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Sirja Myllykoski

# **Resilience and its Strengthening in Organizations**

The Role of Human Resource Management

School of Management  
Master's Thesis in Economics  
and Business Administration  
Master's Degree Programme in  
Human Resource Management

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<b>Tekijä:</b>	Sirja Myllykoski		
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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Työelämän jatkuva muutos voi aiheuttaa paineita menestymisestä organisaatioille ja niiden työntekijöille. Yhdeksi tärkeäksi menestymistä määritteleväksi tekijäksi on tunnistettu resilienssi. Yhä useampi organisaatio toimii kompleksisessa toimintaympäristössä, jonka myötä organisaatiot kohtaavat monenlaisia haasteita sekä epävarmuutta. Organisaatioiden vastatessa haasteisiin menestyksekkäästi, työntekijöiden kyvykkyydet ja varsinkin resilienssi ovat tunnistettu kriittisiksi menestystekijöiksi. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan resilienssiä ja sen kehittämistä organisaatioissa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten resilienssi voidaan käsitteellistää työelämän kontekstissa, sekä miten resilienssiä voidaan vahvistaa organisaatioissa henkilöstöjohtamisen käytäntöjen kautta. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tuottaa lisää tietoa ajankohtaisesta ja suhteellisen vähän tutkitusta aiheesta sekä syventää aiheeseen liittyvää ymmärrystä.

Tutkimuksen teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä keskitytään resilienssin käsitteeseen ja keinoihin, joiden avulla sitä voidaan vahvistaa organisaatioissa. Ensimmäiseksi tarkastellaan, miten resilienssi näkyy työelämässä ja millaisia hyötyjä resilienssillä on todettu olevan. Seuraavaksi tarkastellaan työntekijöiden resilienssin vahvistamista henkilöstökäytäntöjen avulla. Aiheeseen liittyvät aiemmat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, että useiden henkilöstöjohtamisen käytäntöjen kautta voidaan vaikuttaa myönteisesti työntekijöiden resilienssiin. Tutkimuksen empiirinen osa on toteutettu kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena ja lähestymistapana on hyödynnetty kvalitatiivista tapaustutkimusta. Tutkimusaineisto on kerätty haastatteleamalla yhdeksää henkilöstöjohtamisen alan ammattilaista. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu heidän näkemyksistään sekä kokemuksistaan resilienssiin ja sen vahvistamiseen liittyen. Tutkimusaineisto on kerätty puolistrukturoidulla haastattelulla ja sen analyysi on suoritettu teema-analyysin avulla.

Tutkimustulosten mukaan työelämän kontekstissa resilienssillä viitataan niin työntekijän, tiimin kuin organisaationkin resilienssiin. Resilienssi nähdään kehitettävänä kyvykkyytenä ja resilienssi auttaa työntekijöitä, tiimejä ja organisaatioita selviämään muutoksista ja haasteista paremmin. Nykyajan työelämässä resilienssiä pidetään erittäin tärkeänä kyvykkyytenä jatkuvien muutosten ja haasteiden myötä sekä edellytyksenä menestymiselle. Työntekijän resilienssillä toiminnalla viitataan sopeutuvuuteen, joustavuuteen, rohkeuteen sekä kokeiluhalukkuuteen ja sillä nähdään olevan monia myönteisiä vaikutuksia organisaation toiminnalle. Työntekijöiden resilienssiä voidaan vahvistaa organisaatioissa henkilöstöjohtamisen käytäntöjen avulla, kuten arvostamalla työntekijöitä ja panostamalla psykologiseen turvallisuuteen, edistämällä jatkuvaa oppimista, minäpystyvyyttä ja itsensä johtamista, luomalla tukea antava työympäristö sekä kehittämällä johtajuutta. Resilienssin vahvistamisessa korostuu jaettu vastuu, minkä vuoksi organisaation jäsenten jakamat yhteiset toimintatavat sekä tavoitteet ovat olennaisia.

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**AVAINSANAT:** Työntekijän resilienssi, tiimin resilienssi, organisaation resilienssi, resilienssin kehittäminen, henkilöstöjohtaminen

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****School of Management**

<b>Author:</b>	Sirja Myllykoski		
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**ABSTRACT:**

Continuously changing working life may place pressures on success for organizations and their employees. Thus, resilience has been identified as an essential determinant of success for both at the organizational and the individual level. Moreover, organizations operate in a complex environment, where organizations face various challenges and uncertainties. When organizations aim to respond to challenges successfully, employees' capabilities and especially resilience have been identified as critical success factors. This research investigates resilience and its strengthening in organizations. The purpose of the research is to examine how resilience can be conceptualized in working life and how resilience can be strengthened in organizations through human resource management practices. The objective is to provide new information on a topical and relatively little-studied topic and to deepen understanding of the topic.

The theoretical framework of the research focuses on the concept of resilience and the ways how it can be strengthened. First, it is discussed how resilience appears in working life and what kind of benefits resilience has been identified to bring. Next, strengthening employee resilience through human resource management practices is discussed. Previous research has identified that various human resource management practices can influence employee resilience beneficially. The empirical part of the research has been carried out as a qualitative research, and the research approach is based on a qualitative case study. The research data has been collected by interviewing nine HR professionals, and the purpose has been to examine their perceptions and experiences on resilience and its strengthening. The data has been collected through a semi-structured interview, and its analysis has been performed utilizing thematic analysis.

According to the research findings, resilience in the context of working life refers to employee, team and organizational resilience. Moreover, resilience is seen as a capability that can be developed and it helps employees, teams and organizations to cope better with changes and challenges. Resilience is seen as an essential ability in today's working life with constant changes and challenges and as a prerequisite for success. Employee resilience refers to adaptability, flexibility, courage, and willingness to experiment and it is seen to have various benefits on organizations. Furthermore, resilience can be strengthened in organizations through human resource management practices that focus on valuing employees, investing in psychological safety, promoting continuous learning, self-efficacy and self-management, creating a supportive work environment and developing leadership. In strengthening resilience, a shared responsibility is emphasized, meaning that an organizational members' shared practices and goals are essential.

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**KEYWORDS:** Employee resilience, team resilience, organizational resilience, strengthening resilience, human resource management

## Contents

1	Introduction	7
1.1	Purpose of the thesis	9
1.2	Structure of the thesis	10
2	Resilience	12
2.1	Background of resilience	12
2.2	Definition of resilience	14
2.2.1	Employee resilience	16
2.2.2	Team resilience	19
2.2.3	Organizational resilience	21
3	Strengthening resilience through HRM	24
3.1	HRM in organizations	24
3.2	HRM and strengthening resilience	27
3.2.1	Investing in employees	28
3.2.2	Creating a supportive work environment	30
3.2.3	Promoting continuous learning	32
3.2.4	Developing leadership	33
4	Research methodology	35
4.1	Research approach	35
4.2	Data collection and participants	37
4.3	Data analysis	41
4.4	Research trustworthiness	43
5	Research findings	46
5.1	Resilience in working life	46
5.1.1	The importance of resilience in working life	46
5.1.2	The appearing of resilience in working life	49
5.1.3	Resilience at the team and organizational level	53
5.2	Strengthening resilience in organizations through HRM	57
5.2.1	The importance of strengthening resilience in organizations	57

5.2.2	The ways to strengthen resilience in organizations	59
5.2.3	Organizational roles in strengthening resilience	65
6	Conclusions	68
6.1	Discussion	68
6.1.1	Conceptualizing resilience in working life	68
6.1.2	Strengthening resilience in organizations through HRM	73
6.2	Practical implication	80
6.3	Limitations and suggestions for future research	82
	References	84
	Appendices	93
	Appendix 1. Interview frame	93

## Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Structure of the thesis.	11
<b>Figure 2.</b> The proposed framework for organizational resilience (Koronis & Ponis, 2018, p. 39).	23
<b>Figure 3.</b> The proposed framework for employee resilience.	79

## Tables

<b>Table 1.</b> Resilient Employee Behaviours (Kuntz et al., 2017, p. 225).	17
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## 1 Introduction

Organizations operate in a turbulent environment and face remarkable changes from time to time (Linnenluecke, 2017; Bhamra et al., 2011). The turbulence might be caused by economic, environmental, or social disorders, and it can increase the pressures for succeeding and maintaining competitiveness (Burnard & Bharna, 2011). Moreover, the capacity of organizations' employees to respond and adjust for challenges determines the thrive of organizations (Näswall et al., 2019). Therefore, when organizations and their employees aim to succeed when responding to challenges, resilience has been recognized as crucial (King et al., 2016; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Consequently, resilience has been identified as helpful quality and character for individuals as well as organizations when unpredicted events occur, even if they are caused by economic, environmental, or social disruptions (Lim et al., 2020).

The concept of resilience has been researched in various disciplines, including psychology, engineering, economics, and organizational studies (Lim et al., 2020). However, while resilience has been a favoured research subject in fields such as clinical and positive psychology for decades, in organizational behaviour research, it has been recognized as noteworthy later (King et al., 2016). Nevertheless, when resilience has been identified as an essential ability of both organizations and employees in today's business world, research of resilience in the context of working life has expanded (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Bardoel et al., 2014). Research of resilience in the context of working life, can be related to the resilience of employees (e.g. Kuntz et al., 2017; Koerber et al., 2018; Näswall et al., 2019), teams (e.g. Alliger et al., 2015; Meneghel et al., 2016) and organizations (e.g. Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2016; Burnard & Bharna, 2011; Koronis & Ponis, 2018).

Even though resilience has been studied in various fields, the term's conceptualization is relatively similar among the fields where it is often related to the recovery after a disruptive event (Bharna et al., 2011). In the same manner, concerning organizations, resilience can be referred to as employees and organizations' responses to challenges and

turmoil (Bharma et al., 2011). However, regarding the research of employee resilience, it has been proposed that for utilizing resilience at work, it is not necessary to confront major crises (Kuntz et al., 2017). Therefore, the research on the resilience of employees may also focus on coping with everyday practices and challenges at work and how the organization and its work environment enable resilient employee behaviours (Näswall et al., 2019).

Concerning the importance of resilience in the context of working life, resilience has been proposed to bring competitive advantage for organizations (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) and to enhance the performance of an organization (Näswall et al., 2019). Moreover, when all kinds of organizations face challenging situations for now and then, afterwards, it may be resilience that distinguishes the organizations that weaken and organizations that thrive, emphasizing the importance of resilience at work (Lim et al., 2020). When resilience has been identified as vital for organizations and their employees, the interest has shifted to the possibilities to strengthen it. The role of human resource management (HRM) has been identified to be essential for its strengthening. (Bardoel et al., 2014; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011)

The possibilities of HRM to influence beneficially organizational and employee resilience has been recognized in previous studies (Bardoel et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2019; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). The possibilities are based on implementing resilience-enhancing human resource (HR) practices (Khan et al., 2019; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) and creating an organizational culture and a work environment that supports the appearance of resilience in organization (Näswall et al., 2015; Kuntz et al., 2017). As the possibility of HRM in supporting resilience in organizations has been recognized, its research has become much interested topic in academic research.

## 1.1 Purpose of the thesis

The connection between HRM and strengthening resilience is a relatively new research topic which implies that many of the previous studies of the topic are primarily conceptual and theoretical (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Bardoel et al., 2014). This may be problematic when the theories have not been tested with empirical studies (King et al., 2016). The scarcity in empirical studies concerning the connection between HRM and resilience strengthening compose the research gap of this thesis. Hence, this research gap demonstrates the relevance of the research topic and the importance of expanding the topic's research to increase knowledge and theoretical observations of the connection between HRM and resilience. By expanding understanding of the research gap, the practical implication becomes evident in increased knowledge of how HRM can support business in organizations and support personnel to cope better and feel more satisfied with their work.

The purpose of this master's thesis is to create a deeper understanding of resilience in the context of working life and examine what ways the resilience of employees can be strengthened in organizations through HRM by reviewing existing literature and examining perceptions of HR professionals. However, the aim is not to find measurable ways to strengthen employee resilience but to explore HR practises that can support resilience at work. The empirical research investigates HR-professionals' perceptions of resilience, its importance, and its strengthening through HRM in their organization and in general. Thus, this research aims to investigate resilience through HR-professionals perceptions and experiences. The objective is approached with the help of two research questions:

RQ1. How can resilience be conceptualized in the context of working life?

RQ2. How can resilience be strengthened in organizations through HRM?

To find out how resilience can be strengthened in organizations through HRM, it is essential first to discover how resilience can be conceptualized in the context of working

life. The research focuses primarily on the resilience of employees but also team and organizational resilience are discussed. Concerning the organizational level, the focus is on discovering benefits that employee resilience can bring to the organization's functioning. Moreover, the focus of this research is on perceptions of resilience that organizational behaviour and management research have presented. In addition, research in the field of psychology is acknowledged when defining the concept of resilience. The aim of this research is to search implications for HRM and human resource development (HRD). Therefore, the consideration of resilience is limited to the organizational context and its strengthening through HRM.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the subject of the thesis, discusses its background, and explains its relevance in the field of academic research. In addition, the introduction illustrates the objective of the thesis and introduces the research questions. The introduction is followed by a literature review where the second and third chapters constitute the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework introduces the main themes of the research subject and creates a more comprehensive understanding of why the themes are relevant and reasonable to research. The second chapter focuses on resilience. To understand the research topic comprehensively, it is essential to explain the background of resilience, continue to define the concept, and then describe the meaning of resilience in the context of working life. The third chapter focuses on the role of HRM in strengthening resilience. It is first explained what the role of HRM in organizations is in general, and then the ways that resilience can be strengthened in organizations through HRM found in previous studies are introduced.

The fourth and fifth chapters compose the empirical part of the thesis. In the fourth chapter, the practical implementation and the methodology of empirical research are presented. The chapter introduces and explains the chosen research methods, describing the data collection process, introducing data, and data analysis. Moreover, the

trustworthiness and ethicality of the research are discussed. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the empirical research. The sixth and the final chapter of the thesis is conclusions. In the final chapter, the main findings of the research are observed, research questions are answered, and the practical implication of the research is discussed. Finally, limitations of the research and suggestions for future research are considered in the end. The structure of the thesis is demonstrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Structure of the thesis.



## **2 Resilience**

Resilience seems to be a common phenomenon explored in various disciplines and contexts (Masten, 2001). For instance, the popularity of resilience has increased in academic research, business practice, public policy, and the press. However, conceptualization and operationalization of resilience have been quite diverse in research (Linnenluecke, 2017). Therefore, in this chapter, the background and the definition of resilience are discussed. It is illustrated how research has extended from studying individual psychological resilience to resilience in the context of working life, in other words, the resilience of employees, teams, and organizations (Masten, 2001).

### **2.1 Background of resilience**

The concept of resilience has multidisciplinary roots (Windle, 2011), and it has been examined in various fields, including psychology, engineering, economics, and organizational studies, but in some fields, it has got less attention than in others (Lim et al., 2020). For instance, resilience has been a common research subject in clinical and positive psychology studies, whereas in organizational, business, and management research, it has got much less attention (Luthans, 2002; Linnenluecke, 2017; Duchek, 2020). However, recent studies have focused more on organizational and employee resilience and illustrated its increasing significance for the thriving of organizations and their personnel (Saari, 2016; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2016; Duchek, 2020). Therefore, resilience is a relevant concept concerning research on working life and organizations, regardless of its relative recentness (Saari, 2016).

Research on resilience started from the field of psychology in the 1970s when researchers got interested in the phenomenon of resilience in relation to children's developmental challenges as a result of genetic or experiential conditions (Masten, 2001). Subsequently, resilience was studied in positive psychology, and at the beginning of the 21st century, it became included in positive organizational behaviour studies as one positive

psychological capacity together with hope, confidence, and optimism (Luthans, 2002). It was thought that resilience would be an exceptional and unusual gift that some people have through their genetic, but already at the beginning of the 21st century it was noticed that the capacity of resilience can be developed, and emerges in people's everyday actions (Masten, 2001).

