positively associated with organisational performance.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between the use of resilience-enhancing HRM practices and organisational performance will be mediated by employee job performance.

Environmental uncertainty

To understand the global context in which resilience becomes important, we draw attention to recent manifestations of environmental dynamism and turbulence. The 2008–09 GFC and its aftermath heightened awareness of the ways in which external events can significantly impact across global, national, organisational and individual levels (Chau et al. 2012). Such disastrous events have revived scholarly interest in the concepts of environmental dynamism (at the firm level) and perceived environmental uncertainty (at the individual level), which have been extensively discussed in the organisation theory and management literature (e.g. Jansen, Vera and Crossan 2009).

Environmental dynamism refers to both the rate and the unpredictability of change in the external environment of a firm (Jansen, Vera and Crossan 2009). The dynamism in a given environment may be due to factors such as technological change, interruptions in the supply chain, or fluctuations in the demand for a product or service (Jansen, van den Bosch and Volberda 2006). For individuals in the workforce, perceived environmental uncertainty may lead to outcomes such as stress and anxiety (Waldman et al. 2001).

Health, safety and security concerns, including those related to threats such as pandemics or terrorism, are ever-present due to media and public discussion. The impact on employee well-being of economic uncertainty linked to the GFC is dramatically demonstrated by internal statistics on client referrals for counselling services collected by Converge International. As an employee assistance provider delivering offsite counselling and support services, Converge is at the frontline of stressful issues faced by employees in Australian workforces. As demonstrated in Figure 1, Converge's in-house statistics reveal a

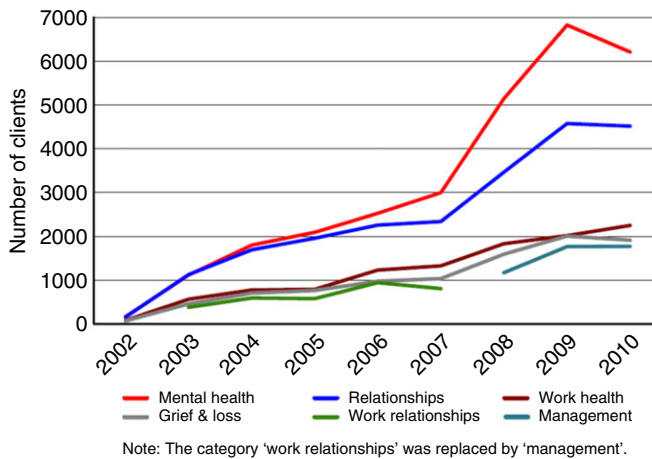


Figure 1 Reasons for referral to Converge International Counselling Services 2002–10
Source: McMillan 2011.

spike in the number of clients using their counselling services, a spike that coincides with the GFC (McMillan 2011). The two most dominant reasons related to the spike are mental health concerns and issues pertaining to relationships. Other issues identified but at lower levels include work health, grief and loss, work relationships and management. The Converge uptick in referrals occurred simultaneously with rising unemployment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).

Referring back to the theoretical foundation of positive psychology, it is suggested that examples of resilience-enhancing HRM practices that could be proactively implemented prior to change events might include HRD programs such as training workshops in change management techniques, or occupational health and safety systems. This logic leads us to suggest the following:

Hypothesis 6: The positive association between proactive investment in resilience-enhancing HRM practices and employees' resilience will be moderated by environmental uncertainty such that the relationship will be stronger during and subsequent to events involving organisational or individual change and turbulence.

COR theory provides a somewhat different perspective on these relationships. Drawing on COR theory, we note that, while it is also possible to introduce resilience-enhancing HRM practices after a change event, the effects will not be as long-lasting. Hence:

Hypothesis 7: Reactive investment in resilience-enhancing HRM practices subsequent to events involving organisational or individual change and turbulence will be positively associated with employee resilience at that time but not at subsequent timepoints.

HRM practices that do not enhance resilience

It is possible to also identify some HRM practices that might have the (unintended) consequence of reducing employee resilience. Although it is reasonable to believe there are positive linkages between some HRM practices and employee resilience, some HRM practices may be irrelevant to or exert an adverse impact on employee resilience, while others may exhibit more complex dynamics.

For example, during difficult economic times, such as those associated with the GFC, firms often struggle to manage costs and become more efficient and effective. Many firms around the world have received media attention for a reliance on workforce downsizing as an HRM approach to cost reduction (Thompson, Lacy and Shore 2011). Nonetheless, HRM practices such as downsizing often generate disappointing results. Research by Gunnigle, Lavelle and Monaghan (2013), conducted with multinational firms in Ireland, shows that a trend related to the GFC is the HR function playing an important role in organisational change and re-structuring, downsizing, working time reductions, industrial relations negotiations and related changes in reward systems and working conditions. By implication, the same HR function is often simultaneously responsible for downsizing and the maintenance of surviving employee morale and commitment. Drawing from COR

theory, to the extent HR practices and processes prior to downsizing involve investments in (or resources for) employee resilience, downsizing may undercut any positive effects of those prior investments by creating a sense of betrayal and reducing employee resilience. Hence:

Hypothesis 8: Unilateral removal by an employer of valued resources from employees will have a negative association with employee resilience.

