

## APPLYING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE MANAGEMENT TOOLS IN THE LITHUANIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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DOI: 10.13165/VPA-25-24-4-11

**Abstract.** The paper analyses the trends of organizational resilience management in Lithuanian central government institutions based on the “bounce-back” concept, examining the impact on the organization from both internal and external environments and incorporating the resulting uncertainty conditions conceptualized through the prism of the organization’s available information for decision-making. The results of an empirical qualitative study in the Lithuanian public sector suggest that performance deterioration in Lithuanian central government organizations arises from both the internal and the external environment. The study reveals that the strength and the frequency of these impacts are comparably similar in each environment, affecting organizational performance with regular and unexpected factors. Regular environmental influences tend to create conditions of moderate uncertainty, where information is either known and available or there is a constant demand for new information acquisition. Unexpected environmental influences tend to create high uncertainty conditions, where there is a persistent need for information in order to make decisions, escalating to not knowing what information is needed and where it can be obtained. Experts suggest that managing resilience and decision-making under uncertainty requires organizations to invest in information processing and communication, emphasizing free information flow and live, substantive communication between managers, adjusting provided information on the situation that is limiting or expanding it. Effective knowledge management and learning processes that help organizations adapt to changing conditions are best supported by personnel who possess institutional memory, suitable digitization of management information, and active engagement in national networking (or international networking if no national equivalent exists). Inadequate preparation for periods of negative impact disrupts the organization’s information exchange, and the learning element becomes unmanageable, especially if the negative impact situations

are frequent and unforeseen, depriving the organization of the necessary time to “take a breath, look back and learn, and consolidate learning.”

**Keywords:** public management, organizational resilience management, bounce-back, conditions of uncertainty, qualitative research

## Introduction

The concept of organizational resilience has been studied in science for decades (Bhamra et al. 2011; Hepfer and Lawrence 2022), but after the events of recent years (COVID-19, hybrid attacks, the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, etc.) that have severely affected organizations’ activities, the topic of organizational resilience is often highlighted in national agendas (e.g., the report of the Lithuanian National Audit Office 2022), in planning documents of public sector and business activities, and at international scientific conferences (Arnault 2020; Resilience in the Public Sector 2022; Sustainable Public Sector under Uncertainty 2023).

The dynamic landscape of managerial resilience research, both in Lithuania and internationally, showcases various applications of the concept of organizational resilience. This diversity arises from the original resilience concepts developed in different scientific disciplines before being adapted for management and other fields. One scholarly discussion highlights the context in which organizational resilience is applied in engineering-applied sciences (Bracci and Tallaki 2021), or otherwise from a conservative perspective (Humbert and Joseph 2019), as the ability of an organization to bounce back to balanced performance conditions after being impacted (DesJardine et al. 2019; Shaw 2012; Sutcliffe and Vogus 2003). Studies also analyze the more dynamic, transformational side of organizational resilience, which has emerged in the field of ecology/ecosystem science (Barbera et al. 2017), and regard it as the ability of an organization to “bounce forward,” becoming better, stronger, and improved after an impact.

The current proliferation of research on organizational resilience, dominated by the diverse application of organizational resilience, has led to a situation in which the research findings are fragmented or applied universally and are too abstract (Hepfer and Lawrence 2022). In Lithuania, research and scholarly discussions on organizational resilience emphasize the transformational “bounce-forward” concept. It remains uncertain whether this concept suits Lithuania’s central government institutions, as these institutions align more with continental Europe’s career model, operate under strict legal constraints, and prioritize continuity. The equivalent application of the “bounce-back” concept in organizational resilience research misses the opportunity to assess which interactions of organizational resilience management tools are better suited to fulfill the ideas of the resilience concept. Due to the perceived lack of practical and theoretical applications of organizational resilience in the context of the Lithuanian public sector, it is valuable to add to the discussion on it. This

paper examines which managerial approaches and tools used in Lithuanian central public sector organizations contribute to organizational resilience management.

**Discussion of the concept of organizational resilience.** In the rapidly evolving scholarly debate on organizational resilience (Annarelli and Nonino 2016; Duchek et al. 2020; Hepfer and Lawrence 2022), organizational resilience is regarded as the ability of an organization to adapt to a changed situation and bounce back to a balanced situation after facing challenges (Barasa et al. 2018). The discussion surrounding organizational resilience highlights not only the important characteristic of bouncing back (Sutcliffe and Vogus 2008) but also an organization's capacity to grow and evolve, which can be described as bouncing forward (Sutcliffe and Vogus 2008). Questions are still being raised about resilience, such as whose interests it serves; what it means; and whether it's a capability (Parsons 2010), capacity (Goldschmidt et al. 2019), characteristic, outcome, process, behavior, strategy, attitude (Annarelli et al. 2020; Duchek 2020), a type of activity, or a combination of these elements (Chen and Liu et al. 2021; Hillmann and Guenther 2021; Munoz et al. 2022; Williams et al. 2017; Woods 2015).