Early studies of resilience focused on resilience mainly as an individual psychological capacity (e.g. Masten, 2001; Luthans, 2002), but afterwards, research extended to entities such as organizations (Coutu, 2002). Thus, resilience became a favoured research subject concerning working life. Consequently, research that examines resilience from other than individual perspectives has become more common (see Alliger et al., 2015; Burnard & Bharna, 2015; Meneghel et al., 2016), which implies that resilience can be explored in various contexts. Psychological resilience, organizational resilience, workforce resilience, community resilience, and economic resilience demonstrate distinct perspectives from which resilience can be studied (Lim et al., 2020).

In today's working life, adversity is part of all organizations' functioning (Richard, 2020; King et al., 2016). Therefore, particularly after many natural and artificial catastrophes have taken place, resilience has become a more attractive concept to understand in relation to organizational change, responsiveness, innovation, and flexibility (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009, p. 334). As resilience has emerged as strategically essential in current working life it has also become a rising challenge for organizations to consider (King et al., 2016). Furthermore, as continuous change has become usual in many organizations, and studies have verified that employees have an essential role in addressing change, the resilience of employees has started to draw attention among researchers (Shin et al., 2012).

Building workplace resilience to address changes requires investing not only in organizational resilience but also in strengthening the resilience of employees (Kuntz et al., 2016; Luthans et al., 2006). In addition to organizational studies, the concept of resilience has

also been applied to describe individual employees and their working life behaviour (Yusef & Luthans 2007). Moreover, resilience has been seen as a suitable concept when considering working life and surviving from the challenges it may cause, as it can be seen more versatile than flexibility, adaptability, or learning (Saari, 2016). According to Saari (2016), the versatility of resilience is associated with the process nature of resilience; resilience can be seen as an adjusting process where recovery, learning and growing are all included in the process.

The role of organizations' HRM in developing organizational and employee resilience has been widely recognized in recent studies (Bardoel et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2020; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). As the interest in resilience has increased in organizational studies and business and management research, also the role of leadership in supporting resilience has started to draw attention (see Harland et al., 2005; Sommer et al., 2016; Richard, 2020). Thus, resilience has become a relevant subject in working life research, even though the origins of resilience studies come from a different field. For instance, Bardoel et al. (2014) have described employee resilience as "an emerging challenge for HRM". Therefore, it can be interpreted that the study of resilience fits in many ways in the field of human resource management, among other fields.

## **2.2 Definition of resilience**

Multidisciplinary roots that resilience has (Windle, 2011) makes it an ambiguous concept and might be the reason for various definitions it possesses (Luthans, 2002). At an individual level, resilience is often seen as an individual capacity (Luthans, 2002) and as a process (Windle, 2011). To illustrate this point, Luthans (2002, p.702) defines resilience as the "positive psychological capacity to rebound or "bounce back" from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility". Windle (2011, p.163) has introduced resilience as: "the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and

resources within the individual, their life, and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary."

Luthar et al. (2000) see that resilience is generally conceived as an ability to recover from adversity which is one widely accepted notion of resilience. Moreover, Masten (2001, p.228) has described that resilience is characterized by "good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development". Therefore, the purpose of the research on resilience is to understand the practices that lead to good outcomes (Masten, 2001). However, resilience does not refer only to surviving and coping with challenges but also to proactive learning and adapting when challenges occur (Yusuf & Luthans, 2007). Consequently, resilient individuals use positive emotions to recover from stressful events efficiently (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004) and learn from challenging events (Yusuf & Luthans, 2007). Hence, learning in this sense indicates that when resilient individuals face similar challenging events in the future, they utilize the accumulated knowledge in managing the events (Yusuf & Luthans, 2007).

When the importance of resilience of individuals, teams, and organizations has been recognized, there has been expanding need to identify the concept through the fields of psychology and organizational and management studies (Britt et al., 2016). Concerning working life and organizations, resilience can refer to the individual and organizational actions and behaviours (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011). Furthermore, as the establishment of teams are general in most organizations, it is essential also to understand how resilience is conceptualized concerning the groups of employees (Gucciardi et al., 2018; Al-liger et al., 2015). Therefore, the concepts of employee resilience, team resilience, and organizational resilience are discussed in the next sections to illustrate how resilience can be conceptualized and understood in working life comprehensively.

### **2.2.1 Employee resilience**

The concept of employee resilience has been described to concern resilient behaviour at work at an individual level, and can be characterized as “the capacity of employees to utilize resources to continually adapt and flourish at work, even when faced with challenging circumstances” (Kuntz et al., 2016, p. 460). Moreover, Saari (2016) has suggested that at the employee level, resilience can refer to the whole process in which employees confront challenges, aim to cope with challenges while similarly improving capabilities for the future. Therefore, employee resilience can be conceptualized more as a capacity or process than a personal trait.

Employee resilience can be promoted by organizations, indicating a connection between organizational and employee resilience (Kuntz et al., 2016; Näswall et al., 2019). Moreover, resilience as a developable capacity requires an enabling organizational environment (Näswall et al., 2019). Enabling organizational environment allows proactive, adaptive, and support-seeking behaviours where employees have more possibilities to utilize resilient behaviours (Kuntz et al., 2016; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Näswall et al. 2019). Concerning the dissimilarity between employee resilience and other definitions of resilience, a few distinctions can be identified (Tonkin et al., 2018; Kuntz et al., 2017). Firstly, when psychological resilience implies effective coping and adaptation to adversity (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), employee resilience appears through workplace behaviours (Tonkin et al., 2018). Thus, employee resilience can be defined as the behavioural capacity where work resources are utilized to secure constant adaptation, well-being, and development at work (Kuntz et al., 2016).

Resilient behaviour at work, refers to an employee’s ability to adapt to challenges and to search for continuous improvement opportunities (Näswall et al., 2019). Resilient behaviour at work contains proactive, learning, and support-seeking behaviours that can appear in everyday practices at work. For instance, utilization of feedback when developing work processes, taking organizational changes as possibilities for improvement, and maintaining performance when the workload is higher than usual, can be seen as

resilient behaviour. (Kuntz et al., 2017) Furthermore, resilient employees collaborate effectively when facing challenges at work and learn from previously made mistakes (Tonkin et al., 2018). Resilient employee behaviours are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Resilient Employee Behaviours (Kuntz et al., 2017, p. 225).

<b>Resilient behaviour</b>	<b>Example of behaviour</b>
<b>Utilizing interactions</b>	Collaborating with colleagues, leaders, and other teams (over organizational boundaries) to handle unexpected challenges at work Seeking support from leaders when needed Seeking and sharing resources from colleagues and leaders
<b>Learning</b>	Learning from mistakes Continually re-evaluating performance to improve work processes Seeking and using feedback (positive and negative) at work to improve work processes
<b>Adaptability</b>	Efficiently controlling high workload when needed Using change as a chance for personal and professional growth

Secondly, Kuntz et al. (2017) have proposed that experiencing sudden crises at work is not necessary for the development of employee resilience. Therefore, employee resilience can emerge and be developed in both secure environments and adverse conditions whereas psychological resilience always requires some adversity (Windle, 2011). Moreover, when employee resilience is a developable capacity, the level of resilience of employees is best caught through a behavioural measurement system (Kuntz et al., 2017). To illustrate this point, Näswall et al. (2015) have introduced an employee resilience scale

that has a behavioural focus in measuring the appearance of resilient employee behaviours within the workplace.

The previously discussed concept of employee resilience is relatively new. However, various previous studies have used terms such as workforce resilience (Lim et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Koerber et al., 2018) and individual resilience at work (Tugade et al., 2004; Youssef & Luthans, 2007), which both have rather similar definitions as employee resilience. For example, Lim et al. (2020) see that workforce resilience is essential because it is often resilience that makes the difference between failing and succeeding when facing challenges. In their definition, Koerber et al. (2018, p. 127) have linked the domains of recovery and adaptation together when they have defined resilience of the workforce as: "The capacity for perseverance that leads to recovering from or adapting to major stressors." Therefore, in this thesis, the concept of employee resilience is used to describe the ability of employees to adapt continually, recover, and improve in daily working life and even when confronting challenges (Kuntz et al., 2016; Saari, 2016; Koerber et al., 2018).

Even though Harland et al. (2005) have acknowledged that the research of resilience has concentrated more on its prerequisites rather than its outcomes, the advantageous effects of resilience have been widely recognized. Regarding the benefits of resilience in working life, several studies have examined the beneficial connection between the resilience of employees and attitudinal work outcomes such as employee engagement, job satisfaction, commitment to change, and turnover intentions (e.g. Shin et al., 2012; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Furthermore, Robertson et al. (2015) investigated that by training resilience, various advantages may be acquired, such as improved self-efficacy, job satisfaction or social skills at work.

Moreover, Luthans et al. (2006) have pointed out that current working life might increase the stress levels and decrease the time of recovery of employees. Therefore, resilience is needed for employees to enhance the possibility of better performance. Similarly,

Youssef and Luthans (2007) and Cooper et al. (2019) have noted that enhanced performance is one of the potential beneficial outcomes of resilience. Consequently, another advantageous organizational outcome of employee resilience may be the strengthened organizational competitiveness due to resilient workforce's better ability to function efficiently even if the work environment would complexify continuously (Wang et al., 2014).

### **2.2.2 Team resilience**

Even though team resilience has got much less research attention than individual resilience, its research in the recent years has expanded (Alliger et al., 2015; Gucciardi et al., 2018; Meneghel et al., 2016; Sharma & Sharma, 2016). When an organization face challenges, also the teams functioning in the organizational settings have to confront challenges and complexities that might threaten the capacity of the team to achieve agreed targets (Dimas et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be assumed that practically any team in the context of working life can profit from having better resilience (Alliger et al., 2015).

According to Alliger et al. (2015), research of team resilience is vital for several reasons. Firstly, they see that teams are widely present in working life. Secondly, they have pointed out that most of the teams will need to overcome challenges because the challenges may have adverse effects on performance, unity of the team, and well-being of the team members. Thirdly, they have illustrated that team resilience enables reliable and balanced team performance in a disruptive environment. Finally, they have described that team resilience is important to consider because a group of resilient individuals does not necessarily compose a resilient team. Therefore, in the research of resilience in the context of working life, it would be essential to not only focus on individual resilience but also on the whole team (Meneghel et al., 2016; Alliger et al., 2015).

Various definitions of team resilience have emerged in recent studies (Alliger et al., 2015). For instance, West et al. (2009, p. 253) have defined team resilience as the team's "capacity to bounce back from failure, setbacks, conflicts, or any other threat to wellbeing that they may experience". Also, Alliger et al. (2015, p.177) define team resilience as "the capacity of a team to withstand and overcome stressors in a manner that enables sustained performance; it helps teams handle and bounce back from challenges that can endanger their cohesiveness and performance". Moreover, Morgan et al. (2013, p.552) have introduced a commonly adopted definition within the literature. They see team resilience as "a dynamic, psychosocial process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effect of stressors they collectively encounter. It comprises of processes whereby team members use their individual and collective resources to positively adapt when experiencing adversity". Thus, similarly with individual resilience, team resilience is often seen either as a trait, capacity, or process (Gucciardi et al., 2018).

Even though there has been a growing interest in the concept of team resilience, literature concerning its reliable and valid measurement has been inadequate (Sharma & Sharma, 2016). Therefore, Sharma and Sharma (2016) have developed a scale to measure team resilience. The development of the scale was based on four dimensions identified such as a group structure, mastery approaches, social capital, and collective efficacy. Consequently, they have seen team resilience as a quantifiable construct is essential for enhancing team performance. In addition, the beneficial impacts of team resilience have been noted to be important to both individuals working in a team and to organizations that facilitate teams (Meneghel et al., 2016; Alliger et al., 2015).

Meneghel et al. (2016) found that team resilience is positively associated with team performance. Thus, team resilience is essential to consider when aiming to enhance both organizational and individual performance. Furthermore, Dimas et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of resilience for team effectiveness. Resilient teams response adversity with more flexible and adaptive ways, and they are likely to use setbacks as challenges or chances for growth which illustrates the connection between high level of resilience

and high level of performance (Carmeli et al., 2013). Moreover, Gucciardi et al. (2018) acknowledged that resilience might help teams functioning to remain relatively unaffected after an adverse event. In the same manner, Alliger et al. (2015) have pointed out that there are various challenges that teams might face which require team resilience which then assists teams with coping, succeeding, and overcoming challenges. Therefore, resilience is seen as beneficial for the performance of teams and the whole organizations in which they are functioning.

### **2.2.3 Organizational resilience**

The definition of organizational resilience is close to the definition of individual resilience (Saari, 2016) where it refers to organizations' capability for flexibility and adaptability (Pal, 2013). Hamel and Välikangas (2003) see organizational resilience as an organization's capability for sustainable reconstruction. Moreover, Lengnick-Hall and Beck (2016) argue that organizational resilience refers to an organization's ability to respond efficiently when facing uncertain and surprising circumstances. Similarly, King et al. (2016) see that resilience influences on how organizations respond to continuous adversity. Hence, organizational resilience determines whether an organization will only survive, succeed, or even reach growth in a turbulent environment.

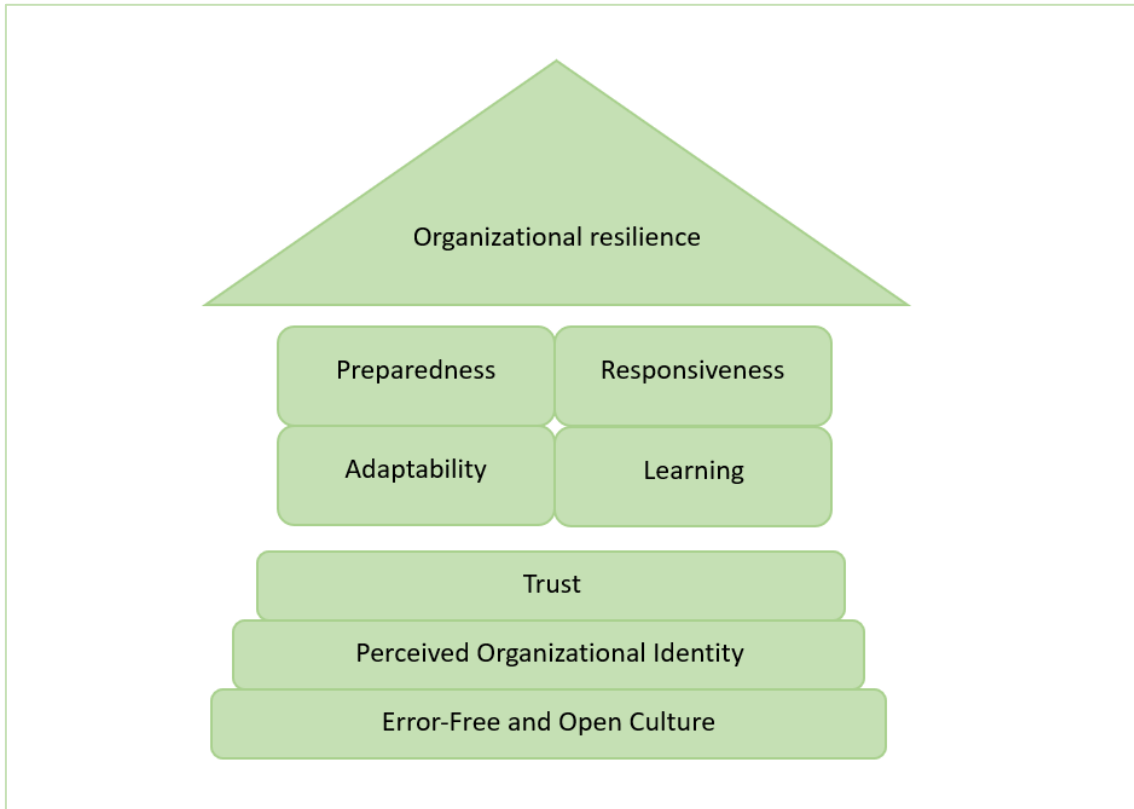
According to Lengnick-Hall and Beck (2016), a resilient organization has the ability to undertake difficulties and stay flexible at the same time. Therefore, resilience assists an organization to survive and recover from environmental disturbances without declining performance. Therefore, organizational resilience refers to survival, recovery, and the process of desirable change. Thus, a better level of resilience is expected to conduce more valuable and robust transformation. On the other hand, Bustinza et al. (2019) have described that resilience capabilities are visible in organizational processes and consist of several abilities and organizational learning. Moreover, organizations' capacity for resilience arises from employees' and teams' abilities, actions, and communication within organization interactions (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

When observing organizational resilience, Lengnick-Hall and Beck (2005) have discussed “resilience capacity”. First, they believe that resilience capacity promotes the creation of various practices that would assist an organization when reacting to uncertainty and complexity. Secondly, they see that resilience capacity promotes organizations understanding of their environment more comprehensively. In the same manner, Burnard and Bharna (2011) have described resilience as a factor that potentializes organizations’ adaptability when facing challenges.

