



Employee Resilience: To Build or To Shape?

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Abstract. In today's business world, with an increasingly competitive and dynamic context, the achievement of an organization will not only represent its capability to survive but also its ability to cope with challenging environments constantly. Nevertheless, the organization relies on resilient employees as they attempt to cope with a gradually more turbulent economy, advancement of technology and innovation, and the social environment. This study aims to examine individual factors (emotional intelligence, cynical personality) and demographic variables (gender, age) role in promoting employee resilience at the workplace. Multiple wasar regression, independent sample t-test, and one-way Analysis of Variance were performed using self-reported data from 200 private sector employees. Findings revealed that emotional intelligence significantly influences employee resilience, while a female employee is more resilient than a male worker and middle-aged employees are more resilient as compared to young employees and older employees. Managerial implications and research limitations are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Employee Resilience, Emotional Intelligence, Age, Gender.

1 Introduction

Our fast-paced culture leads to a significant change in the organization, complexity raising, and tension due to an increase in competitors in the aspect of size, type, and location. Furthermore, the evolution of the entire economy and whether an organization can survive in a competitive environment will be affected by technological advancement. Hence, a business should constantly change such as cooperating with the technological advance to meet the various needs of employees and customers as well as the rapidly changing government policies and regulations. Luthans, Yussuf and Avolio (2007) point out that people with high resilience will have the capability to search for new knowledge and experiences as well as establish a deeper connection with other individuals. Since the change happened constantly in every organization, thus there are a lot of managers and employees who undergo the trouble of failures and resentment that comes with change.

The current issue which relates to employee resilience is environmental dynamism. Environmental dynamism can be proposed as the frequency with which a firm face.

this unexpected external environment change and the occurrence of this unpredictability of change (Jansen, Vera & Crossan, 2009). For instance, job redesign, downsizing, restructuring, and layoffs are increasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lund et al., 2021). The organizations rely on resilient employees as they attempt to cope with a gradually more turbulent economy, advancement of technology, and innovation as well as the social environment. Studies indicated that successfully overcoming adversity will enhance resilience as well as have a better function in mind and happiness (Tonkin et al., 2018). Besides, the researchers discussed individuals who have experienced low or mild adversity will have the ability to maintain their healthy well-being in later crises as compared to those who have not been through any trauma (Ozbay et al, 2007).

Given the importance of the subject, many contextual factors and organizational factors has been investigated to enhance the employees' resilience such as HR practices, leadership quality and social support (Cooper et al.,2019; Franken et al.,2020; Khan et al.,2019; Ozbay et al., 2007; Ojo, Fawehinmi & Yussli,2021). However, research on resilience in an individual context remains limited, and most literature on resilience fails to explain how employee resilience can be developed (Cooper et al., 2019). Hence, it is important to recognize the factors that will affect the resilience level of employees to assist and aid the organizations to improve their employee resilience and achieve desirable outcomes. The research objective for this study is to examine the factors (emotional intelligence, cynical personality, gender, and age groups) that influence employee resilience.

2 Literatures Review

2.1 Underlying theory

Constructivist self-determination theory (CSDT) is used to identify the trauma and evolution of an adversity event (Saakvitne et al., 1998). The theory suggests that the specific implication attributed to adversity is the experience of an individual, age, and period of growth, the background of social, cultural, and economics of an individual. These particular meaning can be used to define how an individual faces the crisis in their own unique way (Nishikawa, 2006). In CSDT theory, traumatic events have affected five areas which are context to form a judgment, self-abilities, ego depletion, major mental wants, as well as conscious and memory setup. CSDT identified that an individual's personality and personal background adversity and its circumstances were interplayed by the adaptation of a person to a crisis. According to Saakvitne et al. (1998) traumatic events explicated that everyone who has experienced and has become a survivor, they are impacted in their own unique way. Based on the study of Agnihotri, Trai- nor, Krush and Krishnakumar (2014) resilience is defined as the capacity of an individual to recover and go back to the status quo after experiencing adversity and negative emotions. Thus, The Constructivist Self-Determination Theory (CDST) is suitable and appropriate to be used to explain and measure resilience (Saakvitne, et al., 1998). According to this theory, there are meanings attached to stressful situations which can determine a person's response to stressful circumstances. The meanings include an individual's self-experience, age and growth, resources that are related to biological and psychological, experiences of interpersonal, and the social, cultural as well as economic facts of an individual (Nishikawa, 2006). Hence, CSDT enables researchers to determine the resilience of employees and how they can tackle diversity and challenges as well as the ability to cope with stress in a changing workplace.