Further discussion on the dimension of organizational resilience in research is connected to applying its related management elements: organizational robustness, anti-fragility, sustainability, learning organization theories, or variations of these elements (Hillmann and Guenther 2021; Munoz et al. 2022). These elements are often not even distinguished as separate, complementary elements of the resilience phenomenon but presented as a kind of “better, newer” model of resilience. Refining these ideas in the context of organizational resilience research would contribute to a more qualitative development of the concept of resilience and practical fulfillment.

Organizational robustness (Lengnick-Hall and Beck 2005) describes an organization's ability to be unaffected by external change, subject to the dynamism and uncertainty of the organizational environment. Resilience (Duchek 2020) enables an organization to return to its previous state within a certain period of time, irrespective of whether the organization's environment is stable or dynamic and its level of uncertainty. In turn, applying the ideas of an anti-fragility theory depends on the organization's environment. Taleb (2012) emphasizes in his study that fragile organizations fail when faced with uncertain and dynamic environments, i.e., no matter how robust they are, they cannot build or exploit organizational resilience. However, anti-fragile organizations will become stronger, learn, and improve if they withstand the impact. Nevertheless, the learning element only occurs due to the negative impact on the organization. In designing the empirical research instrument and correctly interpreting the results obtained, it is important to define in detail the concepts of resilience and the other managerial categories attributed to it.

Organizational resilience is divided into several phases related to an organization's activities. Various authors have identified key components of resilience, including the ability to anticipate potential threats, manage unexpected events, and learn from experiences (Duchek et al. 2020; Williams et al. 2017). Anticipation means knowing what to expect, monitoring means knowing what to look for, responding to unexpected impacts means

knowing what to do, and learning means understanding what has happened (Tennakoon and Janadari 2021). Stephenson et al. (2010) present the dimensions of planning and adaptation (post-impact) in their resilience model. Other researchers structure the elements of resilience more closely to a bounce-back approach, distinguishing between two parts of resilience: static and dynamic resilience (Annarelli and Nonino 2016; Chen and Liu et al. 2021; Chen and Xie et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2021; Sevilla et al. 2023). Static organizational resilience is seen as the reduction of the likelihood of negative impacts through anticipation and prevention, usually through formalized processes. Dynamic organizational resilience involves quickly recovering from unexpected events through rapid actions and more informal processes.

Static organizational resilience refers to the preparation and planning of what is necessary to mitigate potential impacts on an organization (Chen and Liu et al. 2021). It is related to the functional perspective of an organization, where internal processes of the organization shape static resilience. Sevilla et al. (2023) place static resilience in the context of an organization's capacity by distinguishing between the organization's available resources, information, knowledge, or learning. Stephenson et al. (2010), Gibson and Tarrant (2010), and Zighan (2023) identify the tools under static resilience of strategic planning and management, quality management and standards, risk management, and change management, as the formalized processes of the organization that form the overall organizational management framework.

Dynamic resilience often appears as interactions between an organization's processes, employees, and environment that allow the organization to adapt and return to stable operating conditions as quickly as possible. We can highlight key aspects such as information management, internal communication, decision-making, knowledge management, learning processes, and the importance of organizational culture (Al-Ghattas and Marjanovic 2021; Duchek et al. 2020; Tasic et al. 2020; Williams et al. 2017). The organization utilizes its existing resources and the benefits of static resilience investments to enhance the organization's impact and the individual resilience of its employees. This research connects knowledge management and learning to the bounce-back perspective by examining the public sector context, where organizations experience minimal competition and face heavy constraints from laws and formalized procedures. These factors hinder radical, rapid organizational change. However, public sector organizations continue to improve and learn through incremental changes that enhance organizational performance once they return to operational balance.

**The impact of the environment on an organization.** Most authors highlight the importance of organizational resilience when organizations face unexpected external events, such as disasters or crises (Duchek et al. 2020). Other studies view organizational resilience as the ability to adapt to expected changes in external influences, including political, economic, and technological factors (Tengblad and Oudhuis 2018). There is a discussion about both unexpected and regular influences on organizations, which is further analyzed by evaluating the effects of the internal environment on organizational performance (Grote

2018; Halmaghi et al. 2017; Zain and Kassim 2012), revealing the specific nature of organizational resilience. Therefore, it is important to equally assess both internal and external environmental impacts—whether they are regular or unexpected.