Regarding the importance of resilience, Seville (2018) has argued that organizations must have resilience capabilities to manage today’s uncertainty. In addition, Bustinza et al. (2019) believe that succeeding in technological change requires strengthening resilience in organizations and that resilience is one explanatory factor in organizational effectiveness. Moreover, organizational resilience has been described to be essential for organizations when operating in an unstable environment and coping with unexpected situations (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Hence, it can be presumed that resilience might be the issue that can distinguish between an organization that will flourish and an organization that will fail in a turbulent environment. However, Denhardt and Denhardt (2009, p.334) see that resilience is important to consider also when responding to daily challenges and not only when facing sizeable challenges.

Duchek (2020) has concluded that organizational resilience is a capacity of an organization that promotes organizational progression where resilience supports the organization while coping with pressures, continuously improving and adapting to changes. Concerning how organizational resilience is constituted and what factors influence the resilience of an organization, Koronis and Ponis (2018) have suggested a framework for organizational resilience. A modified version of the framework is introduced in Figure 2. In the framework, trust, perceived organizational identity and error-free and open culture are defined as cultural traits. Preparedness, responsiveness, adaptability and learning are defined as drivers of resilience that proposedly support organizational resilience together with cultural traits.

**Figure 2.** The proposed framework for organizational resilience (Koronis & Ponis, 2018, p. 39).



Koronis and Ponis (2018) have suggested that the cultural traits presented in the framework are a set of social capital and organizational values, referring that an unprejudiced and committed atmosphere potentializes resilience in an organization. They imply that in resilient organizations, a culture of resilience is vital as it promotes emerging of the drivers of resilience shown in the framework. Furthermore, they refer to organizational resilience as a social ability. Therefore, organizations that acquire a culture of resilience have a better ability to cope with and adapt to challenges.

### **3 Strengthening resilience through HRM**

It was previously mentioned that employee resilience is a developable capability, and enabling organizational environment is vital when developing the resilience of employees (Näswall et al., 2019). Similarly, Seville (2018) has mentioned that resilience is a dynamic capability, and therefore it is essential to promote and support resilience in organizations proactively. Furthermore, according to Wang et al. (2014), the resilience of employees might be affected by their gender, age, or educational level, emphasizing the importance of the development of resilience in organizations. Moreover, in today's working life, employees might perceive continuous changes, more stress, and less time for recovery, highlighting the importance of supporting resilience in the workplaces (Luthans et al., 2006).

Concerning strengthening resilience in working life, it has been recognized that in organizations, the decisions of HRM have a crucial role in the development of organizational capacities (Bustinza et al., 2019). Thus, it can be assumed that HRM plays an important role also when reaching for strengthening the capacity of resilience in organizations. Therefore, in this chapter, it is discussed how employee resilience can be strengthened and supported in organizations through HRM. To fully understand the role of HRM concerning strengthening resilience, the role of HRM in organizations in general is first discussed.

#### **3.1 HRM in organizations**

According to Uotila and Viitala (2014, p. 60), the widely recognized purpose of HRM is to potentialize the accomplishment of organizational goals. Moreover, HRM in organizations focuses on ensuring sufficient workforce and adequate competence, well-being, and motivation of the workforce (Viitala, 2014). However, HRM has a long history as an organizational function, and consequently, the role of HRM has changed continuously due to various trends in the field and changing operational environment (Jolkkonen &

Järllström, 2014, p. 21). For instance, as time has passed, the role of HRM has changed from administrative to more strategic (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). According to Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015), already in the beginning of the 1980s, HRM was seen to have a central role in the functioning of organizations and therefore, HRM was viewed as a possibility to promote organizational effectiveness rather than only as a function which is responsible for administrative affairs.

Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015, p. 190) have described the development of HRM through three waves. First, "Administrative wave of HR" refers to HR as a traditional administrative function. Second, in the "HR practices wave", the focus is on planning and implementing innovative HR practices. Third, in the "HR strategy wave", the HR strategy means that HR practices and business strategy are aligned. Nevertheless, according to Truss (2008), the strategic role of HRM is no replacement for the administrative role but is added for the responsibilities of HRM. Thus, it can be established that the role of HRM has developed to be more diversified with time.

Nowadays, HRM is supported by an organization's business strategy, and strategic HRM has started to draw more attention among researchers when in many organizations, human resources are the core on which strategic organizational decisions are based on (Viitala, 2014). Strategic HRM aims to connect the needs and expectations of employees to the organization's goals and make sure that they are aligned (Wang et al., 2014). Furthermore, research on strategic HRM has focused on the utilization of HR practices in assisting organizations in achieving their goals (Jiang et al., 2012).

According to Viitala (2014), knowledge management, performance management, and well-being at work are areas that HRM often is responsible for in organizations. Consequently, it is usually HR function that makes sure that employees possess suitable competencies and that there are training and development possibilities, that the process of compensation and benefits are suitable concerning the strategy of an organization and that employees' well-being is supported. In addition, when HRM is more aligned with

business and strategy, the meaning of HR analytics has increased (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). According to Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) HR analytics is referred to thorough measurement of HR investments and results to justify the decisions of HR and having possibilities to prioritize and enhance HR investments systematically. Thus, systematic HR metrics may increase the accuracy of HR decisions and the professional value of HR.

Furthermore, change management is part of HRM, and its role is highlighted in today's business world when continuous changes and turmoil are usual for organizations. Thus, one of the responsibilities of HRM to ensure that the adverse impacts are minimized during organizational changes. (Long & Ismail, 2012) Furthermore, Ulrich et al. (2013) describe that HR professionals work as change champions where their aim is to make sure that the change process will proceed efficiently in organizations. Concerning change, it is the work of HRM to communicate the reasons and benefits of change and institutionalize the change by ensuring sufficient resources.

Various HR practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and benefits, safety and health, and performance management can be seen as the infrastructure of HRM where they support and enable HRM in organizations (Viitala, 2014). Moreover, HRM in organizations is responsible for designing and implementing HR practices which support both individual and organizational levels (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). First, at the individual level, HRM needs to focus on the required talent in relation to the organization's strategy. Second, at the organizational level, the focus should be on the required organizational capabilities and culture in relation to the organization's strategy. In addition, essential work of HRM is to consider what kind of leadership should be supported to make an organization's strategy happen (Ulrich, 2014).

The connection between HRM and organizational performance has been recognized in studies for decades, even though the measurement of the connection is quite difficult (Viitala, 2014). The notion that HR practices influence beneficially on organizational outcomes is based on the potential development of capabilities by employees (Guest,

1997). Hence, through different HR practices, the aim is to influence diverse organizational outcomes (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). For instance, it is discovered that the relationships between HRM and organizational outcomes such as performance (e.g. Guest, 1997) and employee-related outcomes such as well-being (e.g. Guest, 2017) have been studied for a good while. Previously the focus was on the HR practices aiming to affect organizational performance, but recently, the focus has shifted to consider HR practices that would enable well-being-related outcomes (Guest, 2017).

### **3.2 HRM and strengthening resilience**

Resilience has been recognized as essential for HRM (Bardoel et al., 2014) as it is positively related to organizational performance and the well-being of employees (Cooper et al., 2019). Furthermore, when knowledge management and talent development are responsibilities of HRM (Viitala, 2014), it can be assumed that HRM could have possibilities also to develop the competence in relation to employee resilience. Thus, concerning the role of HRM in resilience strengthening, Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) have proposed that organizational resilience can be strengthened through strategic HRM. Moreover, the interest in the relationship between HR practices and employee resilience has been noticeable in recent studies (see Bustinza et al., 2019; Bardoel et al., 2014; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Luthans et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2014).

Thus, Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) have stated that HRM policies, practices, and activities are the basis of an organization's capacity for resilience. Also, Bustinza et al. (2019) have acknowledged that in organizations, resilience capacities can be improved by HR practices that enhance the employees' capabilities to overcome uncertainty. Hence, various resilience enhancing HR practices have been widely found in previous studies (e.g. Bardoel et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2014, Cooper et al., 2019) and successful implementation of those HR practices which enhance employee resilience has been found essential regarding the development of resilience in organizations (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011).

Even though the relationship between HRM and resilience has started to draw more attention, the initiatives to enhance resilience at work have been criticized for their inadequate validity in a business-related context (e.g. Robertson et al., 2015). However, Kuntz et al. (2017p. 228) have argued that: “in order to increase their validity and effectiveness, resilience-building initiatives must not only identify and manage psychosocial risk factors at work but also involve leaders in preemptively eliminating hurdles to, and devising strategies that support, the development of employee resilience.” Furthermore, Bardoel et al., (2014, p. 292) have argued that when aiming to strengthen resilience the purpose is to find HR practices which: “serve as forms of resources that can be used most effectively in a proactive or reactive fashion to enhance resilience.” Therefore, the support of HR practices in the development of resilience may also happen through a mediator or indirectly (Cooper et al., 2019).

In their study, Kuntz et al. (2017, p.228) have introduced various resilience-building initiatives across four areas: “valuing employees, human-capital development, support for challenges at work, and fostering learning and collaboration.” Moreover, Näswall et al. (2015) have suggested that employee resilience is enhanced in organizations that promote a supportive, collaborative, and learning-oriented environment at work. Inspired by this and combining research results from other studies, four HRM-related areas, including HR practices to strengthen employee resilience, are discussed next. Thus, based on previous literature on HRM and resilience, it is suggested that investing in employees, creating a supportive work environment, promoting continuous learning and developing leadership are proposed dimensions that HRM could focus on when aiming to strengthen employee resilience in the organization.

### **3.2.1 Investing in employees**

Kuntz et al. (2017) have described employee recognition as one area of resilience building. They see that employees should be offered recognition, for example, by involving them in the planning of activities related to changes occurring in an organization. Moreover, Khan et al. (2019) have proposed that job design is one of the critical areas of HR

practices found to support the development of employee resilience. In job design, they emphasized gender-neutral job design and diverse work in teams. The results of their study implied that the development of employee resilience was potentialized through job design when the organization fostered employees' feelings of involvement and organizational citizenship behaviour. In the same manner, according to Kuntz et al. (2017), both employee and organizational resilience can be developed by promoting high-involvement practices.

Moreover, Bardoel et al. (2014) have introduced various HR practices that aim to enhance employee resilience including employee involvement through the possibility of decision-making concerning organizational change. Furthermore, resilience may be strengthened in organizations through policies that reinforce employees' autonomy in decision making (Koerber et al., 2018) and promote a feeling of control and ownership (Kuntz et al., 2017). Similarly, Kuntz et al. (2017) have noted that enhancing employees' feelings about belongingness and identification with the organization is one initiative of resilience building.

Bardoel et al. (2014) have introduced flexible work arrangements as potential resilience enhancing HR practice. They have argued that flexible work arrangements may improve employees' adaptability when facing changes and therefore provide resources to enhance resilience. In addition, Kuntz et al. (2017) have found that promoting health and well-being initiatives may support resilience strengthening. They see that providing flexible work arrangements, as an option to enhance work-life balance, is part of health and well-being initiatives to enhance employee resilience. Similarly, Bardoel et al. (2014) have noted that HR practices that promote work-life balance are proposed to be potential for strengthening resilience as they contribute to healthy relationships.

Moreover, supporting equality and low hierarchy in an organization might enhance the resilience of employees (Näswall et al., 2019). Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2020) has noted that collaborating is vital when enhancing resilience and the

development of a resilient work community starts with the recognition of the complicated processes within work, introducing those to the whole workforce and developing them together. Hence, the shared knowledge of the workforce is increased when new, improved work processes are shared and utilized widely in the organization. Furthermore, Bardoel et al. (2014) have proposed that the utilization of occupational health and safety (OHS) systems, might strengthen employee resilience. By utilizing (OHS) systems they referred to OHS-related HR practices that involve safety training, programmes focused on health and well-being, promoting a safety culture and environment that improves employees' health and safety.

Accordingly, reward and benefits systems are seen as one potential area of resilience strengthening (Khan et al., 2019; Bardoel et al., 2014). Bardoel et al. (2014) have observed that changes in reward systems might strengthen employee resilience as they concentrate on organizational commitment. Also, Khan et al. (2019) have proposed that the influence of reward system on resilience strengthening are based on the connection between benefits and organizational commitment and the motivational dimension that benefits may enhance. Moreover, they identified flexible work arrangements as a non-monetary benefit scheme that supports employees' resilience.

### **3.2.2 Creating a supportive work environment**

According to Kuntz et al. (2016), a vital contributor to employee resilience is a supportive organization. Consequently, support at work has been positively related to employee resilience (Kuntz et al., 2017), where a supportive work environment consists of both supportive team and organization (Kuntz et al., 2016). Cooke et al. (2019) found in their study that a supportive work environment might positively impact employee resilience. They highlighted that both leadership and co-worker support contribute to the supporting resilience at work. Therefore, one way to strengthen employee resilience in the organization is to implement HR policies that promote social support at work (Koerber et al., 2018).

In the same manner, Bardoel et al. (2014) have introduced the development of social support at work as one potential resilience enhancing HR practice. In a supportive resilience strengthening culture, employees are encouraged to discuss work-related affairs with leaders and enhance their relationships with colleagues (Khan et al., 2019). Thus, employees are encouraged to seek and provide support to enhance both formal and informal interactions within the organization (Kuntz et al., 2017). In addition, Khan et al. (2019) showed that support among colleagues was important for employees in developing their resilience. Hence, it can be established that creating a supportive work environment to strengthen employee resilience social support at work should be promoted comprehensively, referring to both team support, leader support, and organizational support.

Information sharing within an organization is another potential HR practice to strengthen resilience (Khan et al., 2019). Similarly, Kuntz et al. (2017) have recognized communication as one area of resilience-building initiatives. They have proposed that communication as an initiative could focus on communicating long-term goals, and when goals are changing, communicating the effects of changes on employees. In addition, they see that, especially during changes, it is crucial to clarify the plans for all employees. Thus, according to Kuntz et al. (2017), both employee and organizational resilience can be developed by promoting goal clarity.

Concerning the meaning of communication in resilience strengthening, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (2020) has described that developing a resilient workforce, it is essential to understand the comprehensive nature of work context. From this perspective, it is meant that employees need to understand that their work is a part of the broader context of the organization and where individual goals should be aligned with the team and the organization's goals. In the same manner, Kuntz et al. (2017) have proposed that by making sure that employees and teams are aware of their actions' influence on reaching the organization's strategic goals resilience at work can potentially be developed.

### 3.2.3 Promoting continuous learning

According to Kuntz et al. (2017), both employee and organizational resilience can be developed by promoting continuous learning. They believe that organizational culture that promotes learning improves the employees' reactions when facing challenges at work, and due to that, potentially builds resilience. In addition, Näswall et al. (2019) have noted that when aiming to strengthen the resilience of employees, organizations could focus on the design of their learning culture. Moreover, they see that aiming to strengthen employee and organizational resilience, encouraging learning can be encouraged by offering benefits and rewards for learning behaviour or clarifying the implications of learning on performance or well-being.