2.2 Employee Resilience

Research on resilience was originally focused on clinical and child development applications and for now, the researchers have carried out further studies on resilience

from the perspective of career and organization. Based on the study of Patterson et al. (2002), after an organization has been through a traumatic event it was able to move forward through consistent improvement or excessive performance and thus this organization will be characterized as resilient. The concept of employee resilience is based on the definition of organizational resilience, described as “a feature of an organization’s general situation awareness, management of keystone vulnerabilities, and adaptability in a complex, dynamic, and interconnected setting” (McManus, Seville, Vargo, & Brunson, 2008, p. 82). Perry (2002) stated that resilience is the ability to deal with stress without great incidents in functioning.

Based on the study of Babić et al., (2020), resilience is usually determined in terms of protective psychological risk factors that cultivate the development of positive outcomes and healthy personality characteristics. Fikretoglu and McCreary (2012) pointed out that the definitions of resilience majority highlight an individual expressing signs of positive adaptation after encountering a disaster. Therefore, Britt, Sinclair, and McFadden (2013, p.6) defined resilience as “the sign of positive adaptation in the face of significant tragedy”. American Psychology Association (APA; 2009) stated that stress in the workplace negatively affected workers and entire organizations. More than one-half of employees lost productivity because of work pressure and this problem is augmented among young workers. Resilience increases an individual’s ability to react well and experience less harmful effects while under duress (Babić, et al., 2020). This is because workers’ learned ability to be resilient enables better problem-solving and could maintain their motivation as well as enhance their capacity to tackle and manage stress in demanding work settings. Hence, resilience helps employees gain a competitive advantage and can be retained in an organization longer since a resilient employee is more valued by the organization due to their ability to assist the organization to quickly respond and perceive a change in order to gain a new business opportunity and addressing a potential threat.\.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) has received much notice, and it is the capability of an individual to be aware, link, recognize as well as emotional management one’s capability to be aware, link, understand, and handle emotions (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2004). Emotional intelligence includes a group of four emotional ability which is precisely perceiving emotions, associating emotion with knowledge, recognizing emotional outcomes, and controlling emotions for an individual’s adaptation (Salovey, Kokkonen, Lopes, & Mayer, 2004). These skills build in a control which start from the capability to perceive emotions up to the management of emotions. Determining as well as conveying feeling accurately is a major capability that is included in perceiving emotions. Goleman (1995, p.34) defined EI as the ability to lead and stimulate oneself and insist when faced with failure, manage to prolong satisfaction, manipulate the moods of an individual and maintain problems from ease the ability to believe, empathize as well as to expect. An individual can make adaptations in order to accomplish the goals of a person, party, and organization by addressing emotional intelligence in the process of regulating a person on emotions and motivation (Magnano et al., 2016). Besides, this intelligence is also stated as the capability to perform well and reliably when under pressure (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000). Previous studies have found a significant relationship between EI and employee resilience (Aljarboa et al., 2022; Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2018; Magnano et al., 2016). In other words, an employee with high emotional intelligence can be more resilient and adapt to change in the workplace more easily since they can better tackle adversity and maintain their motivation. Thus,

H1: Emotional intelligence positively influences employee resilience.

2.4 Cynic Personality

Eley, Cloninger and Walters (2013) studies indicate that resilience is affected by various elements of personality, which can vary in different types of populations and can be differentiated in terms of adversity levels and cultural context. An individual who believes that people are only motivated by self-interest and accordingly accepts everyone as self-seeker is defined as “cynic”, and the thought trying to explain this is identified as “cynicism” (Erdost, Karacaoğlu & Reyhanoğlu, 2007). Cynical is usually proposed as an expression that will raise inconsistent and negative thoughts of an employee as well as defined as an instrument that can moderate foiling with troubled circumstances (Brandes & Das, 2006, Wilkerson et al., 2008). Decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Jung & Kim, 2012), and poor job performance (Bommer, Rich, & Rubin, 2005), all were the consequences of cynicism. Cynicism is known as the behavior of inefficacy of change; and known as the blockages for organizational change (Reichers et al., 1997). In the literature, a negative correlation was found between cynicism and resilience (Manzano García & Ayala Calvo, 2012). These individuals are open to others’ inducements in their social relationships and daily lives. Thus, they exhibit both submissive behaviors and decreased resilience (Bakioglu & Kiraz, 2019). In addition, Abraham (2000) stated that one of the biggest reasons for resistance to change is employee cynicism. Since a person with a cynical personality will only care about themselves and would not be helping others with their work problem, employee resilience will only increase when they receive support and assistance from their colleagues and supervisor. Therefore,

H2: Cynic personality negatively influences employee resilience.

