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Stress and resilience of Ukrainian employees during the Russian-Ukrainian war

1. Introduction

Resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity and maintain psychological well-being in the face of challenging circumstances, has become a topic of growing importance in the context of prolonged conflicts and crises. The Russian-Ukrainian war has inflicted a multitude of internal and external predicaments upon the Ukrainian population, including the nation's workforce. In such an environment, understanding the resilience level of Ukrainian employees and their coping mechanisms is not only academically significant but also holds practical implications for the well-being and productivity of Ukrainian population. In this context, the well-established Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), developed by Connor and Davidson (2003), becomes a corresponding instrument for assessing individual resilience, offering potential insights into the resilience level of Ukrainian employees during the ongoing conflict.

The impact of war extends beyond the battlefield, profoundly influencing working conditions and the broader work environment. Scholars such as Hobfoll (2001) have emphasized the importance of considering the ecological context when studying the effects of stressors, particularly in times of conflict. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of the working environment is essential in understanding how war circumstances have affected Ukrainian employees.

Moreover, the influence of the ongoing conflict on individuals' well-being and the workplace cannot be fully assessed without evaluating the support mechanisms provided by organizations. Masten (2014) has stressed the significance of social support in fostering resilience. Therefore, an evaluation of organizations' financial assistance, psychological support initiatives, and special programs aimed at mitigating the stressors resulting from the war becomes integral to this inquiry.

This study aims to contribute systematically by assessing resilience level, exploring the war's impact on the working environment, evaluating organizational support, and analyzing coping mechanisms, fostering resilience for both individuals and the nation's recovery.

2. Study sample

In order to study stress and resilience of Ukrainian employees we conducted an online survey between April and October 2023. The total number of respondents was 512, with 361 of them being employed. 25% of the respondents were male, 75% female and most of the respondents were between 36–45 years of age (43%). Predominant occupational areas were science, education, IT, sales, marketing, HR, medicine, finance.

3. Resilience level of employees by companies' sizes

We have examined resilience level of employees across organizations of various sizes using CD-RISC, developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). The data indicates average resilience level among all employees at 69%. It is consistent at approximately 69% for organizations with fewer than 20 employees and 21–80 employees as well as for organizations with more than 1500 employees. However, in mid-sized organizations with 81–200 employees, resilience level dip slightly to 66%. In contrast, resilience level appears to be relatively higher in larger organizations. Organizations with 200–800 employees report a resilience level of 71%, while organizations with 800–1500 employees show the highest resilience level at 72%.

Based on our analysis of employee resilience across organizations of varying sizes, it appears that the size of an organization is correlated to the resilience level of its employees. Resilience level is generally steady for small and very large organizations, with a slight decline in mid-sized organizations and an upswing in larger organizations. These findings may have implications for understanding the dynamics of employee resilience in different organizational contexts. It is our assumption that the working environment, in conjunction with organizational support, could potentially play a significant role in shaping employee resilience.

4. Working Environment

The majority of respondents (69%) expressed strong agreement with their ability to use knowledge and skills, and notable agreement (38%) was observed for the comprehensive organization of work processes.

Regarding remote work, 51% were “completely satisfied” working from home, while 48% were similarly satisfied with mobile work practices. This indicates a positive sentiment towards flexible work arrangements.

In terms of health and safety culture, a mixed picture emerged. While a substantial portion felt supervisors cared about their health (36% absolutely agreed), responses varied on the value placed on their work (39% absolutely agreed) and support during stressful situations (36% absolutely agreed).

The survey reflected a generally positive work climate, with respondents feeling valued (91% partially, rather and absolutely agreed) and making a substantial contribution (92% partially, rather and absolutely agreed). However, challenges in maintaining good relationships with colleagues (71% partially, rather and absolutely agreed) and communication difficulties (25% partially, rather and absolutely agreed) were noted.

Regarding teamwork culture, 94% (partially, rather and absolutely agreed) expressed satisfaction with colleagues' relationships, and 90% (partially, rather and absolutely agreed) felt they could rely on colleagues during challenging times. Conflicts among colleagues were reported by 21% (partially, rather and absolutely agreed), with 36% (partially, rather and absolutely agreed) among them perceiving a negative impact on health. Direct supervisors' involvement in resolving conflicts was reported by 80% (partially, rather and absolutely agreed), highlighting variability in conflict management approaches.

5. Organizational support

We assessed the support measures implemented by organizations and their perceived effectiveness. 49% of the respondents mentioned financial support, 26% reported humanitarian aid and 42% noted psychological support. Moreover, 26% of the organizations provided accommodations for those who relocated, 36% initiated special programs, online meetings, consultations, or chats.

Perceived effectiveness of the measures provided (rating from 1 (did not help) till 5 (significantly helped)), Tab. 1:

Tab. 1: Effectiveness of the measures provided by the organizations

Type of support	Average rating
Financial Support	3.88
Psychological Support	3.17
Special Initiatives	2.87
Accommodation	2.52
Humanitarian Aid	2.40

In summary, financial and psychological support measures were perceived as the most helpful, while special initiatives, accommodation and humanitarian aid received lower ratings. Organizations should consider ongoing assessment and adaptation of support strategies during the war.

6. Coping with stress

We further examined the effectiveness of various coping strategies utilized by employees to manage stress, revealing the top-performing approaches and their impact on resilience and well-being.

The top-performing strategies are:

1. Spending leisure time in nature: 80 % (54 % significantly helped, 26 % rather helped).
2. Communicating with Family: 73 % (41 % significantly helped, 32 % rather helped).
3. Positive Attitude: 64 % (36 % significantly helped, 28 % rather helped) and having a hobby: 64 % (33 % significantly helped, 31 % rather helped).

Other significant strategies include:

- Spending time with kids (61 % found it helpful, with 38 % significantly and 23 % rather)
- Watching movies or videos (56 % helpful, with 30 % significantly and 26 % rather).

7. Outlook

In the context of prolonged conflicts like the Russian-Ukrainian war, this article underscores the growing importance of studying resilience and emphasizes the significance of understanding Ukrainian employees' resilience for their well-being and productivity. As the Russian-Ukrainian war continues, ongoing efforts are essential to build resilience and provide effective support, ensuring the sustained well-being and productivity of Ukrainian employees in this challenging context.

Bibliography

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