Moreover, learning from mistakes in the workplace is part of resilient employee behaviour (Kuntz et al., 2017). Carmeli and Gittell (2009) have found that psychological safety fosters learning from mistakes in the organization. Furthermore, Lengnic-Hall et al. (2011) have described that organizational resilience entails taking interpersonal risks. In addition experience of psychological safety fosters risks taking. Thus, it can be presupposed that an organizational environment that promotes psychological safety may influence employee and organizational resilience beneficially and strengthen them.

Evaluating the ways of working and developing them is part of resilience strengthening at work. When developing the ways of working, it is essential to not to worry about failing but learning from every step of the development process. Furthermore, when a resilient workforce develops, learns, and improves the ways of working, it is important also to re-evaluate and rearrange the development methods. (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, 2020) Similarly, the findings of the study of Malik and Garg (2020) indicates that developing learning organizations may strengthen employee resilience. Learning organization refers to continual improvement and creation of knowledge needed in the future to succeed (Wick & León, 1995).

Furthermore, Khan et al. (2019) have proposed that providing employee development opportunities is one of the critical areas of HR practices found to support the development of employee resilience. They found that employees who participated in training perceived increased job satisfaction, and due to that potentially strengthened their resilience. Similarly, Bardoel et al. (2014) have introduced employee development programs, such as resilience training, as potential resilience enhancing HR practice to focus on in organizations. Furthermore, different kinds of resilience training programmes have emerged in the literature of resilience development (Tonkin et al., 2018; Vanhove et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2015).

### **3.2.4 Developing leadership**

Leadership is an essential part of HRM where leaders put HRM actions into practice in their work (Viitala, 2014). According to Kuntz et al. (2017), leadership contributes to creating an enabling organizational environment for resilient employee behaviours. Moreover, in previous academic research, it has been discovered that leadership can influence the resilience of employees (e.g. Siebert, 2006; Luthans, 2002; Harland et al., 2005). Thus, improving the resilience of employees, organization may profit by re-evaluating the current state of leadership and developing it (Näswall et al., 2019). However, to strengthen employee resilience through leadership, leaders need to understand resilience in the work context comprehensively (Siebert, 2006).

According to Harland et al. (2005), a leader's behaviour might positively affect employee resilience, and the positive effects on resilience can be reached by various leadership behaviours. Sommer et al. (2016) examined the role of leadership in developing resilience and found a positive relationship between the behaviour of a leader and the resilience of employees. They observed that especially transformational leadership may positively influence the resilience of employees when their behaviour is encouraging, inspiring, and motivating. Furthermore, enabling leaders potentializes individual and

organizational development, including the development of resilience, by securing required resources and offering support through their actions (Kuntz et al., 2017).

According to Kuntz et al. (2017), leadership that supports resilience strengthening contributes to the evaluation and the choices of resilience enhancing practices as leaders may have the knowledge of the level of resilient employee behaviours. Moreover, it fosters resilience-enhancing mentality and promotes the implementation of practices for strengthening resilience (Kuntz et al., 2017). Furthermore, according to Luthans et al. (2015, p.161), beneficial leadership to employee resilience consists of seeking better self-awareness, aiming for open communication, building trust, providing employee development opportunities, and encouraging mutual feedback. Hence, considering resilience, the most beneficial leadership approach may be an authentic and transformational leader (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 161).

To conclude, the theoretical framework has demonstrated how research on resilience has extended from studying psychological resilience to resilience in the context of working life (Masten, 2001). Resilience in the context of working life can refer to employee (Näswall et al., 2019), team (Gucciardi al.,2018) and organizational resilience (Koronis & Ponis, 2018). As resilience has been identified as strategically critical in working life, supporting and developing it has become a relevant research topic and essential for organizations to consider (King et al., 2016). As the beneficial influence of HR practices on employee and organizational resilience has been discovered in research (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Bardoel et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2019), the theoretical framework has demonstrated how resilience can be strengthened in organizations through HRM. It was observed that investing in employees, creating a supportive work environment, promoting continuous learning and developing leadership may be areas of HRM that strengthen employee resilience in the organization (Kuntz et al., 2017).

## **4 Research methodology**

In this chapter, the methodological choices of the research are presented. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 14), methodology refers to utilizing different methods to achieve the set objectives, whereas method stands for explaining and justifying the research findings. Therefore, the method determines the new information found in the research, while the methodology evaluates the reasonableness of the utilized methods (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 14). During the research process, the researcher makes various decisions concerning data collection and data analysis methods, and the decisions are based on the research problem (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 15-16). Thus, it can be interpreted that the research problem determines the methods that are used in the research (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 27).

This master's thesis will employ a qualitative approach, which is based on a case study. Hence, this chapter gives reasons for choosing qualitative research and presents the description of a case study approach. Furthermore, the research process is discussed in this chapter, and the decisions of the researcher are explained. Moreover, the data collection and data analysis methods are presented and explained, and the research data is described. In addition, the trustworthiness and ethicality of the research are considered at the end of the chapter.

### **4.1 Research approach**

In the empirical part of this thesis, qualitative research methods were utilized. Qualitative research concentrates on describing perceptions, behaviours, experiences, and social contexts without quantification or statistical data (Fossey et al., 2002). Therefore, qualitative research methods were chosen because the empirical research aimed at investigating perceptions and experiences of HR-professionals of resilience, its importance in the working life, and its strengthening in their organization and in general. Moreover, according to Fossey et al. (2002), qualitative research is often used when creating an

understanding of inadequately understood and complicated topics, and the focus is on creating an understanding of the meaning and experience aspects of people's lives and social worlds. Thus, qualitative research methods can be presumed suitable concerning this research because the topic is relatively little researched from this perspective, and the aim is to create an understanding of perceptions and experiences of HR professionals and to research the topic in the context of working life.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008, p. 59) have noted that it is typical for qualitative research that the sample size of the research is small and the focus is on the quality rather than in quantity. Therefore, they have described that qualitative research aims to understand the chosen case profoundly, find information of chosen cases or seek new theoretical perspectives concerning chosen cases and phenomena rather than statistical generalization. Consequently, qualitative research aims to describe, interpret and understand some cases and phenomena rather than create statistical generalizations (Tuomi & Saarajärvi, 2018, p.74).

The approach of this research is based on a case study. According to Eriksson and Koistinen (2014, p. 4) case study is a diversified research approach where one or more cases are examined, and the main aim is to define, analyse and solve the cases. They have described that it is usual that the case study approach is contextual which refers to the willingness to understand the case of the research as a part of a specific environment where the environment creates the context of the research. In this research, the case study consists of the perceptions and experiences of Finnish HR professionals in relation to resilience and its strengthening in their specific working life context. The context of this research is not based on a specific field or organization but on working life as a uniting concept.

The current research was conducted during the COVID 19-pandemic. Therefore, it is to be noticed that the pandemic situation may have influenced on the data collection and findings through the participants experiences and the overall atmosphere the situation

has caused. Therefore, working life and the changes caused by COVID 19-pandemic compose the environment in which the case of the research is understood.

## **4.2 Data collection and participants**

Interview, inquiry, observing, and data collected from documents are different qualitative research methods (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, p. 62). Interview was chosen as the method for data collection in this research. With interview, comprehensive answers can be received where it is possible to repeat questions during the interview, avoid misunderstanding, and clarify the answers during the data collection, which is not possible, for example, in inquiries fulfilled through the mail (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 34–37). Moreover, one advantage of the interview is that the interviewer can act as an observer at the same time when drawing attention to the way of expression of the interviewee (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 84–86). On the other hand, the interview also has a disadvantage as a data collection method as the arranging and transcribing of interviews takes much time and might be challenging for an unprepared researcher. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, p. 34–37).

The interview method was chosen for this research because the topic of the research from similar perspectives is only a little-studied. In addition, the intention was not to limit the research to focus on specific ways to strengthen resilience through items chosen beforehand, which would have been required if an inquiry would have been chosen as a data collection method. Moreover, the aim was to understand the role of people in the process and connect the answers of the interviewees into a broader context. It was presumed in advance that the answers would be ambiguous, and therefore the additional questions and clarification of the opinions would be necessary.

There are three different interview types where the difference is based on the level of predefined structure: unstructured interview or non-directive interview, semi-structured interview, and structured interview (Koskinen et al., 2005, p. 104). The chosen

interview type for this empirical research was a semi-structured interview. The aim of the semi-structured interview is to find relevant and meaningful answers for research problem from interviewees (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 88). It is relevant for the semi-structured interview that it is based on chosen themes that are decided in advance and based on the theoretical background of the research (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 47–48). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 65), a semi-structured interview goes forward with chosen themes and specifying questions, and it is possible to specify the questions during the interview depending on the answers of the interviewees. A semi-structured interview can be quite free-formed, which allows interviewees natural reactions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, p. 47–48). Therefore, it is the decision of the researcher whether the questions are the same or in a same order for all the interviewees (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, p. 88).

According to Koskinen et al. (2005, p. 31), qualitative research often focuses on analysing individual cases, and the analysis is based on the opinions and viewpoints of the individuals participating in the research. Concerning the data of the qualitative research, the aim is to understand chosen phenomena more deeply and receive new information regarding the phenomena (Hirsjärve & Hurme 2008, p.59). In this research, the aim was to understand and collect profound information on resilience in the working life and its strengthening in organizations by examining the perceptions and experiences of HR professionals.

The data collection of this research was built on nine interviewees, composing the data of the research. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 73–74), there is no specific rule of how many interviews would produce appropriate documentation for the research. Thus, it is more important that the interviewees possess as much knowledge and information about the topic of the research as possible. According to Morrow (2005), sampling procedures such as quality, depth of interview data, and a variety of evidence are more valuable than the number of participants. Hence, the number of participants

depends always on the purpose of the research (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 58). Therefore, the amount of nine interviews was assumed suitable concerning this research.

All of the interviewees represented the HR department of their organization in some way. Potential interviewees were first contacted primarily through the LinkedIn service, and afterwards, additional information about the research was provided via email. In this research, the interviewees were chosen concerning their work task and experience in the field of HRM with an assumption that the interviewees have proper knowledge, experience, and perceptions of the research topic. Hence, the interviewees worked in various HR-related positions such as HR manager, HR Director, or in a position responsible for well-being in the organization. Two interviewees worked in the trading sector, one in the municipal sector, three in the IT sector, and three in the manufacturing sector. Six organizations are considered large companies and two are considered as small companies including one organization in the IT sector, and organization in the municipal sector.

In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, it is not possible to provide specific information about the interviewees or their organizations that they work in. Furthermore, the aim of the research was not to collect information associated with some specific HR-related professions or organizations but to collect topical data of the chosen phenomena from a practical working life context by examining perceptions and experiences of HR professionals that were assumed to have proper knowledge and experience about the research subject.

The questions of the interview were sent in advance for the interviewees. In this research, the interview frame was created by the researcher and modified based on the feedback of the supervisor of the thesis. The questions of the interview concentrated on resilience as a skill in working life and resilience strengthening in organizations. The interview guide is visible in Appendix 1. During the interviews, each interviewee was asked the questions according to the interview frame. However, interviewees spoke freely

about the themes, and sometimes, the latter questions were answered already during the answers to the earlier questions. There was no intention to limit the discussion by the interviewer, and the interviewees had the possibility to describe their perceptions and experiences freely. However, the interviewer ensured that all the topics would be discussed and asked additional questions if it was necessary.

The interviews of the HR-professionals were arranged in individual interviews. Individual interviews are the most common way to arrange interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 61). According to Koskinen et al. (2005, p. 125), the advantage of an individual interview is a better level of trust. To illustrate this point, in the group interview, there might be less willingness to talk about experiences and practices openly, especially when interviewees work in different organizations. According to Koskinen et. al. (2005, p. 126), other benefits of individual interviews are the agreement of timetables when the decision is not dependent on many people, and the duration of the interview is easier to estimate. In addition, transcribing and analysing the interview is easier when there is not overtalking and many voices to be recognized.

The interviews were carried through during three weeks in January and February 2021 after the theoretical part of the thesis was written. The interviewees were informed about the background and the purpose of the research and data protection practices concerning the research. The purpose of the utilization of recorded interviews was informed, and the researcher emphasized the voluntariness of participating in the research and guaranteed the anonymity of participants in reporting the findings. Participants were for example informed about the utilization of anonymized citations when reporting the findings. Participants agreed to participate in the study after they were informed about these purposes and procedures. All of the interviews were done and recorded remotely through Microsoft Teams -service. The duration of the interviews varied from 25 to 50 min, and the total of the material was approximately 5 hours and 30 min. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher after each interview, and the analysis of the data started in February 2021.

### 4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis of this qualitative empirical research was completed through thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79), thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. The thematic analysis offers practices for creating codes and themes from qualitative data where codes describe interesting elements of the data and construct themes where the themes stand for patterns of meaning or responses in the data and construct a broader story for the analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The flexibility of thematic analysis increases its usefulness which refers to, for example, the flexibility in the research questions, sample, and data collection method (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Moreover, thematic analysis can be utilized when discovering patterns within data concerning the perceptions and experiences of participants (Clarke & Braun, 2017), which emphasizes the convenience to utilize the method in this research.

Thematic analysis can be divided into inductive or theoretical; in inductive approach, the themes are not guided by the researcher’s theoretical interest in the subject, and in the theoretical approach, analysis is guided by the researcher’s previous knowledge of and interest in the research subject (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, it can be interpreted that the thematic analysis of this research is more theoretical when the coding process leans on to the researcher’s theoretical interest in the area. However, the analysis also contains inductive reasoning when the aim was not to divide data into specific previously chosen themes founded in theory and the researcher allowed all kinds of themes that appeared in the data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have introduced an outline guide for thematic analysis, which proceeds through six phases described next. In the first phase, the researcher gets familiarized with the data, including data transcribing, reading the data multiple times and taking notes about interesting features in the data. In the second phase, interesting extracts are coded systematically throughout the whole data, and appropriate data for each code is collected. Next, in the third phase, potential themes are searched when

codes are gathered, and appropriate data for each potential theme is collected. The phase includes considering the connections between codes, themes, and between the different levels of themes and producing a thematic map of the analysis. In the fourth phase, potential themes are reviewed by ensuring that each theme is logical concerning the coded extracts and the actual data. In the fifth phase, themes are defined and named by continuing the analysis by refining details of each theme and investigating how each theme fits into the overall storyline of the analysis. Finally, the sixth phase is producing the report.

In practice, the data analysis of this research started by reading through and getting familiarized with the transcribed interviews. Next, it was decided what to focus on in the data and what is interesting in the data concerning the research questions. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 78), it is usual that the data of qualitative analysis contains many interesting things, and therefore, at the beginning of the analysis researcher must decide what parts of the data to analyse and report and what to leave out of the research. After the decision, the analysis continued by coding interesting original expressions of the data. Thus, interesting expressions were searched from the data and coded with different colours depending on the theme that the expression was describing. Next, the coded expressions were listed in a different document apart from the original data and collated by codes or similarities in the expressions.

In this way, potential themes were formed based on the similarities in the coded expressions. At this point, two main themes were formed based on the theoretical framework of the research, and the interview frame. Sub-themes were formed based on the data. Next, the potential themes were reviewed by making sure that the themes are appropriate concerning the coded expressions so that there is a sufficient amount of data in each theme to support them and that the data is not too diverse but that it is coherent and logical. After that, the themes were defined, and in this phase, the core of what each theme was about was determined, and it was made sure that each theme fits into a broader context that will be formed in the analysis. However, the naming of the themes

was under consideration during the analysis and writing so the naming was the last phase of the analysis.

