

LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE: WHERE SHOULD WE GO NEXT?

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In the symposium's first article, Wilkinson requested that leaders consider resilience as one possible asset to assist employees in thriving during volatile times. In the second article, Georgoulas-Sherry demonstrated resilience as a contrast unique from grit or hardiness and brought clarity as to how each of these three constructs should be discussed. Leaders and researchers should now be able to correctly identify which construct is needed in a given situation. In the third article, Bowman provided an overview of the resilience and leadership literature. By identifying what research has already been conducted, Bowman identified what types of research need to be conducted going forward. One such area identified was the impact of leadership on team resilience. In the fourth article, McEwen explored the role leaders play in creating work climates that foster team, and subsequently, organizational resilience. In the current and final article, Shek and Wilkinson explore future opportunities for leadership and resilience research.

Leadership and Resilience Research in the Non-Western Context

A survey of the literature suggested a need to conduct more research on the relationship between resilience and leadership. Using “resilience” as the search term, a March 2022 search of PsycINFO yielded 36,928 citations. A subsequent search of the same database using “leadership” yielded 99,846 records. However, when searching for “resilience” and “leadership,” only 1,358 citations were found. The rather low yield for the combined terms of “resilience” and “leadership” points toward the need to conduct more studies on resilience and leadership. An additional observation is that most studies on resilience and leadership are conducted in Western societies. Culture defines the nature and meaning of resilience. There is a need to understand resilience and its relationship with leadership in different cultures. With specific reference to

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JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP STUDIES, Volume 16, Number 2, 2022

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View this article online at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jls.21817) • DOI:10.1002/jls.21817

the Chinese communities, a PsycINFO search using “resilience,” “leadership,” and “Chinese” as the search terms revealed only 26 citations.

Using the Chinese culture as just one example of resilience in the context of a culture, the Chinese culture views adversity as a good opportunity for growth and constitutes “training” for a person’s forbearance and endurance. In a study on the concept of adversity in Chinese people, Shek (2004) noted that Chinese cultural beliefs can promote endurance and resilience under adversity. These include:

1. “Chi de ku zhong ku, fang wei ren shang ren” (hardship increases stature).
2. “You zhi zhe shi jing cheng” (when there is a will, there is a way).
3. “Zhi yao you heng xin, tie chu mo cheng zhen” (if you work hard enough, you can turn an iron rod into a needle).
4. “Jiang qin bu zhuo, qin jian nai ku” (diligence is an important factor to overcome poverty).
5. “Ren ding sheng tian” (man is the master of his own fate).
6. “Jiang xiang ben wu zhong, nan er dang zi qiang” (man is not born to greatness, but achieves it by his own effort).

There are two reasons why Chinese beliefs about adversity should be examined. First, the sheer size of the Chinese population suggests that resilient leadership models must be tested in Chinese people for its generalizability. Second, Chinese beliefs about adversity based on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism provide interesting leads for developing resilient leadership models. How to integrate non-Western cultural beliefs about adversity and resilience in the context of leadership with Western theories and research is an exciting area to be explored. Exploring resilience in the Chinese culture is just one example of the need to strengthen the scientific database on resilience and leadership in non-Western contexts.

Leadership and Resilience Research in New Fields

Certain fields such as medicine, nursing, and the military have led the way in work-related resilience

research. Studies of resilience among nurses are consistently being produced (Lee & De Gagne, 2022; Sierra-García et al., 2022; Sihvola et al., 2022). Studies related to resilience in military personnel are also regularly seen in the literature (Doody et al., 2022; Millstein et al., 2022). However, even within these fields, there are few studies examining resilience in leadership (Georgoulas-Sherry, 2022). More research needs to be conducted in a wide variety of fields to find generalizable skills or training methods.

Leadership Behaviors and Employee Resilience

It is also important for research to explore the leadership behaviors that may influence employee resilience. Wilkinson (2020) examined servant leadership behaviors and found two behaviors that had the greatest impact on employee resilience. While Wilkinson’s study was a start, more studies need to be conducted to either substantiate or reject these findings and further studies need to be conducted to evaluate the impact of behaviors of other leadership styles on employee resilience. In a review of the literature pertaining to leadership’s relationship with resilience, Wilkinson (2020) found only (a) humble leadership (Zhu et al., 2019), (b) supportive leadership (Cooke et al., 2019), (c) contingent reward leadership (Harland et al., 2005; Nguyen et al., 2016), (d) management-by-exception leadership (Harland et al., 2005; Sommer et al., 2016), (e) transformational leadership (Harland et al., 2005; Sommer et al., 2016), (f) laissez-faire leadership (Harland et al., 2005), (g) paradoxical leadership (Franken et al., 2020), and (h) empowering leadership (Hodliffe, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2016) had been explored in concert with resilience. It is suggested that additional research is needed on each leadership style to assess these previous studies’ findings. These studies must also be replicated in new contexts to assess generalizability. Additional similar studies are needed to explore the relationship of other leadership styles such as authentic leadership, spiritual leadership, adaptive leadership, and so on with resilience.

However, the goal of research examining the connection of leadership and employee resilience should be to detect the leadership behaviors that significantly

influence employee resilience, regardless of style. While identifying that a leadership style has a positive influence on employee resilience is beneficial, it is more beneficial to know which specific behaviors have the greatest influence. Assessing the relationship of employee resilience with a wide variety of leadership styles could result in identifying common influential behaviors, which suggests that greater attention to specific leadership behaviors is necessary. Only three of the studies cited above examined specific leadership behaviors. Therefore, future studies should use instruments that assess specific leadership behaviors and conduct data analyses that reveal how those behaviors relate to employee resilience.