An organization's performance in uncertain environments, a poorly operationalized variable, contributes significantly to the chaos and fragmentation in the scientific and practical debate on the dimensions of the organizational environment and resilience. It is usually abstractly presented as a contextual fact, for example, turbulent conditions, crisis, organizational shock or upheaval, and conditions of social transformation (Butkus et al. 2023; Ramašauskienė 2022). However, this criterion is not qualitatively applied and controlled when conducting research or applying the proposed theoretical resilience model. Therefore, the adaptability of the proposed resilience frameworks and models to the specific case of organizational functioning loses the value added for the organization. There are two main theories worth mentioning that explain uncertainty conditions: (i) information uncertainty (contingency), which states that the key variable is the organization's lack of information and knowledge to make decisions under uncertainty; and (ii) resource dependence theory, which states that the organization relies on critical resources, with external stakeholders influencing their acquisition and use (Hatch and Cunliffe 2013; Ruiz-Martin et al. 2018). Connecting the elements of organizational resilience with the uncertainty conditions examined in the public sector context, we will further operationalize the uncertainty conditions through the information management (contingency) approach. Organizational uncertainty is defined as the difference between the amount of information required to perform a task and the amount of information already possessed (Grote 2018).

According to scholars studying the performance of organizations in changing environments (Duncan 1972; Hatch and Cunliffe 2013; Ashworth et al. 2007), an important and poorly expressed element in existing research is the identification of an organization as a system in an environment of complexity and compatible performance (Sharfman and Dean 1991; Walker et al. 2003). For example, in studies of an organization's uncertainty conditions, when assessing an organization's operating system as simple-complex or static-chaotic, a distinction is made between the levels of uncertainty that affect the organization: situations of low, moderate, or high uncertainty (Duncan 1972; Jucevičius et al. 2017). This distinction of the concept of uncertainty relies on the information the organization possesses for decision-making (Samsami et al. 2015). In order to operationalize the uncertain environment through the prism of information, it is necessary to assess the information management situations that arise in an organization: (1) the required information is known and available; (2) there is a continuous demand for new information; (3) information saturation—over-saturation; and (4) the necessary information remains unidentified (Hatch and Cunliffe 2013). As this discussion evolves, researchers are also modeling more sophisticated sets of ideas for uncertainty conditions (Samsami et al. 2015). However, capturing this is not easy in practice, especially when it is not the main focus of the study but only a component.

**Empirical research methodology.** To assess how the complex components of

organizational resilience management work in Lithuanian central public administration organizations, it is appropriate to apply a qualitative research method. Such a research model is designed to let the researcher understand the research object better and to form conceptual, theoretical insights in the context of resilience management in Lithuanian central government organizations (Newcomer et al. 2015). The qualitative research method allows deeper insights into the problem and enables learning about the context from the different perspectives of the subjects under study (Döringer 2021). The development of the research instrument followed an analysis of the theoretical concepts of organizational resilience, and the following criteria for a qualitative empirical study are distinguished:

1. **Environmental impact on the organization:** The organization assesses the impact of both the internal and external environment. It evaluates the resulting uncertainty conditions through the dynamism and complexity of the environment and the context of the information available for decision-making.
2. **Organizational management criteria:** This involves dividing approaches into static resilience, which includes strategic management and planning tools; quality management approaches and changes in standards; risk management and change management—formal processes forming an organization's overall management system—and dynamic resilience, which include elements of internal communication, decision-making, and organizational culture.
3. **Information management approaches:** Studying information management tools is important for dynamic resilience and uncertainty conditions. However, as formalized information management tools fall within the scope of structural resilience, the criterion is presented as a separate issue.
4. **Knowledge management approaches:** Knowledge management or learning organization applications in the concept of resilience correspond to adaptation to changing conditions (bounce-back) but can also be linked to conditions for improvement (bounce-forward). In this case, the issue of knowledge management is to assess the importance of the existing processes in adapting to changing conditions and fulfilling a bounce-back approach. The criterion distinguishes itself from the criteria for organizational management approaches by its relevance to static and dynamic resilience.

We developed eight semi-structured interview questions based on the four research criteria derived from theoretical analysis. We chose this method for its precise structure, ability to interpret the results, and capacity to allow experts to provide more constructive guidelines for the questions without influencing their answers by specifying the questions' limits. This approach retained the possibility of steering the conversation due to the complexity of the research (Kakilla 2021; Kallio et al. 2016).