#### **4.4 Research trustworthiness**

A traditional way to analyse the trustworthiness of research methods is to consider the concepts of reliability and validity (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, p. 186.) The reliability of a study means the reproducibility of the research result, and validity, on the other hand, means the ability of a research method to measure exactly what it is meant to be measured (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 119). However, previously mentioned concepts emerge to serve more quantitative research, so their use is criticized among qualitative research. Nevertheless, according to Morrow (2005), various standards of quality described as trustworthiness, validity, credibility, or rigor are associated with qualitative research.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 121), there is no straightforward guide for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. However, to evaluate qualitative research, it is essential to consider the internal coherence of the research and the relationship of following matters: the object and purpose of the research, the researcher's commitments in the research, data collection, research participants, the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, duration of the study, analysis of the data, the trustworthiness of the research, and reporting of the research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 121–123). Moreover, according to Morrow (2005), for the trustworthiness of qualitative research, it is essential that in the research, it is not indicated that the findings could be generalized to other context.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 123), the trustworthiness of qualitative research is enhanced by the researcher's accurate description of the implementation of the research. In this thesis, the researcher aims to coherence concerning the research process, which is one criterion of trustworthiness. The duration of the research process was approximately eight months. The research process started in September 2020 with

planning and continued writing of the theoretical part of the thesis. After that, the data were collected and analysed at the beginning of the year 2021. The process continued with writing the research findings, and finally, the research process proceeded with writing conclusions. The thesis was completed in April 2021 that was the previously agreed target time.

The trustworthiness of this research is based on the precise explaining and argument of the utilized research and analysis methods. Moreover, the data collection process and the data were described comprehensively. In addition, direct quotations of the interviewees were introduced in the findings of the research, which are considered as one of the indications of the trustworthiness of this research. Furthermore, the researcher emphasizes that the research findings are based on the individual interpretation of the researcher of the collected data of the chosen phenomena. Moreover, the researcher emphasizes that creating statistical generalizations is not the aim of the research or possible for this kind of qualitative data.

The ethicality of the research and compliance with good academic practice are connected to the trustworthiness of the research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 110). Academic research can be ethically acceptable and reliable when research has been conducted according to the responsible conduct of research and complying with good academic practice. Good academic practice refers, for example, to complying with the principles that the research community has endorsed, applying methods aligned with scientific criteria, and respecting the work of other researchers. Moreover, a research complying academic is planned and conducted and reported complying with the standards set for scientific knowledge. (TENK, 2012, p. 6) In addition to complying with ethical principles, it is important that the researcher explains the reasons for the research and the motives of the researcher at the beginning of the research (Koskinen et al., 2005, p. 282–283.)

According to Fossey et al. (2002), ethicality is essential to consider in all research and in all phases of the research. In this thesis, ethicality has been considered throughout the research process. Firstly, the research's purposes and motives have been explained in the introduction, and the research has been implemented by following the principles of good academic practice. Furthermore, the research participants were informed comprehensively on the background and the purpose of the research and data protection practices concerning the research. In addition, review of literature has been accomplished critically throughout the thesis. Thus, the ethicality is also visible in precise citations of the sources and a comprehensive list of references.

## **5 Research findings**

In this chapter, the findings of the empirical research are presented and explored. The findings are organized under two main themes. The first central theme is resilience in working life, and under that are sub-themes named the importance of resilience in working life, the appearing of resilience in working life, and resilience at the team and organizational level. The first theme examines what kind of perceptions HR professionals have on resilience and its importance in working life. Furthermore, it is discussed how interviewees describe situations where resilience is needed and how they conceptualize resilience in working life.

The second central theme is strengthening resilience in organization, and under that are sub-themes named the importance of resilience strengthening in organization, the ways to strengthen resilience in organization, and organizational roles in resilience strengthening. The second theme focuses on resilience strengthening in organizations and perceptions that HR professionals have introduced in relation to the importance and ways of resilience strengthening in organizations. Finally, organizational roles in resilience strengthening are explored. Furthermore, the most relevant expressions of the interviewees are presented as quotations in the research findings. Quotations of the interviewees are marked with the letter I and numbers from 1-9, indicating separate interviewees and illustrating diversity of the data.

### **5.1 Resilience in working life**

#### **5.1.1 The importance of resilience in working life**

Empirical data confirm the notion that employee resilience is vital competence in current working life as all of the interviewees considered resilience as an essential capacity in succeeding in today's working life. Because working life changes continuously, the

demands for employees changes similarly. Therefore, the resources of employees are also influenced by the changes. The data illustrated that especially the progression of information and communication technologies have influenced the development of organizations and similarly on the development of employees' requirements.

Moreover, it was seen in the data that the need for resilience was emphasized, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thinking about the COVID-19 pandemic, the events of the year of 2020 and the effects on organizations were heard in interviewees' talk throughout the interviews. One of the most significant impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on organizations was the pressure of organization of remote work, especially concerning knowledge workers. According to the interviewees, resilience was seen beneficial when coping with these kinds of pressures that cause remarkable organizational changes, and where the benefits of employee resilience are associated with the matter that resilient employees survive and recover easier from changes.

*"I think that the direction the world has been going lately [referring to COVID-19 pandemic] has pointed out how extremely important capacity it [resilience] is." - I7*

*"I think that it [resilience] is very important because only change is permanent. The world is changing continuously, if we are thinking about the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience is essential when surviving from occurring challenges even if they are a worldwide pandemic or some employer-related such as organizational change [...] It is crucial because we have had extremely many changes during the last few years and some of the people have not the strength to deal with them, and they have resigned and said directly that the reason is that they do not have the strength to deal with the constant changes" -I3*

Considering the situations where resilience is needed at work, the theme of change continued in the answers of HR professionals. When interviewees were asked in what kind of situations resilience would be useful for employees, many of the interviewees thought it was needed, especially during changes. It was discovered that the organizations that the interviewees worked in had faced continuous changes. In addition to changes taking place inside the organizations, the external environment had influenced organizations'

functioning and sometimes also unexpectedly like, the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes in the organization often affected the demands of the work, and through this the employees as well, such as their resources for work, well-being, motivation, and performance. According to the interviewees, resilience had been there to support the activity of employees during uncertainty or change.

*“Well, one obvious situation where it [resilience] is needed is in our organization’s continuous change [...] changes of organizational structures are typical and affect employees and how they are identified in our workplace, and where they feel that they belong, and if they can adapt to changing organizational structures like okay today, I belong to this team and tomorrow I belong to another team.” -I4*

*“It is useful in general, but I think that especially during remarkable change, resilience is needed [...] the remarkable change can arise from inside of the organization such as from organizational changes and business agreements or outside of the organization like the COVID-19 pandemic. Nobody could do anything about it, or prepared for it [...] in bigger changes resilience is especially needed, but it is also that kind of a daily need.” -I3*

In addition, it was noticed that resilience was seen as useful when taking new systems into use and when learning new and developed technologies. The data showed that especially the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the organizations to work remotely if they had not before and promoted or forced the organization’s technological progression to potentialize the remote work. Thus, resilience promoted the eagerness to learn and develop the working ways and enhance the ability to adopt new systems and processes. Hence, when it had been necessary for most organizations to adopt new ways of working, employees who possessed resilience might have coped better with the recent events than employees whose resilience was not that consistent.

*“Well, kind of this need to continuously change and that we have constantly shifted to more and more agile work processes [...] Thinking about the situations [when resilience is needed] at the most simply they can be such some working tool changes that you must jump to this world of Teams. One year ago, it could have been very unfamiliar for some people, and someone could ask like “what Teams” which no one of those who are knowledge workers ask any more.” -I2*

*“Well, as I said before, only change is permanent. If we are thinking about the development of technology, etc. progression is happening all the time, so organizations and individuals must keep up with the development, which is why resilience is needed.” -13*

*“One situation where it [resilience] is needed is when new systems come into use constantly and when they need to be adopted and developed, and I think that one is a big factor.” -18*

However, the findings point out the usefulness of resilience also in everyday life when some interviewees described that resilience is helpful in general in working life and daily routines. This emphasizes the notion founded in the theoretical part of this research that catastrophe is not necessary for resilience to occur or develop. Moreover, resilience was considered beneficial when employees balance work and free time. Regarding the balance, resilience was seen as a helpful instrument when creating the line for work and free time, and therefore, resilient employees could have had a better ability to differentiate work and free time than employees whose resilience was not that strong. Consequently, through balance, resilience could have had beneficial influence on well-being of employees.

*“Resilience is useful in everyday life with normal encumber, so it is not necessary to some crisis to happen.” -11*

*“I think that resilience is useful when thinking about the harmonization between work and free time or whether there is a separate work and free time.” -15*

### **5.1.2 The appearing of resilience in working life**

Previously it was discussed that organizational changes often impact the demands of the work, and therefore, on employees' resources, well-being, motivation, and performance. The data heightened the view that resilience supports the functioning of employees even though changes occur and demands are transformed. Therefore, regarding the appearing of resilience in working life, in the data, resilience was mainly considered as an individual ability in the work environment, which refers to employee resilience.

Hence, the findings illustrate how employee resilience is conceptualized in practice by HR professionals.

To create an understanding of how HR professionals conceptualize resilience in the context of working life, they were asked about how they perceive resilience in their organization or in general. In the answers, it was noticed that the resilience of employees was seen as an essential competence and referred to as civic knowledge of working life. Moreover, it was seen as a prerequisite for success in modern working life. The use of the concept of modern working life emphasized the notion that the need for resilience of employees had increased, especially in recent years. Furthermore, some interviewees thought that resilience is one of the most important competencies in working life or even the most important one because it was seen to support employees' working comprehensively. By comprehensiveness, it was referred to as the benefits of resilience in both robust and turbulent work environment.

*"Generally speaking, I think it [resilience] is essential, and I see that it will also be in the future [...] it is maybe sort of civic knowledge of working life." -I1*

*"I think that it [resilience] is actually a prerequisite for success in modern working life." -I9*

*"Well, it [resilience] is for sure one of the most if not the most important competence of working life [...] resilience is in some way the most important because it helps when coping with more or less continuous uncertainty." -I4*

Even though the importance of employee resilience was recognized, the findings point out that resilience was considered partly as an intrinsic ability. However, it was identified in the data that resilience was an ability that could also be developed and strengthened, and the strengthening was seen as essential when wanting to cope better with working life. It was seen that the possibility of strengthening resilience potentializes equal chances for employee resilience, even though some employees may have naturally a stronger level of resilience. Thus, the difference could be visible in the amount of work

in the development process when, for some employees reaching a better level of resilience may be easier than for others.

*"I also think that at the individual level, resilience is partly intrinsic and like it was used to thought that you either have or leadership or communication skills or you don't." -19*

*"I think that a part of the resilience capacity we get as a gift when we are born but it is also a capacity that can be practised and learned better [...] especially when wanting to keep your head in the game you need to practice and learn capacities for resilience." -17*

*"I have understood that some people have a high level of resilience naturally, so they cope with all kinds of crises without exhausting [...] and some people have a lower level of resilience, but I also think that it can be developed and learned." -15*

When interviewees were asked how resilience appears in their organization, they described that resilience of employees appears variously and in several situations. However, the same themes emerged in the answers, and the appearing of employee resilience was connected to changes and the turbulent nature of working life. However, HR professionals described that employee resilience appears also in daily working life. As the data pointed out that resilience was visible in the behaviour of employees, every employee has the possibilities to influence resilience by behaving differently. Therefore, by evaluating their behaviour, each employee could aim to enhance their resilience by increasing resilient behaviours in their work.

Many of the interviewees described employee resilience or resilient employee behaviour in terms of flexibility and adaptability. Nevertheless, employee resilience was seen as a broader concept than previously mentioned concepts as it describes the action of employees. Resilient employees may maintain similar activity while they cope with change and even if the work effort decrease due to the change, resilient employees recover effectively and "bounce back" or "bounce forward". "Bounce back" referred to

activity that was as successful as before the change or challenge and “bounce forward” referred to activity that was more successful than before the change or challenge.

*“Resilient behaviour, meaning that the functioning continues similar than before even if some change happens, so it is flexibility concerning changes and ability to cope with stress [...] like faith for the future that we will survive from change.” -17*

*“I see that resilient people are flexible and adaptative concerning changes [...] first thing that comes to my mind about resilience is bounce back [...] I think that flexibility is not enough to describe it but the way I see it, it is in a sense that you can recover and jump back on the track when some change appears. Thinking about that working life changes continuously it [resilience] is definitely one of the basic capacities that an employee must have.” -13*

*“It [resilience] is the flexibility of thoughts and adaptation to changes and in a sort of fast processing of things and reflection and finding new directions and ways of action.” -18*

A few interviewees described courage as one area of resilient employee behaviour. By courage, the HR professionals referred to the boldness to try new things at work without having perfect knowledge and with no fear of mistakes. Consequently, in addition to eagerness, resilience was visible also in courage to learn and try new things. Based on this, it can be understood why resilience is considered useful regarding technological progression and when taking new systems into use. This also expands the understanding of why the importance of resilience at work has been increasing in recent years and during the COVID-19 pandemic when technological progression and various technologies in work have increased.

*“Very resilient employee is courageous, and by courage, I mean that even if a person does not know yet how to do some new thing, they are not afraid to do it and try it out.” -14*

*“One way to think about resilience is that let’s do experiments and take risks and fix it if it is not successful.” -19*

Like in the traditional definition, resilience was associated with surviving from different kinds of obstacles and coping with challenging situations also by interviewees. Hence, in the data it was identified that employees resilience was seen as a tool for managing or surviving from challenging events or changes at work. Challenging events were associated with changes in the work processes but also with personnel changes. Based on the findings, these kinds of challenges influence employees differently when changes in the work processes may indicate that something new must be learned. In addition, personnel changes may imply that relationships and interaction transform where feelings may have more significant role.

*“It can be that kind of resilience that a person survives from difficult situations where for example some of your close colleagues are left out of job, or you get a new supervisor, or your work task changes remarkably, or you need to acquire new kind of skills.” -I6*

*“If we are thinking about resilience at an individual level it would be psychological recoverability, ability to recover [...] maybe managing situations that are in some way considered as setbacks.” -I9*

### **5.1.3 Resilience at the team and organizational level**

Concerning the perceptions of team resilience, interviewees were also asked about the role of teamwork in their organization. All of the interviewees emphasized its importance in current working life. In addition, a few of the HR professionals underlined that it is usual today that people belong in different kinds of networks which are not limited by organizational boundaries, which again emphasizes the value of the ability to work with others. As a consequence, the importance of studying resilience at the team level, in addition to the individual level, was heightened.

*“Well, teamwork has a big role. I think that there are not many tasks anymore that someone could say I can do this alone so all tasks are associated with some networks or teamwork.” -I2*

*“In today, I would talk more about networks rather than teams because a lot of the work is done in different project groups [...] like we are not limited by the organizational boundaries.” -18*

It can be established that team resilience in the context of working life refers to the resilience of employees working together in a group. The perceptions of HR professionals of team resilience showed that it was considered as vital as the resilience of individual employees. In many expressions, it was described that in a team, other members' strong resilience might also support the member who has weaker resilience or, on the other hand a member with strong resilience might not flourish in a team where other members possess weaker resilience. Hence, it was seen that by promoting teamwork and assuring that group dynamic and interaction work successfully in teams, organizations may benefit more from the resilience of employees than by focusing on just the work of individuals.

*“Team resilience as a concept may be more interesting than an individual like that in many other things the team's total score is more than the individuals combined that maybe I'm not at all surprised that if that's the case in team resilience too.” -11*

*“Team resilience, maybe at the team level person who has weaker personal resilience might do well if others in that team have stronger resilience.” -13*

*“I think that it might be some kind of multiplier in one way or another like thinking about a team of four people if there is one person who possesses very good or very weak resilience it is kind of more than the four or it might kind of decrease or increase the value if considering this mathematically.” -17*

*“If there are people in a team who have strong resilience, it for sure supports the work of a person whose resilience is not that strong, or if there are many people acting as a hindrance, it for sure weakens the resilience of a person who has it naturally.” -18*

Examining team resilience more profoundly, a few interviewees described that feeling of togetherness and psychological safety are matters to consider when aiming to improve the resilience of a team. Consequently, the influence of feeling of togetherness on

enhancing team resilience was based on the idea that in the team, members often want to be what the majority of the members are. Therefore, concerning team resilience, if most team members behave in a resilient manner, so does the member whose resilience is not that strong on the individual level.