Deepening the Understanding of Resilience and Leadership Development

Researchers must also deepen their understanding of resilience and leadership development. While the concepts of adversity and resilience are widely examined in the developmental and clinical literature (Windle, 2011), they are not thoroughly addressed in the leadership literature. While there are accounts of “resilient persons” (Everly Jr. et al., 2012), fewer studies exploring “resilient leaders” are found in the literature (Ratze et al., 2021). Although Dartey-Baah (2015) argued that resilient leadership qualities are covered in transformational and transactional leadership models, a specific focus on resilience is not common in the leadership literature. Furthermore, there is a need to understand more about how “inner strengths” are related to resilience in leadership. With the growing influence of positive psychology, how spiritual beliefs, meaning, and vision are related to resilience in leaders is theoretically important. As resilience can be regarded as psychosocial competence, the theoretical relationships between resilience and other psychosocial competencies should be further explored. In particular, how “soft skills,” “social–emotional skills,” or “psychosocial competencies” are related to resilient leadership is a theoretical issue that should be addressed. Finally, researchers need to develop conceptual models on the consequences of resilient leadership on leaders, followers, and organizations, and conduct empirical studies to examine such theoretical postulations.

Additional Research Modalities

First, to examine the role of resilience in effective leadership, longitudinal studies are needed particularly to understand antecedents and consequences of resilient leadership. Using longitudinal research designs, researchers are able to examine the causes, concomitants, and consequences of resilient leadership. Coupled with the use of advanced statistical analyses, such as structural equation modeling, researchers can understand more about the mechanisms underlying resilient leadership via longitudinal data. Unfortunately, there are few longitudinal studies exploring resilience and leadership. Without more longitudinal studies, it will be difficult to delineate the processes and outcomes surrounding the role of resilience in leadership.

Second, in investigating the linkage between resilience and leadership, mediating and moderating factors may be involved (Nguyen et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2019). For example, beliefs about adversity may shape resilience in leadership which, in turn, may eventually contribute to organizational effectiveness and well-being. For moderating processes, factors such as gender, age, and social class may moderate the relationships between resilience and developmental outcomes. Hence, researchers should be aware of such intervening processes in order to develop a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the role of resilience in leadership.

Third, there is a need to conduct experimental and quasi-experimental studies to examine the effects of resilience, such as presence versus absence of leadership resilience or the impact of resilience training, on leadership outcomes.

Fourth, researchers should conduct qualitative studies to examine the nature of resilient leadership, including the lived experience of resilient leaders and their narratives about adaptation under adversity. Such qualitative studies would add a level of complexity, sophistication, and robustness to resilient leadership models.

Fifth, as mixed-method studies can enrich the understanding of resilient leadership, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods would be helpful.

Finally, there is a need to develop and validate instruments on resilient leadership (Everly Jr. et al., 2013).

Evaluation of Training Programs on Resilience and Leadership

Trainers commonly develop programs to promote leadership competencies, including resilience (Lawton, 2015). However, research evaluating the impact of such programs is lacking. Hence, resilient leadership trainers are called upon to include in every resilient training program an evaluation to assess its impact.

In the field of leadership training, trainers commonly use subjective outcome evaluation via client satisfaction to gauge feedback of the program participants. Although such an approach is a convenient way to evaluate the training's effectiveness, there are two criticisms. First, favorable perceptions of the training do not necessarily imply positive changes in participants' behavior. That is, "feeling" that the leadership program works does not necessarily result in positive changes in leadership behavior. Second, client satisfaction may not be valid if trainers do not use validated measures in the assessment of client satisfaction. That is, resilient leadership programs should only be evaluated using validated measures.

Besides subjective outcome evaluation, trainers often ask program participants to write reflections. Usually, trainers will invite participants to write their reflections about the benefits of the training program from their subjective experience. Individual or focus group interviews can also be conducted to understand subjective experiences of training programs. If leadership researchers use qualitative methodology to examine the effectiveness of their resilient leadership program, they should pay attention to the principles highlighted by Shek et al. (2005), which included statements of the philosophical orientation of the study, clarification of how biases and ideological preoccupation are addressed in the study, ways to address authenticity and consistency of findings, and the researcher as an instrument. Self-discipline is essential when conducting qualitative evaluations related to understanding the impact of leadership training programs.

In addition to subjective outcome and qualitative evaluation, trainers of resilient leadership may consider using objective outcome evaluation to examine the program's impact, such as how leadership promotes the resilience of the followers (Eliot, 2020; Tau

et al., 2018). Methodologically, the easiest way is to collect pretest and posttest data using objective outcome measures. If participants show positive changes in outcome measures (e.g., resilience qualities), it can be interpreted that positive changes may be because of the training program. Ideally, if trainers wish to conclude that a resilient leadership program is effective, they must employ an experimental strategy with randomized controlled trials (Holmberg et al., 2016). However, the use of experimental methods to evaluate leadership programs is challenging and often impractical, thus, not very common, in the leadership and resilient leadership fields.

Conclusion

In the current article, it was argued that there are few studies examining resilience and leadership based on a survey of PsycINFO. As researchers seek to conduct new studies in this area, it was suggested that research should be conducted (a) on leadership and resilience in the non-Western context; (b) within nascently or unexplored fields; (c) with an emphasis on leadership behaviors and their influence on employee resilience; (d) to deepen the understanding of resilience and leadership development; (e) using research modalities that have not yet been widely used; and (f) to evaluate the effectiveness of resilience training programs. There is a myriad of other possible research agendas that could be explored, but these six would provide leaders with additional knowledge to be applied to their spheres of influence.

Acknowledgments

The preparation of the current paper was financially supported by the Li and Fung Endowed Professorship at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Research Matching Fund from the Research Grants Council (U.ZH3K).

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