The empirical research was carried out in July–November 2024 and is a part of a dissertation in preparation. The selection of experts for the empirical study relied on their current and previous top and middle management positions in public sector central government organizations over the past five years. The study depersonalized the experts' information

and assigned codes to the experts (E1, E2, E3, etc.). Researchers transcribed and analyzed the expert survey results using qualitative content analysis. This allowed the resulting data, widely distributed and expressed in depth, to be structured, interpreted according to criteria, and used to justify the study's findings (Lindgren et al. 2020). The data analysis identified categories and sub-categories based on the criteria used to develop the questions. This paper only presents a summary of the analysis.

## Survey results: Environmental impact on an organization

**Internal environment.** The experts believe that the most common and consistently disruptive factors affecting an organization's performance stem from its internal environment, particularly staff turnover. It includes changes in management and the departure of key personnel, such as long-term employees, highly skilled workers, and those with essential competencies that others depend on for support. Researchers frequently identify these aspects as significant influences on organizational dynamics.

When the experts commented on the uncertainty conditions that arise in an organization's internal environment, the most emphasized aspect was the complexity of the environment. The various functional tasks and the different specific knowledge needs, as well as the hierarchical management structure, all lead to the identification of the internal environment as complex. Experts are less likely to view an organization's internal environment as static (five informants), highlighting its dynamism due to unplanned tasks, staff turnover, shifting strategies, decision-making processes, and the societal/government demand for speed.

In the case of routine activities, the experts consider that the situation for managing internal environmental information is one of moderate uncertainty; there is a constant need for information, and sometimes information is known and available. However, when unexpected impacts on performance occur, high uncertainty conditions increase the need for information, emphasizing the importance of managing the required information to avoid overload or uncertainty about what information is needed, where to find it, and who is responsible for it.

**External environment.** When commenting on the regular impact of the external environment on the quality of the organization's performance, experts were much more likely to highlight aspects of the organization's immediate environment: the impact of stakeholders on the organization and the reasons for changes in the civil service law or status. The most frequently mentioned are the electoral cycle and the change of government. Historically, in Lithuania, the ruling majority in the newly elected parliament is held by other parties; therefore, the periodic change of government is a decisive influencing factor, and the change of political leaders of central government organizations affects the government program (changes in priorities/objectives). Other factors influencing performance decline include environmental pressures, mainly from parliamentary politicians, and negative

impacts from the public, media, private sector, and social networks, as noted by experts.

Assessments of the dynamic and complex environment dominate an organization's external environment, regardless of whether the organization operates in a steady-state (routine) environment or experiences an impact. Experts complement the description of the environment by assessing high uncertainty, which arises from the alignment of interests, communication and collaboration challenges, and the delegation of unplanned, urgent tasks to the forming and implementing organizations. Experts also consider the activities of interest groups and the pressure from various actors.

Information management in an organization's external environment is distinguished by lower uncertainty in routine activities—in most of them, there is a constant need for information, or information is known and available. However, when unexpected impacts occur, the situation shifts to information overload and high uncertainty, where the location, quality, and means of obtaining the information remain unclear.

## Organization management approaches

**Static resilience factors** represent the organization by communicating as a partner rather than a subordinate and form constraints on tasks delegated to the organization. Experts identified this aspect as one of the necessary features of an organization to balance the unplanned and excessive delegation of tasks that arise from an overly possessive attitude towards subordinate organizations—a toxic form/culture of communication.

In the category of formalized management processes, most comments and examples given by the experts came from the application of managerial processes in performance management: process management, description, improvement, digitalization of performance management, systematic gathering of information about an organization's internal environment through surveys and research methods (on learning, trust, burnout, etc.). The identification of the elements of quality management is not exhaustive. Managers play a key role in implementing quality management methods, especially since Lithuanian public sector organizations often adopt them independently. While full certification may not be necessary, a fragmented application can still contribute to organizational resilience.

While recognizing the benefits of formalized management processes in preparing an organization to recover from adverse impacts, experts stress the need to balance formalizing processes and methods, achieving standards, and investing in generic competencies, as formalized procedures slow down processes during recovery. However, if organizations do not follow formalized procedures, they impact the elements of the strategic management process and the transfer and retention of information and knowledge in writing.

**Dynamic resilience factors** are the most common factors identified by experts and include the stability of middle management, motivation, and the importance of civil servants with institutional experience in the organization. The role of managers or leaders was not particularly emphasized, with the importance of timely and unmistakable delegation



of responsibilities and leadership. Quick and effective decision-making creates the right conditions for developing empowering leadership and a performance improvement philosophy. Empowering staff to work in teams, to deal with new situations without formally restricting the exchange of information within the organization.