*“I think it [team resilience] is associated with the traditional matters associated with teams like that feeling of togetherness if people feel togetherness also those people who are not that resilient want to be similar with the majority of the team.” -12*

*“One important matter concerning resilience at the team level is that I think that if people have manyhanded knowledge and the communication is easy, and togetherness of team and psychological safety contribute to the resilience of a team.” -16*

Considering resilience at the organizational level, it was identified as the ability of a whole organization to “bounce back” from adverse situations. Moreover, it was referred to as an organizations’ ability to respond to the external environment successfully. To demonstrate this point, one interviewee described that organizational resilience might appear in organizations actions responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, for resilience to occur in an organization, the resilience of employees, teams or organizations are all pieces of the larger entity where they all need to support each other. Furthermore, the data reinforced the notion that employee and organizational resilience can have beneficial effects on the functioning of an organization.

In the perceptions of HR professionals, it was noticed that resilience is seen as beneficial for organizations in many ways. Firstly, a few interviewees pointed out that resilience is vital for an organization’s survival and general functioning. In the perceptions, the importance was associated with the resilience of the whole organization, teams and employees, but it was noted that especially the resilience of actors working in critical roles in the organization is essential. This was explained by the observation that people working in the key roles of the organization are often those who make critical decisions

concerning organizations and these decisions often need to be done quickly. Consequently, it was seen that resilience supports efficient decision making.

*“But at the organizational level, it is maybe a little bit different, for example, if you think this decrease in sales due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ability to recover from that, so you get the business back again.” -I9*

*“I don’t think resilience just as an ability or a characteristic of an individual but comprehensively as resilience of an organization like in a sense as an agility to respond to markets and competition [...] And individual resilience of employees is one thing that must be considered in the comprehensiveness so the organization could succeed in the competition.” -I6*

*“And I think that it is very important for the survival of an organization even if it is about the resilience of individuals, the resilience of teams or the whole organization, but it would be important that these different pieces are supported by each other.” -I2*

Secondly, resilience was seen as beneficial when leading through changes as a few interviewees thought the duration of change resistance was shorter among resilient employees. Moreover, the importance of resilience of the whole organization was recognized in relation to successful change management. By organizational resilience, it was referred to as the ability of an organization to understand the need for supporting employees regarding the changes. Thus, it was shown in the data that there is a connection between the resilience of employees and the resilience of an organization.

*“I think there is a connection in that respect that the more quickly we are getting rid of old habits and the briefer the resistance of change stays, it will be supporting for the business of the organization.” -I8*

*“If we want to take changes forward then one thing is that a person itself has resilience like that but then also the resilience of an organization comes in I think so that we can successfully handle changes and we have an understanding of what kind of support is needed in these kinds of situations.” -I6*

Concerning direct effects of employee resilience or its lack on organizational outcomes or performance, a few interviewees mentioned the beneficial effects of resilience on

resignations, turnovers, and sick leaves. Thus, in the data, a good level of resilience was connected to better coping with changes, and due to that lower level of turnover rates and a smaller number of sick leaves. On the contrary, lack of employee resilience was associated with increased exhaustion and its disadvantageous impacts on organizations' performance. Based on this, the notion that employee resilience is beneficial for organizations in various ways was supported.

*“At the organizational level it is very important that there are resilient people because otherwise if people get exhausted, of course, there are sick leaves due to exhaustion, but also turnover if people have not strength, so the turnover is also expensive for the organization, so thinking about this way if the organization is given resilient people it reinforces the permanency and that they bounce back together from those adversities.” -13*

*“For example, the first thing that comes to my mind is sick leaves so if people possess good resilience they can cope with the ups and downs of life [...] very resilient people need fewer sick leaves, they can accept setbacks without them driving them for sick leaves, and there is a direct connection when people are at work and not in sick leave, it is visible in the profit of the organization.” -15*

## **5.2 Strengthening resilience in organizations through HRM**

### **5.2.1 The importance of strengthening resilience in organizations**

The findings demonstrate that the importance of resilience strengthening was widely recognized among HR professionals. To expand the understanding of the importance of strengthening resilience in organizations, interviewees were asked about their perceptions about supporting employee resilience in the workplace and its importance. Considering the reasons for the importance, HR professionals described that they are associated with the need for the ability to continuously adapt to changes and cope with suddenly transforming work environment that, for instance, pandemic like the COVID-19 can cause.

Consequently, resilience was seen as an answer for managing these kinds of situations as it potentializes viewing the change as a possibility, and therefore, organizations should consider how to support the resilience of employees. Furthermore, the importance was associated with the abilities that will be needed in the future, and when resilience was seen as a vital capacity also in the future, organizations may benefit if they start to consider how it could be supported in the work environment.

*“Well, I would vote for it so in practice it is that kind of [...] like life management skill I would say and basic skill that is needed in working life [...] so that employees are productive in this kind of time, [referring to the COVID-19 pandemic] and have energy, and resilience is strong, so that would not make sense if the employer would not support or courage for enhancing resilience.” -I3*

*“Well yes, I associate this with more like changing working life and what kind of skills we will need in let’s say for 25 or 50 years later, that resilience is in one way one of those most important skills because it potentializes that even though the environment changes we are not scared of the change, but we will see it as a possibility [...] so I would say it is an important topic and for sure a topic that would be good for organizations to think about how to support it.” -I4*

Moreover, in the data, it was described that the educational system or teaching practices in Finland might not support resilience, and therefore, the role of an employer is essential regarding strengthening employee resilience. The conversation about whose responsibility it is to enhance this kind of ability that resilience represents was carried out in most interviews. However, when discussing employee resilience, the benefits it brings were mostly connected with working life and organizations, and therefore, the strengthening of it should also be reinforced in working life and organizations.

It was also explained that resilience enhancing might stay as a responsibility of an individual both in working life and life outside of the work. Thus, it was seen that when organizations have possibilities to influence strengthening employee resilience, they should utilize the possibilities. On the other hand, it was hoped that individuals would develop resilience spontaneously, besides, it would be supported in education and working life. The notion that resilience is also the responsibility of an individual to develop

appeared in the data. However, it was seen that best solutions would be achieved when resilience would be developed and supported by individuals themselves, the educational system and organizations throughout life.

*“ [...] resilience is for sure a topic that is not taught in high school or university so whose responsibility it is to teach [...] in that way I think that the role of the employer is very important that they would bring this topic to awareness and encourage people to take care of their well-being.” -I3*

*“I think it [strengthening resilience at work] is very important because I would argue that Finnish education system does not encourage for that, so it stays pretty much for the responsibility of an individual [...] so the organization has possibilities to support individuals in that.” -I4*

*“I hope that individuals would understand to develop their resources in addition to that, that they develop like actual skills like now I will learn how to use Excel so in addition to that they would learn these kinds of general skills of working life that would help them even if they are working in any kind of place and resilience is one of them [...] in a sense I hope that resilience and these other skills would be in reasonable entirety developed in schools and also in organizations.” -I1*

### **5.2.2 The ways to strengthen resilience in organizations**

To understand the ways that resilience could be strengthened in organization through HRM, interviewees were asked about their perceptions of what kind of HR or leadership practices or other kinds of ways could strengthen employee resilience. This was quite a difficult question for many of the interviewees when the connection between resilience and HR practices was not recognized before or familiar, so it was new topic to them that HRM could influence employee resilience. However, when interviewees discussed their perceptions of how employee resilience could be strengthened, most of the practices or areas they described were part of HRM. Thus, the data pointed out the connection between enhancing the resilience of employees and HRM.

The first theme in the data associated with strengthening resilience through HRM was creating a work environment where employees are valued and feel psychologically safe. Consequently, it was noted that interviewees thought that by promoting openness, trust, and a culture where employees are safe and cared for, employee resilience could be strengthened and supported. Managing organizational culture is often the responsibility of HRM, and the data showed that to strengthen employee resilience in organizations, it would be worthwhile to focus on creating a previously described culture and to encourage leaders and whole personnel for openness and low hierarchy in interaction.

*“I would say that a culture is very important that the culture is caring and open so that an employee really can say to the leader that hey now I am out of energy [...] that kind of open, caring culture, the creation of it and maintaining are important [...] so creating caring culture is very important and open discussion would be ways to support employee resilience.” -13*

*“It [resilience] is supported by an open, conversational culture where own thoughts and feelings can be expressed so with that kind of open, conversational, constructive, forward-looking culture it can be supported.” -18*

*“In this part, I would emphasize psychological safety that when we feel that we are in a safe environment and have the courage to speak up.” -17*

As one part, the interviewees described that trust in the work environment was connected to employees' autonomy in decision making. Thus, when aiming at a better level of employee resilience, organizations could offer employees autonomy, for example, to decide when the work is done and how the workday is organized. In addition, a few interviewees pointed out the importance of flexibility when supporting the resilience of employees. Therefore, to strengthen employee resilience, organizations could offer flexible ways of work and support for employees in different phases of their lives by offering flexibility.

*“I think resilience might be, so if we think that resilience that you can be resilient you need to have possibilities to make independent decisions [...] it goes forward to trust that in the organization there must be trust and culture of trust where employees are believed and trusted that they make right decisions [...] I think*

*organization must be flexible and understand that people are different and same person has different situations at life [...] a person might have different space for work in different situations, and it would be good to understand that the work could also be flexible.” -15*

*“ [...] and of course, the flexibility of working ways with them it is possible to support [resilience].” -12*

Another theme that appeared in the data concerning strengthening resilience was connected to allowing mistakes and learning from them to increase transparency and courage among the organizational members. Moreover, it was seen that by promoting continuous development and learning as a whole, the resilience of employees could be strengthened. Promoting continuous learning is one of the topics of knowledge management and a procedure that HRM usually can influence in an organization. Thus, it was seen that by creating a learning culture and mindset of growth in an organization, HRM could support the resilience of employees.

*“ [...] mistakes are allowed to happen and that that is visible in the day to day life that is in one way the most important [...] the aim is not to celebrate mistakes but to bring them to awareness and share them like also key actors have shared their own mistakes when others get the feeling that okay they also make mistakes it is okay also for me.” -14*

*“If I think this from the organizational viewpoint [resilience strengthening] [...] when it is tried to build from inside the culture that we continuously learn from what we do and based on that we develop the work.” -16*

*“ [...] like one way is to change the usual way of working I think that build resilience [...] seeking continuously new ideas and solutions and cooperation over the silos could also be one way.” -12*

Similarly, the role of a leader was emphasized in the answers of HR professionals concerning strengthening resilience through HRM. A few interviewees thought that the support and example that a leader shows are associated with resilience enhancing, and one interviewee pointed out that the way that a leader handles situation where mistakes are made, may influence employee resilience. Consequently, when a leader thinks of

setbacks as possibilities to grow and can laugh at own actions was associated with psychological safety and was seen to influence employee resilience beneficially. In addition, a few interviewees suggested coaching leadership style as a way to support employee resilience.

*“I would say that generally speaking the role of a leader, support, example and also the role of the closest colleagues that those things have a big meaning in that [strengthening resilience] [...] Thinking about the ways, so maybe this kind of coaching, professional guidance and that kind of ways could influence strengthening resilience.” -18*

*“I think that the power of example is quite good and this kind of action where setbacks are taken as possibilities [...] also the handling of mistakes and the ability of a leader to laugh at himself/herself would be extremely important which again requires very strong psychological safety [...] and the coaching skills of leaders and learning of discussion methods and teamwork methods would be useful [when strengthening resilience].” -19*

To create a more comprehensive understanding of how HR professionals perceive that resilience can be strengthened in the organization, they were asked if their organization has aimed to enhance resilience consciously and in what ways. However, in all of the interviews, it was noticed that this would be unlikely, so a question was directly added that whether the HR professionals think that resilience could be strengthened indirectly through some other practices. That widened the perceptions of HR professionals on resilience strengthening. Thus, most of the interviewees described that resilience is strengthened mostly indirectly, and strengthening resilience had not been necessarily the main point of the practices they described, but the strengthening happened indirectly.

The theme that appeared most in the answers of HR professionals concerning strengthening employee resilience in their organizations was offering possibilities to develop self-management. According to HR professionals, developing self-management consisted of learning more about mindfulness, self-awareness, skills to cope with stress and recovery. Thus, the interviewees thought that resilience would be strengthened when employees

increase their self-awareness and practice mindfulness and that it would be strengthened through various well-being-related practices that help, for example, in recovery and coping with stress. One interviewee described that resilience had been hidden in training that focus on mental strength. Additionally, other interviewees described that the training might not be called “resilience training”, but the resilience still may be strengthened through developing self-awareness.

*“Self-management we have been trained for many years [...] mindfulness is one way to manage stress and that we have been training for many years.” -I2*

*“We have had practices and training where we have discussed resilience but mostly self-management and coping with stress and we have organized mindfulness.” -I5*

*“Well, probably biggest support comes indirectly [...] but the direct way, so maybe this kind of training that we have organized but we have not called them like resilience training, but the subject has been more like self-awareness and its development.” -I4*

*“I don’t remember if we have discussed resilience exactly, but it is kind of hidden in many trainings, and it is often related to training of mental strength, recovery, and resources or training of teamwork or work community skills, so it is like one area I think it that way.” -I7*

So, even though employee resilience can be viewed as an ability of an individual, organizations and HRM have the possibilities to support it by offering opportunities to train self-management. Moreover, another theme that appeared in the data concerning resilience strengthening in interviewees’ organizations was offering challenges for employees and driving them for discomfort zone. It was described that resilience strengthening through these practices happen when employees experience personal growth and feel that they can survive for tasks that they thought challenging before. Therefore, by offering new challenges and personal development possibilities for employees, HRM offers opportunities for employees to develop and strengthen their resilience.

*“The thing we discuss a lot is going to the discomfort zone, so that strengthens resilience maybe the most, like even if we have any kind of training and organizational structures if a person does not get to the discomfort zone, then they cannot develop and neither the resilience is strengthened so if the person has not the courage to go to the discomfort zone, then it is the responsibility of the organization to push the person there.” -I4*

*“I have experienced that during my career, the best way to strengthen resilience are through big challenges when you have to step into slightly too big shoes that is one remarkable way of strengthening resilience when you survive from that.” -I2*

Communication and information sharing within an organization was seen as one part of strengthening employee resilience as one interviewee pointed out that when receiving information continuously, employees’ resilience may be strengthened as they feel more valuable within the organization. Furthermore, it was seen that successful communication and information sharing within an organization during changes may support employees coping with changes, and therefore, effective communication and information sharing may lead to more resilient employee behaviour.

*“Actually dialogue, first of all, this kind of one way communication has been a key factor even if it is a change or this kind of exceptional like COVID-19 pandemic, so we have noticed that personnel still wish for more dialogue [...] we have organized these kind of events where it has been possible to send questions in advance, and some persons have answered them [...] I think even if we have not consciously thought resilience with these events but it for sure strengthen resilience when you receive information all the time.” -I2*

*“ [...] that we know how to manage information sharing clearly and actively, so the competence in communication in these kinds of situations has an essential role because with that we can help employees to cope with changes.” -I6*

Another theme concerning strengthening resilience was the development of leaders. A few interviewees saw that by promoting leadership development, leaders would have more ways to support the resilience of employees, for example, when they have ways to motivate employees and comprehensive knowledge about modern leadership styles. Therefore, regarding resilience strengthening through HRM, HRM may first focus on

developing leadership by offering leaders opportunities to enhance their awareness about resilience and ways to motivate employees.