2.5 Gender

There is a mixed finding on the difference of gender in resilience level. Quisumbing (2008) found males and females have different abilities to engage in risk and cope with adversity. He stated that the ability of females to overcome stress when comes to a crisis is usually less able as compared to males. This is because females have limited resources to access and manage. The other reason may be the weaknesses based on gender which involve great time load; threats or acts of brutality; legal insufficient in the aspect of benefits and protection, and they have less authority towards decision-making and management of financial property rights (Quisumbing, 2008). Moreover, Bahadir-Yilmaz and Fatma (2015) proposed that female students will be less resilient compared to male students. Whereas, Erdogan et al.(2015) indicated that divergence in gender obtains a lot of attention for the sub-scopes of the authority of an individual, insight, lifetime objective, guidance, and observative Besides, another group of researchers stated that the levels of resilience indicated by male and female is at the same level (Laor et al., 2006). Since females and males naturally have a diverse personality which seems to influence the way they manage crisis and resilience thus gender differences will be one of the factors of resilience. For example, a male may have less communication during a period of crisis, and this results in getting help much less than women who have conducted more communication which enables them to gain aid and social support from others (Mhongo, 2019). To survive and thrive in a dynamic environment, female employee seems to be more resilient than male worker (Mhongo, 2019; Ren et al., 2017). Therefore,

H3: Female employee has a higher level of employee resilience compared to male employee.

2.6 Age

The elderly people would not surrender easily when they experience adversity thus, they are considered mentally resilient. They exhibit the ability for successful adaptation instead of succumbing to adversity, this adaptation can be analyzed by stressful incident management, convalescing past or objective or subjective well-being's minimally level after exposure to an adversity. The elderly will be able to transform the stress in the face of adversity into hope, decrease the risk, avoid being exposed to traumatic events, maintain self-efficacy as well as minimize the impact of stress by creating opportunities (Fontes & Neri, 2019). Persons and social coping sources support the elderly face adversity by making use of their experience, searching for and retaining enjoyment activities, applying for interpersonal roles, employing management skills, and by initiating societal support. By applying this coping system resilience will be encouraged by reducing, converting, or rejecting the influence of trauma. According to Bal et al. (2011), it is normal to assume that older workers are having difficulty to adapt new tasks and resisting change. Thus, age may be one of the key factors which impact employee resilience. Previous researchers recognized that people in old age had relatively high resilience (Scheibe et al., 2022). Furthermore, high-age individuals are more resilient compared to younger people (Gayton & Lovell, 2012). Thus, age may be one of the key factors which impact employee resilience.

H4: Employee resilience level is significantly different between young and old age groups.

3 Methodology

The target respondent in this study was the employee who works in the private sector as private sector employers have more flexibility as compared to the public sector. Based on the calculation from G-power (Version 3.1.9.4), the minimum total sample size to conduct this research study should have a minimum of 129 respondents.

Convenience sampling was used to collect data from respondents who were able to meet certain criteria for selection, for instance employees who works in the private sector regardless of any industries. In this study, each concept was measured based on the items that were proven to be reliable and valid in previous studies. First, employee resilience was measured with thirteen items adapted from Hodliffe (2014). Emotional intelligence was measured with fifteen items borrowed from MindTools (2019). Cynic personality was measured with five items borrowed from Bang and Reio (2017). All items except for employee resilience were measured using a 5-point Likert's type scale, which was anchored from Almost never (1) to Almost always (7). Employee resilience was measured using a 7-point Likert's type scale. With different scale types of scales adopted for variables in the study could reduce the potential common method bias.

All the collected data were analyzed using statistical software SPSS 29. Multiple linear regression was used to measure the significant relationship between the variables. To analyze the differences between the level of employee resilience based on their gender and age, the independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA, Post-hoc Tukey tests were executed.

4 Data Analysis

4.1 Demographic Profile

A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed to respondents and 200 of them have completed the survey. Thus, the response rate for this survey is 80%. Among of them there are 115 of male which accounted for 57.5% of the total number of respondents and 85 females participated and accounted for 42.5% of the total number of respondents. Next, the respondents of age range between 31-40 years old (34.5%) has the

highest rate of participated in this research. Followed by the group of 21-30 years old (33%), 17-20 years old (13.5%), 41-50 years old (9%), 61 and above (7%), and there are only 6 respondents who are 50-60 years old participated in this research. Most respondents are Chinese which indicated several 123 (61.5%), followed by Malay with the number of 48 which accounted for 24%. 107 of respondents (53.5%) are single. Most respondents have work tenure for 1-5 years which is 64 respondents which accounted for 32%. General workers demonstrate the highest number of respondents 71 (35.5%) of the job position in this survey. Managers with a number of 62 (31%) were the second highest. Most respondents in this survey had a monthly income of RM 1,001 – RM 3,000, which is 83 (41.5%).