Experts believe that middle managers lack leadership and managerial skills, often due to the narrow range of specialist qualifications required for the positions. The dominant narrative of organizational culture in the experts' responses elaborates on the importance of focusing on team building and individual psychological resilience, possibly with the help of an organizational psychologist and systematically developing a quality improvement philosophy, including sessions to discuss mistakes, mismatches, or suggestions among managers or within the organization.

**Information management** is one area in which experts emphasized the importance of internal, interpersonal, and verbal communication tools while they were answering a question about successful information management practices when an organization faces negative internal or external influences. Emphasis was also placed on filtering and limiting information to avoid overloading the staff implementing the tasks. Management meetings and spreading information at the managerial level were also stressed, as they should convey information to the workforce professionally and through various communication methods. The views of the experts point to the importance of striking a balance between limiting and providing information in the event of a negative impact on an organization's performance. Regarding the emotional and contextual meaning of the information, several experts pointed out that it is appropriate to provide a broader context of the situation in an organization, thus reassuring and, to some extent, involving the employees more, ideally enabling them to contribute to proposals and action plans.

Another aspect linked to communication is fostering a culture of openness in an organization, ensuring that staff are informed about context, solution paths, and upcoming changes. The importance of verbal communication in an organization, especially during situations of negative impact, is highlighted. Digitizing management information for decision-making is vital but comes with drawbacks. In organizations with less advanced digitization, experts often downplay the role of internal communication and culture in managing information, focusing more on challenges related to possessing, processing, and using information. Experts rarely mention quality management, leadership, and cooperation with external actors regarding information management in an organization's return to equilibrium after a negative impact.

**Knowledge management approaches** sparked considerable discussion among the experts. When asked which organizational learning approaches and processes help an organization return to equilibrium after a negative impact, the experts identified the importance of generic competencies and placed the most significant emphasis on the aspect of lively internal communication in the exchange of knowledge, especially in the context of the competencies of management. It is important to be able to manage the learning process (i.e., to plan and record the results of learning in the organization) both at individual and

divisional/departmental levels, and to formalize it where possible. Creating a digital analogy of the organizational memory would enable it to be used in the organization's work, so that it is not "buried in drawers" (E3).

The statement also highlights that organizations improve most effectively in a balanced environment, mainly when using different learning forms. Both national and international networking contribute to an organization's bounce-back from impact and organizational learning. However, they are more likely to work better in routine settings, depending on the organization's culture, the attitudes of managers, and the ability to take advantage of it.

## Conclusions

1. The complexity of organizational resilience creates a wide range of interpretable applications in practice. However, it does not accurately assess the impact of the environment, after which an organization needs to exploit its resilience and return to equilibrium conditions. It is, therefore, important to give equal weight to the factors affecting the organization's performance from both the internal and external environment, whose uncertainty conditions can be assessed through the availability of information for the organization's decision-making.
2. Also, in the context of public sector activity, which is characterized by (i) limited competitiveness of organizations, (ii) seeking to ensure a predefined continuity of activities, i.e., the uninterrupted provision of public administration functions and public services, and (iii) activities based on a strict legal framework that limits operational flexibility. The conservative bounce-back concept of organizational resilience overlooks the importance of development and learning, focusing instead on returning to operational balance before systematically assessing the tools necessary for recovery after negative external impacts.
3. Qualitative research indicates that performance decline in Lithuania's central public administration stems equally from internal and external factors. The turnover of staff in management positions and those with historical memory mainly shape the impact of the internal environment, directly influencing the aspects that contribute to a negative organizational culture. External elements link to changes in government due to the election cycle, strategic priorities, stakeholder activity, and emerging pressures from stakeholders, politicians, the public, and the media on the organization.
4. Recurring environmental factors create moderate uncertainty, while unexpected ones lead to high uncertainty, requiring improved information management. Unexpected environmental influences tend to create conditions of high uncertainty, where there is a constant need for information to make decisions, evolving into not knowing what information is needed and where it is located. According to the expert interviews, in managing resilience and decision-making under uncertainty,

organizations need to invest in the ability to process and disseminate information through the organization's internal communication channels in a variety of forms, with a particular emphasis on the free flow of information between colleagues and substantive live communication between managers, both limiting and expanding the information provided.

5. As an organization adapts to changing operating conditions, it most positively influences the knowledge management and learning process by (i) the involvement of staff with institutional memory, (ii) the digitization of the organization's management information, and (iii) the quality of engagement with national networks (or international networks if there is no national equivalent). Inadequate preparation for periods of adverse impacts disrupts the organization's information exchange, and the learning element becomes unmanageable, especially if the adverse impact situations are frequent and unexpected, and the organization does not have enough time to implement learning processes.

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