*“We have had, for example, this kind of virtual training like leadership in change, and resilience and its strengthening has been part of it.” -I2*

*“ [...] we coach our leaders in every two weeks, so we have very continuous training for leaders, so we invest very much in leadership [...] we have coached mindfulness for leaders and all these kind of skills like how you can motivate employees and that kind of matters.” -I3*

### **5.2.3 Organizational roles in strengthening resilience**

To understand resilience strengthening in organizations more deeply, interviewees were asked about their perceptions and experiences about the different organizational roles when aiming to enhance employee resilience at work. While employee resilience has been recognized an essential for HRM to consider, the intention was to increase understanding of other roles that would support HR in their work to strengthen the resilience of employees. Concerning the role of HR, many of the interviewees saw that when strengthening resilience, HR would have a supporting role, and it was often seen as an initiator. However, it was seen that senior management must be involved, and their decision must be in the background. According to the interviewees, the resilience of employees can be strengthened through HRM, but there must be the support of the other organizational parties also.

*“ [...] HR has this kind of supporting role, and it shows the directions where senior management wants the things to go so senior management shows directions HR shows directions, but HR has this kind of supporting role concerning knowledge and well-being [...] in addition, concerning the role of HR it kind of strengthens the new ways of working.” -I2*

*“For my experience, I could argue that the initiative comes from HR [...] but nothing can be done if there is not support from senior management, so HR probably sells the idea to senior management, but I think that senior management act as an example so that at 9 o'clock in the evening no emails are sent to anyone [...]”*

*but the initiative comes from HR, but senior management must be involved.” -13*

On the other hand, concerning other organizational roles when aiming to strengthen employee resilience, a few interviewees thought of senior management as an initiator in relation to the responsibility of senior management of organizational culture and value basis. Moreover, the role of an initiator was associated with the responsibility of senior management in organizational changes as a whole. However, the role of HR was still seen as an essential supporter for the development of employee resilience. Thus, according to the interviewees the senior management should guide and encourage HR to create a culture and practices that would enhance the resilience of employees so that HR could design and implement resilience-enhancing culture and practices.

*“In one way I think that it starts from senior management and value basis of the organization like are we that kind of an organization that encourages to try and experience [...] so organization culture and it often starts from the senior management, but of course everyone in the workplace takes part in it [...] in a way each individual is responsible for it and can affect to it [...] and concerning the role of HR I think it is quite the same with what I said previously, but of course HR rarely is part of the day to day activities which emphasizes that the role of HR is particularly to support teams, coach them [...] the role of HR is supporting people.” -14*

*“Often senior management is responsible for change as a whole and when taking HR as part of planning the change HR can observe the need for change support and think about how resilience could be supported during the change. -16*

In addition, many interviewees emphasized the role of a team leader in practical work, for example, when implementing changes. It was described that to support the resilience of employees, a team leader must show a good example and have knowledge about change management where again, HR can support the work of the team leaders. Therefore, the data showed that when HR possesses the support of senior management, they can design and implement resilience enhancing culture and practices and then support the team leaders with their daily practical work in implementing the resilience enhancing culture and practices.

*“ [...] team leaders also have a strong role when they show an example of how to act in different situations as if they are stuck with problems or if they find solutions.” -12*

*“ [...] the implementer in practice I think a leader has a big role [...] team leader is very important in practice when implementing models and helping employees to have more strength, but they receive support from HR and senior management.” -13*

*“In practice, it goes like the responsibility of the implementation of the change is mostly for a team leader because when change is communicated team leader is there and often the person who shares information for employees [...] so there is a big influence on how team leader manages the situation, and HR can help there for example by planning training for team leaders.” -16*

Concerning the organizational roles in resilience strengthening, a few interviewees also saw the role of employees' self-management as necessary. Furthermore, it was described that resilience is a shared responsibility of all members of the organization, and considering the strengthening of it, it would be important that each one takes responsibility of their development. Consequently, the main point of the data concerning the organizational roles when strengthening resilience was that the actions of all organizational roles support each other. Therefore, when aiming to strengthen resilience in organizations, employees, team leaders, HR, and senior management should have similar shared goals and actions to strengthen employee resilience at work.

*“Well concerning employees perception we have this kind of a problem regarding human resource development like an individual might think that organization needs to train me and shift responsibility for an organization and from organization's perception it is noticed that individuals must take responsibility for the development. I believe that resilience is also a matter where we can look at the organizational level to organize all kind of development intentions, but I believe that in this or in any matter related to self-development, it is more effective if an individual takes responsibility of it.” -11*

*“I think resilience is shared responsibility of all [...] I think that it must be written in a shared organizational culture that the resilience of employees is strengthened and maintained.” -13*

## **6 Conclusions**

This chapter presents the conclusions and discusses the main observations of the research. First, in the discussion, the findings of the research are reviewed, and the research questions are answered individually. The research questions are answered by presenting the findings that emerged through the data analysis. Moreover, the relation of the findings to the theoretical framework is examined by comparing previous research findings of the topic presented in the literature review with the findings of this research. After the discussion, the practical implications are considered and explained. In the end, limitations of the research are discussed, and suggestions for future research are presented.

### **6.1 Discussion**

The aim of this research was to create an understanding of resilience in the context of working life and examine what ways the resilience of employees could be strengthened in organizations through HRM. The aim was approached by two research questions that were investigated by reviewing previous studies of the topic and examining the perceptions and experiences of HR professionals provided in the interviews. Furthermore, the purpose of this research was to expand the understanding of research on the topic by examining topical perceptions of HR-professionals on resilience and its strengthening in organizations.

#### **6.1.1 Conceptualizing resilience in working life**

The first research question was associated with resilience and its conception in the work environment. Hence, in the theoretical framework, it was recognized that resilience is a relatively new but settled research topic in the context of working life (e.g. Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Bardoel et al., 2014). Similarly, this is identified in the empirical observations

of the research when HR professionals recognized the connection of resilience and working life and had perceptions and experiences about resilience regarding their own working life. This was demonstrated already when sending requests for the interviews and all nine HR professionals accepted them, which imply that they all felt they have enough knowledge and understanding about the topic to bring additional value to the research. Only one HR professional who was sent the interview request declined and proposed a colleague who would have more to give to the research about resilience in working life.

Based on the information that previous studies about resilience have provided, it can be perceived that the importance of employee resilience has increased recently when working life seems to be more and more complex due to continuous changes and development (King et al., 2016; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009, p. 334). The empirical observations in this research strengthen this notion as all of the interviewees described resilience as a vital capacity in today's working life, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like in previous literature, resilience was seen as valuable during changes and in learning. Consequently, the research findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed organizations to change work processes and employees to learn which have emphasized the value of resilience. From this, it can be interpreted that complexity and continuous change are part of many organizations functioning. Therefore, resilience is essential for employees to cope with the current continuously changing working life.

However, according to the research findings, employee resilience is also seen as useful in everyday life and daily routines at work. This emphasizes the notion discussed in the theoretical part that a disaster is not necessary for employee resilience to occur or develop in working life (Kuntz et al., 2017). Furthermore, the research findings illustrate that resilience may assist employees in balancing between work and free time. Hence, it can be understood that employee resilience is beneficial and useful in life comprehensively as resilience may support employees when creating a line between work and free time which may influence well-being advantageously.

Regarding the conception of resilience in the work environment, according to Näswall et al. (2015), employee resilience can be referred to as a developable capacity and Saari (2016) have noted that employee resilience can be referred to as a process. Similarly, based on the findings of this research, resilience can be described variously in the context of working life. Moreover, the suggestion that employee resilience is a behavioural construct (Kuntz et al., 2017; Näswall et al., 2019) is also seen in the empirical observations as the interviewees described how resilient employees would behave.

The research findings demonstrate that the resilience of employees is seen as flexibility and adaptability and, therefore, as an asset when coping with changes and turbulent nature of working life. Also, Saari (2016) have connected the concept of resilience to flexibility, adaptability and learning but pointed out that it is more versatile than previously described terms. Similarly, the research findings indicate that neither flexibility nor adaptability is enough to describe resilience when it refers to a more comprehensive activity or behaviour of an employee when adjusting to changes or challenges.

Furthermore, the research findings demonstrate that employee resilience can be described as eagerness of employees to learn and develop and accept and learn from mistakes. This is also supported by literature when Tonkin et al. (2018) have described that resilient employees learn from previously made mistakes. In addition, resilient behaviour at work refers to searching for continuous improvement opportunities (Näswall et al., 2019). On the other hand, the empirical observations emphasize courage as one part of resilience and heighten the importance of self-efficacy in employee's resilient behaviour at work. Therefore, it can be interpreted that employee resilience is visible in employees' behaviour when eagerly learning new, courageously improving daily practices and handling mistakes at work without weakening their self-efficacy.

Based on the research findings, employee resilience appears when surviving from different kinds of obstacles and coping with challenging situations in working life. Thus, employee resilience is perceived as an ability to manage, survive and recover from setbacks

or challenges so that functioning continues to be similar or even improves. In the same manner, this has been noted in some previous studies as Kuntz et al. (2016) have recognized that employees have resilience if they possess the ability for adaptability and thriving in a complex environment. In addition, Koerber et al. (2018) have described that workforce is resilient if they have the ability to adapt to and recover from complicated situations. Consequently, it can be interpreted that employee resilience is visible in the behaviour of employees when they face difficulties in the work environment. According to the research findings, the difficulties can be associated with work methods when employees need to develop their competence or when personnel changes and employees need to control their emotions and reactions. Hence, a resilient employee may recover easier from both kinds of difficulties than an employee whose resilience is not that strong.

Concerning conceptualizing resilience in the context of working life from a more comprehensive perspective, in addition to employee resilience, team resilience and organizational resilience were discussed in the theoretical framework. Alliger et al. (2015) have described team resilience as the ability to maintain the same level of performance while coping with challenges and the ability of a team to bounce back. In addition, Morgan et al. (2013) have identified that team resilience can be seen as a process that protects the members of the team from adverse impacts that challenges may cause.

Based on the research findings, it can be interpreted that team resilience is seen as important as individual resilience of employees. This notion was also seen in the theoretical framework when it was noted in previous studies that the research of resilience of teams was expanded recently (Alliger et al., 2015; Gucciardi et al., 2018; Meneghel et al., 2016). Moreover, the findings of this research emphasize the meaning of teams and networks in the current working life when not many work processes exist that could be performed alone. From this, it can be construed that in the current working life, teamwork is especially important and the research of team resilience is essential.

An interesting research finding concerning team resilience is that in teams, other members' strong resilience might also support a member who has weaker resilience, or on the contrary, a member with strong resilience might not flourish in a team where other members possess weaker resilience. The empirical observations emphasize the importance of feeling of togetherness and psychological safety concerning team resilience as they have enhancing influence on team resilience. The influence is based on the notion that in a team, members often want to be what the majority of the members are and feeling of togetherness and psychological safety support this kind of behaviour. Consequently, by focusing on teamwork and assuring that group dynamic and interaction work successfully in teams, organizations may benefit more from the resilience of employees than by focusing on just the work of individuals.

Concerning resilience at the organizational level, Burnard and Bharna (2011) have described that resilience potentializes the adaptability of organizations when managing challenges. Similarly, according to Lengnick-Hall and Beck (2016), organizational resilience potentializes the ability to manage difficulties by continuing to be flexible at the same time. Therefore, it can be described that the resilience of an organization is identified as the ability to manage, cope with and survive from environmental setbacks or challenges in a way that functioning continues to be similar or even improves. Similarly, in the findings of this research, organizational resilience is described as the ability of a whole organization to bounce back after difficulties, meaning that organizations possess the capacity to respond to the external environment successfully.

According to the research findings, it can be understood that for employees be resilient, also should the organization and vice versa. Based on this, it can be established that the resilience of employees, teams or organizations are all dimensions of a larger entity where they need to support each other. This notion is also supported in previous literature when Kuntz et al. (2016) and Näswall et al. (2019) have described that the connection between occurring of organizational and employee resilience is an indication that employee resilience is supported by organizations. Furthermore, when the

organizational environment allows proactive, adaptive, and support-seeking behaviours, the opportunity for employees to behave in a resilient manner is heightened (Kuntz et al., 2016; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Näswall et al. 2019).

Even though organizational resilience was not described as much by the interviewees as was employee resilience, the findings strengthen the conception found in previous literature that the resilience of employees can be beneficial to organizations in various ways (e.g. Shin et al., 2012; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). The findings of this research point out that resilience is advantageous for an organization's everyday actions but especially when leading through changes due to beneficial influence on employees' change resistance. In addition, it is seen that resilience is useful regarding outcomes and performance of an organization due to higher adaptability, lower level of turnover rates, and a smaller number of sick leaves. Therefore, as employee resilience refers to coping better and more effectively with changes and challenges, the whole functioning of an organization may be more successful due to resilience.

In conclusion, it can be ascertained that resilience in the context of working life may refer to the resilience of employees, teams or organizations. There is a connection between all these dimensions; in order to employees have the possibility to behave in a resilient manner, organizational environment must enable it. Consequently, when employees behave in a resilient manner it brings various benefits for organization. To summarize, resilience supports the activity of employees, teams, and organization when changes and challenges occur at work but it also potentializes a proactive approach to daily working life.

### **6.1.2 Strengthening resilience in organizations through HRM**

The second research question was associated with the ways that resilience could be supported in organizations through HRM. The empirical observations show that strengthening resilience is considered especially important. Also, the theoretical framework

supports this notion as Seville (2018) has described that it is essential to proactively promote and support resilience in organizations. Even though the conception of resilience in the context of working life is comprehensive, the perspective for strengthening resilience is mainly considered as the resilience of employees. Nevertheless, concerning the ways to strengthen resilience, resilience at the team level is associated with the assumption that team resilience in the work environment refers to the resilience of employees working in a group. Therefore, it is assumed that team resilience is strengthened similarly with employee resilience. Accordingly, resilience at the organizational level is associated with the beneficial impacts that strengthened employee resilience would bring on organizations' performance.

According to previous research, HRM have many ways to influence resilience in organizations (see Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Bardoel et al., 2014; Luthans et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2014). Similarly, empirical observations of this research support this when employee resilience is thought to be strengthened by various ways that often are the responsibility of HRM in organizations. Thus, the research findings suggest that the resilience of employees could be strengthened through HRM by creating a work environment where employees are valued and offering autonomy and flexibility at work, promoting continuous learning and offering challenges at work, promoting self-management and offering opportunities to develop self-awareness and mindfulness, promoting efficacious communication within the organization to create a supportive work environment, and developing leadership for the leaders to have the knowledge on how to support employee resilience.

According to the research findings, a work environment where employees are valued and it is invested in psychological safety, supports employee resilience. This refers to the promotion of openness, trust, and a culture where employees are safe and cared for at work. In previous studies, it was recognized that assuring the utilization of occupational health and safety (OHS) systems, employee resilience may strengthen (Bardoel et al., 2014). However, the findings of this research emphasize creating a safe work

environment and organizational culture where psychological safety is assured. Consequently, the findings point out that a work environment that encourages employees to speak up and ask for help promotes resilience strengthening. Thus, it can be established that psychological safety strengthens employee resilience as it refers to “the degree to which people view the environment as conducive to interpersonally risky behaviors like speaking up or asking for help” (Edmonson et al., 2016, p. 71). Furthermore, the research findings show that when employees have possibilities for open discussion and hierarchy is low in the organization, there may be a better atmosphere for resilient employee behaviour. In the same manner, Näswall et al. (2019) have observed that supporting low hierarchy in the organization may enhance the resilience of employees.

In addition, the research findings suggest that by offering autonomy in decision-making and flexibility in the ways of working, employee resilience may be strengthened. Thus, based on the findings it can be understood that when employees have a possibility to influence their work, and they feel trusted, they may behave in a more resilient manner. Similarly, previous studies have noted this when Koerber et al. (2018) have argued that resilience may be strengthened in organizations through policies that reinforce employees’ autonomy in decision-making. Furthermore, Bardoel et al. (2014) have introduced flexible work arrangements as potential resilience enhancing HR practice when they have argued that flexible work arrangements may improve adaptability in changes and therefore provide resources to strengthen resilience.