Developing measures of resilience-enhancing HRM practices

Research on construct clarity in the HRM literature stresses the importance of developing clear constructs so that researchers are better able to empirically investigate various HRM phenomena (Klein and Delery 2012). As we have discussed, the concept of employee resilience has been defined and built on the foundations of positive psychology and conservation of resources theory. We have contributed to this field of research by defining and identifying a set of resilience-enhancing HRM practices. A logical next step is to generate items that represent this concept and can be developed into a scale (MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff 2011) to operationalise the construct of resilience-enhancing HRM practices. Table 1 shows a set of sample items generated through the review of HRM and resilience literature; it is acknowledged that this list requires refinement and is not exhaustive.

Table 1 Resilience-enhancing HRM practices: generation of sample scale items

| |
|---|
| Employees have access to training workshops in resilience development techniques |
| Employees have access to flexible work arrangements that help employees to cope with multiple work and non-work demands |
| Employees have access to employee involvement in decision-making about organisational change |
| Employees have access to an employee assistance program |
| Employees have access to event response programs such as grief counselling |
| In organisational restructuring, changes are made to the reward systems to accommodate employee interests (e.g. reduction of bonuses rather than termination of some workforce members) |
| In organisational restructuring, changes are made to working conditions to accommodate employee interests (e.g. changes to shifts or working hours rather than termination of some workforce members) |
| There is a crisis management plan that includes items such as such as emergency compensation for displaced employees |
| Employees have access to work–life balance practices |
| OHS systems are designed to address mental health |
| The organisation has a system to manage return to work following a workplace injury or period of extended leave |
| The organisation has flexible rewards and benefits to accommodate the diverse needs of employees |
| The organisation embraces/encourages diversity of ideas |
| The organisation embraces/encourages diversity of people |

Further research, following the steps outlined by MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011) is needed to develop these items into reliable and valid measures.

Conclusion

Implications for research

We have sought to establish the relevance of resilience to HRM, and framed the discussion using theories of positive psychology and COR. Perhaps most importantly, we have challenged the notion that the only, or even the most effective way, to promote resilience lies in formal resilience training. The key is to identify a set of HRM practices (e.g. social support at the workplace, work–life balance practices, diversity management or HRD) that serve as forms of resources (e.g. work teams, flexible work, grief counselling or resilience training) that can be used most effectively in a proactive or reactive fashion to enhance resilience.

In COR terms we argue that resilience can be a valuable resource regardless of whether or not change is present such that, even if there is no change within the organisation, the non-work lives of employees tend to be turbulent, so employee resilience will still help with employee attitudes and behaviours. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the main benefits of resilience-enhancing practices and resources will accrue during periods of organisational turbulence and that such turbulence will continue to be relevant to many organisations and drive the need for further research on employee resilience. Each of the hypotheses presented here warrants further study.

At the level of the employee, studies are needed of how HR practices support or undermine psychological, social or instrumental resources associated with resilience. Further, the strength of the relationship between specific HR practices and resilience warrants study. To make the issue more complicated, it is possible that resilience itself is not a unitary phenomenon so, for example, the resources that promote employee resilience in the face of massive technological change may be relatively distinct from those promoting resilience following a natural disaster.

At the organisational level, studies would be useful that addressed the costs and benefits of various HR practices in terms of employee resilience, and the practices that are more or less effective when implemented in a proactive or reactive fashion. Longitudinal studies would be particularly useful here given that the payoff for having resilient employees may change with the fortunes of the organisation.

Finally, we encourage research efforts to develop and validate a scale to operationalise a construct focused on resilience-enhancing HRM practices. Scale development is an ongoing process and the sample items provided in Table 1 are only a first step in defining relevant properties and characteristics.

Implications for practice

The research presented here does not provide specific guidelines for HRM specialists; more research is needed to develop such guidelines. Nonetheless, the research fits well with efforts to strategically align HRM practices within organisations. Further, viewing

HRM practices in terms of whether they do or do not support employee resilience could help practitioners to provide demonstrated value to the organisation, particularly in times of crisis and change. More generally, practitioners may benefit from a focus on the proactive and reactive strategies for promoting resilience, as suggested by Luthans et al. (2006), and discussed here.

In Australia, and elsewhere, the value of employee resilience has probably never been greater. The question of how to harness that value, in a cost-effective manner, is one that both practitioners and researchers need answered. The research here provides the beginnings of that answer.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge funding provided for this research by Converge International.

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