The research findings point out that promoting continuous learning strengthens employee resilience. Consequently, encouraging employees to try, inspiring them to create new ideas and discussing mistakes openly are vital for strengthening employee resilience. In the same manner, Näswall et al. (2015) have suggested that a learning-oriented work environment promotes the resilience of employees. Based on this, it can be ascertained that an organizational culture where making mistakes is made transparent and employees are not scared to experiment and fail support resilient employee behaviours and, therefore, also strengthen employee resilience.

Moreover, according to the research findings, offering challenges for employees and encouraging them to their discomfort zone are beneficial for employee resilience to strengthen. From this, it can be interpreted that when employees' self-efficacy enhances and employees notice they can survive from responsibilities they considered too complicated before, they have the courage also in the future to utilize resilient behaviour. As a result, employee resilience may be strengthened. In relation to strengthening resilience in the theoretical framework, development opportunities and training possibilities for employees were emphasized whereas empirical observations emphasize improving employees' self-efficacy through functioning in discomfort zone.

An interesting empirical observation in the findings of this research is that the most emphasized way to strengthen employee resilience is associated with self-management and offering opportunities to develop it. Hence, the research findings point out that when employees increase their self-awareness, practice mindfulness and when employees are offered well-being-related practices that help, for example, in recovery and coping with stress, also their resilience would be strengthened. Thus, it can be ascertained that practices that contribute to mental strength may contribute similarly to the development of resilience. Concerning the ways for strengthening resilience, the findings of this research emphasize practices regarding self-management that would assist individuals with developing their capacities whereas in the theoretical framework the focus was more on the practices that HRM or organizational environment could provide.

According to the research findings, ensuring successful communication and information sharing within an organization is one way to strengthen employee resilience. This is based on the notion that while receiving information continuously, employee resilience may be strengthened due to the feeling of being supported in the organization. In conjunction with this, it has been recognized in some previous studies that ensuring successful communication and information sharing within an organization are potential HR practices to strengthen the resilience of employees (Khan et al., 2019; Kuntz et al., 2017). Moreover, the research findings note that successful communication and information

sharing within an organization potentialize the notion that employees can modify their activities in compliance with the new information and reduce the uncertainty among employees. This may again increase employees' courage for experimenting at work which was one part of resilient employee behaviour.

The research findings support the notion that a leader's and team's support may influence employee resilience beneficially. The notion was identified in the theoretical framework as Kuntz et al. (2016) have argued that a supportive organization is a vital contributor to employee resilience and a supportive work environment consists of both a supportive team and organization. Therefore, it can be established that implementing HR practices that promote social support may strengthen resilience in organizations (Koerber et al., 2018). The findings of this research acknowledge that psychological safety and a supportive culture at work promotes employee resilience. According to the research findings, the leader's example is vital for strengthening employee resilience; when leaders consider challenges as possibilities and handle mistakes transparently which requires psychological safety, resilient employee behaviour is promoted.

The research findings point out that especially coaching as a leadership style and the ability for successful change management are beneficial for employee resilience. Furthermore, it is seen in the findings that by developing leadership through leaders increased knowledge of resilience, they would have more ways to support the resilience of employees. In the same manner, Siebert (2006) has proposed that to strengthen the resilience of employees through leadership, leaders need to understand what resilience means in the work context. Thus, it can be interpreted that HRM should focus on training leaders in relation to resilience when aiming to strengthen employee resilience in the organization. Similarly, the role of leadership in strengthening resilience was recognized in the theoretical framework (e.g. Sommer et al., 2016; Luthans, 2002; Harland et al., 2005). Consequently, to improve the resilience of employees, organizations may benefit from developing leadership (Näswall et al., 2019),

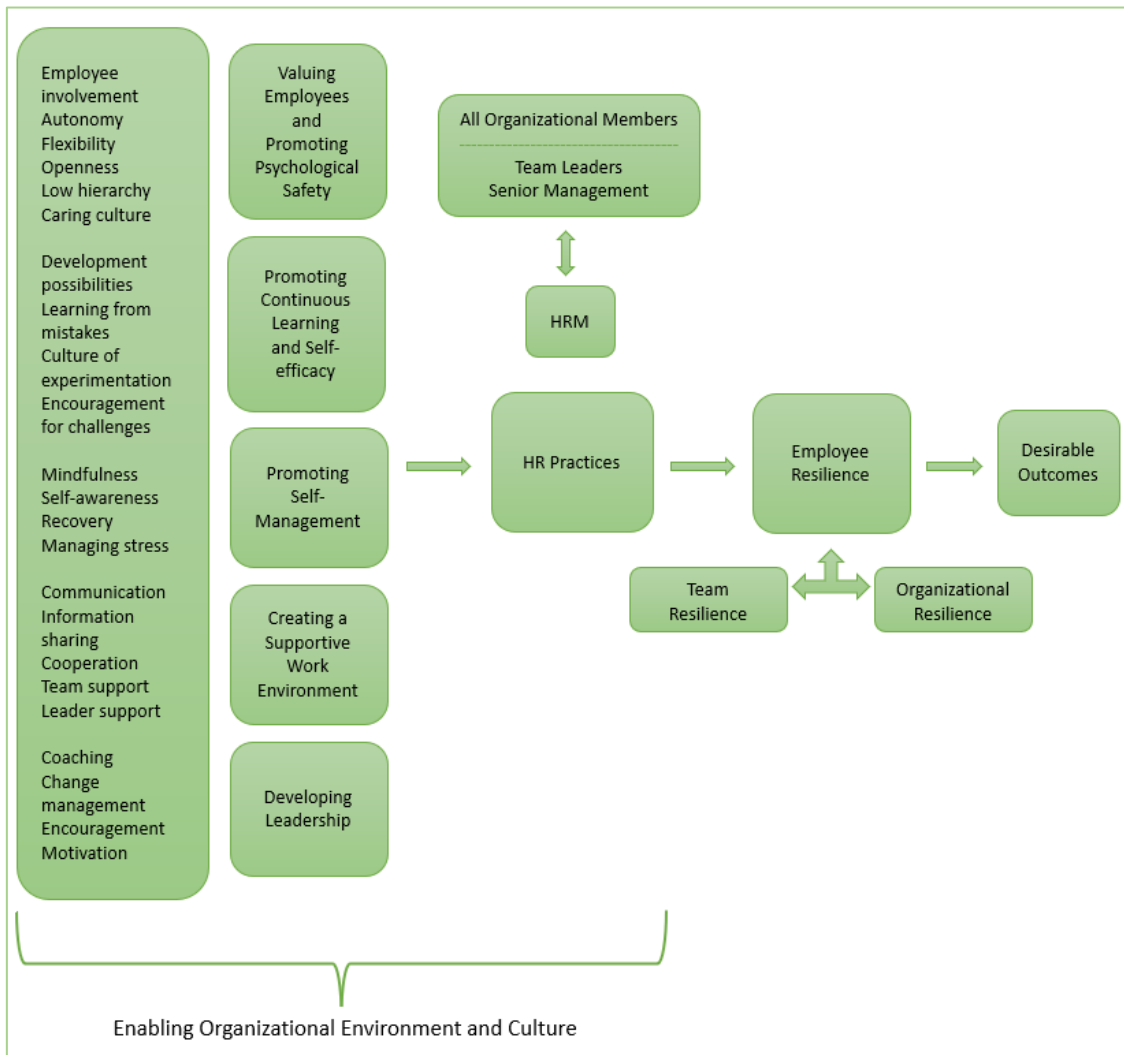
When in the theoretical framework, the focus was mainly on the HR practices that may strengthen employee resilience, in the empirical observations, also the role of HR and other organizational parties was discussed. The research findings point out that in strengthening resilience, the role of HR is to provide support throughout the organization. According to the findings, either HR or senior management could be an initiator when deciding to strengthen resilience in the organization, and in any case, both HR and senior management's actions and decisions should support each other and have a shared objective. Moreover, team leaders have an important role in practical work, such as implementing ways to strengthen resilience. Furthermore, the role of self-management is highlighted in the research findings concerning organizational roles in resilience strengthening.

To summarize, it can be established that senior management should support HR in creating resilience enhancing culture and practices so HR could design and adopt culture and practices that would strengthen resilience in the organization and support team leaders with their daily practical work in implementing them. Consequently, the research findings emphasize shared responsibility when aiming to strengthen resilience in the organization. Thus, strengthening resilience is a shared responsibility of all members of the organization. Concerning organizational roles in strengthening employee resilience, it can be interpreted that employees, team leaders, HR and senior management should have similar shared objectives and procedures to strengthen employee resilience at work.

In conclusion, Figure 3 presents the relationship between HRM and strengthening employee resilience as a framework for employee resilience. Näswall et al. (2015) have assumed, that resilience can be strengthened and supported by organizational environment, and Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) have stated that HRM policies, practices, and activities are the basis of an organization's capacity for resilience. Accordingly, the research findings suggest that employee resilience could be strengthened through HRM by valuing employees and promoting psychological safety, promoting continuous learning and

self-efficacy at work, promoting self-management, creating a supportive work environment where successful communication is promoted and developing leadership. Therefore, as HRM often has possibilities to influence previously mentioned areas in the organizational work environment, the connection shown in Figure 3 is assumed.

**Figure 3.** The proposed framework for employee resilience.



Moreover, the framework illustrates the process of strengthening employee resilience which can lead to desirable outcomes in organizations. Hence, the shared responsibility of strengthening resilience is demonstrated when all organizational members have opportunities to participate in the process, not just the representatives of HRM. The

connection between employee, team, and organizational resilience is demonstrated in the framework as the research findings emphasize that they contribute to each other.

The research findings point out the notion that resilience requires specific prerequisites to appear. Thus, in the framework enabling organizational environment and culture demonstrate this notion. Even though one employee in an organization or one member in a team would be resilient, it may not be enough for the effective utilization of resilient behaviours. Therefore, enabling organizational environment and culture consisting of HR practices and shared practices and goals by all organizational members are essential.

## **6.2 Practical implication**

The purpose of this research was to increase knowledge and theoretical observations of the connection between HRM and resilience and respond to the research gap composed by scarcity in empirical studies of the topic. Thus, the practical implication is seen as an expanded understanding of what resilience means in the context of working life and how HRM can offer practices to strengthen employee resilience. In addition, the practical implication is associated with an increased understanding of how HRM can support personnel to cope better and feel more satisfied with their work and similarly enhance business in organizations. Moreover, the research demonstrates in what kind of situations resilience is needed in working life, why more resilient employees, teams and organizations may survive from adversities better than others and how resilience promotes employees' proactive approach at work.

Based on the research findings, recommendations for practical working life can be proposed. The research findings can be utilized in practice in organizations when planning the development of employee capacities, such as employee resilience. The recommendations based on this research are directed primarily to professionals or representatives of HRM in organizations. Especially people responsible for HRD or well-being in

organizations may find the recommendations as helpful. In addition, the recommendations for senior management and team leaders are presented.

First, for HRM representatives, the note of the research is to ensure a proactive approach concerning HR practices and their development. It is important to continuously evaluate the current state of the practices and improve them if it is seen as beneficial. Concerning the improvement, HR analytics could be helpful, for instance, when stating arguments for senior management in relation to the improvement of the practices. Thus, it would be vital to consider data collection methods concerning the costs of implementing new practices or the current state of employee resilience in an organization. Taking the role of an initiator may be essential for representatives of HRM. It would be critical to promote resilience as well-being and forward HRD related issue in the organization and along with the organizational strategy would be critical. Therefore, when aiming to take well-being and HRD related issues such as resilience into consideration in a strategy-oriented manner, it would be vital that representatives of HRM are part of the strategic planning in an organization alongside of senior management.

Concerning recommendations for enhancing resilience at work, it would be essential to increase the awareness of its importance in the work environment throughout the organization. Moreover, employee involvement and the promotion of open and shared dialogue in the organization would be vital. In addition, understanding employees in different life situations and offering flexible work arrangements would be important. Continuous learning and development could be promoted by offering development possibilities for employees and creating a culture of experimentation by emphasizing it in communication, for instance, by introducing career stories and stories about both succeeding and failing with experiments.

Information sharing should be efficient in the organization, and it would be important to assure it to reach the whole personnel and that there are enough platforms where people can ask questions and share knowledge and experiences. Regarding training, self-

management should be promoted by offering opportunities to develop self-awareness and practice mindfulness. In addition, regarding the leaders' training, their knowledge about resilience should be increased, and leaders should be trained to support resilience by coaching approaches that aim to motivate and encourage. Both in the training of self-management and leaders, external partners could be utilized.

Second, for senior management and team leaders, the note of the research is to ensure functional dialogue with representatives of HRM. HRM representatives must have the support of senior management to improve HR practices. To support team leaders in their work, HRM must be in functional interaction with the leaders. Both senior management and team leaders are in a critical position concerning strengthening resilience. The key position of senior management is based on their responsibility of organizational values and strategy and that they support the development possibilities of employees. The key position of team leaders is based on the significance of their work in daily activity in implementing new practices at work. Thus, a proactive approach at work is essential for both senior management and team leaders as strengthening employee resilience is the shared responsibility of all organizational members. Therefore, the whole organization may profit when anyone takes the role of an initiator.

### **6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

The research succeeded in answering the research questions, but there are also some limitations considering the research. The data composing of nine interviews and the findings based on the data analysis does not create generally applicable answers to research questions which can be seen as a limitation. Thus, the research findings cannot be generalized when the findings represent individual perceptions of HR professionals. In addition, researchers, organizations and their employees are always diverse and the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees are highly subjective. Thus, different findings may be found in different research contexts. Furthermore, no field-specific generalizations about the findings cannot be made when the interviewees of this research work in

various fields, and there were no field-specific requirements to participate in the research.

However, the findings of the research may increase the understanding of resilience in the context of working life and how it could be strengthened through HRM. The chosen methods served the research well as interviews provided comprehensive information about the chosen phenomena. The interviewees seemed to be comfortable in during the interview where it seemed like they shared their perceptions and experiences honestly and openly. It can be interpreted that the research succeeded in its aims when selected research questions were answered, the research was able to produce new information of the research topic, bring together previous studies and connect new information to previous studies and therefore strengthen previous knowledge.

Suggestions for future research often arise in academic research, and possible suggestions appeared also based on this research. The first suggestion would be to continue this research with more interviews of HR professionals and, in this straightforward way, aim to understand the topic more deeply. However, the viewpoint of employees about their resilience would also be an interesting and important research topic. Therefore, the second suggestion for the future would be to continue the research with measuring employee resilience with the scale measuring resilient employee behaviours and with an inquiry for employees in relation to how they perceive their resilience would be strengthened.

Third, based on the research findings hypothesis could be created and examined quantitatively through an intervention research. Based on the hypothesis, it would be interesting to implement resilience enhancing HR practices found in this and previous research and to re-collect data to discover possible implications. Moreover, as there is a limited amount of scales for measuring employee resilience or its strengthening in the work environment, this research provides new insights for developing ways of measurement.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1. Interview frame**

#### **Interview questions**

What is your role and task in the HR function of your organization?

#### **The meaning of resilience in working life and organization**

How important capacity do you consider resilience in working life? Why?

In the interview request, I described what resilience means in the research literature. How do you see resilience in your organization?

In what situations do you think resilience is needed? What are the demands of employees in today's working life and your organization? What role does resilience play in meeting and coping with these requirements?

What is the meaning of employee resilience at the organizational level, for example, for the organization's coping with changes or organizational performance? What do you think about the importance of team resilience? What is the role of teamwork in your organization?

#### **Resilience strengthening in organization**

What do you think about supporting/strengthening employee resilience in the workplace? How important do you think it is?

What do you think is the role of HR in supporting/strengthening resilience? What would be the other roles in supporting/strengthening resilience (HR, senior management, team leaders, other personnel)?

What kind of HR practices could strengthen employee resilience? And what kind of leadership practices could support employee resilience? Can you think of other ways to support resilience?

Has your organization aimed to support/strengthen employee resilience consciously? In what ways? Or do you think that resilience develops in some other way, e.g. indirectly through well-being projects or employee development opportunities, etc.?