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha reliability is a method that is mostly used to measure the reliability or internal consistency of social and organizational sciences. Based on Sekaran (2003), the 0.80 range considered good and based on Tavakol & Dennick (2011), the acceptable values of alpha ranging from 0.70 to 0.95, therefore all the data collected for all the variables in this research as shown in Table 1 are reliable. The highest Cronbach's alpha value is 0.866 in terms of Employee Intelligence.

Table 1. Reliability, Mean and Standard Deviation

Variables	Items	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	SD
Employee Resilience	9	0.793	5.377	1.009
Emotional Intelligence	15	0.866	3.807	0.760
Cynic Personality	5	0.798	3.366	1.157

4.3 Inferential Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis is one of the analyses that are used to examine the relationship between the variables and used as the prediction for the dependent variable value that is influenced by the independent variable value. The R-square value in this regression analysis is 0.775, this indicates that 77.5% of the variance in employee resilience can be explained by emotional intelligence and cynical personality while the remaining (22.5%) can be explained by other factors. The dominant predictor variable towards the dependent variable (Employee Resilience) is Emotional Intelligence as the beta value of this variable is higher than cynical personality. Although there are two predictors that showed significance to employee resilience as the p-value is less than 0.01, the beta value of cynicism (H2) is positive rather than negative thus only H1 is supported.

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression

Variables	Beta Value	P value	R square	F value
Emotional Intelligence	0.691	< 0.001	0.775	339.048

Cynic personality	0.238	< 0.001
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As shown in Table 3, the mean value of female ($M=5.569$, $SD=0.955$) is relatively high as compared to male ($M=5.236$, $SD=1.028$) indicating that female is more resilient than male. In addition, the result shows that the t-test is significant as the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < .05$) with a t-value of -2.358. Therefore, H3 is supported.

Table 3. Independent T-test for Gender

Group	n=200	Mean	SD	t	Sig -t (2 tails)
<i>Gender</i>					
Male	115	5.236	1.028	-2.358	0.019
Female	85	5.569	0.955		

To examine whether age makes a difference in employee resilience level, respondents were divided into six age groups: 17 to 20, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60 and above 61. One-way ANOVA was used for data analysis and the results are summarized in Table 4. As can be seen, there was a significant difference in the employee resilience level with varying age groups at the workplace. Besides, the Tukey test shown in Table 5 also confirms a few age groups have significant differences compared to other age groups. For instance, young workers (age 17-20) were shown a significantly lower level of employee resilience as compared to middle-aged workers (age 21-30 and age 31-40). Similarly, senior workers aged 61 and above were significantly less resilient as compared to middle-aged workers. Thus, H4 is supported.

Table 4. ANOVA test for Employee's Age

Variable	Age Category	n=200	Mean	SD	F	Sig-F
Employee Resilience	17-20	27	4.621	1.097	7.685	<0.001
	21-30	66	5.670	0.948		
	31-40	69	5.599	0.884		
	41-50	18	5.247	1.093		
	51-60	6	5.222	0.670		
	60 and above	14	4.595	0.531		

Table 5. A Post-hoc analysis for Employee's Age -Tukey method

Variable	Age Category		Mean Difference	Sig. at p<.05
Employee Resilience	17-20	21-30	-1.049	<.001
		31-40	-0.978	<.001
		41-50	-0.626	.242
		51-60	-0.601	.711
		61 and above	0.026	1.000
	21-30	17-20	1.049	<.001
		31-40	0.071	.998
		41-50	0.423	.531
		51-60	0.448	.871
		61 and above	1.075	.002
	31-40	21-30	-0.071	.998
		17-20	0.978	<.001
		41-50	0.352	.712
		51-60	0.377	.933
		61 and above	1.004	.004
	41-50	21-30	-0.423	.531
		17-20	0.626	.242
		31-40	-0.352	.712
		51-60	0.027	1.000
		61 and above	0.652	.370
	51-60	21-30	-0.448	.871
		17-20	0.601	.711
		31-40	-0.377	.933
		41-50	-0.025	1.000
		61 and above	0.627	.741
	61 and above	21-30	-1.075	.002
		17-20	-0.026	1.000
		31-40	-1.004	.004
		41-50	-0.652	.370
		51-60	-0.627	.741

5 Discussion and Implications

The findings revealed that employees with high emotional intelligence will be more resilient. The previous study by Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler and Mayer (1999) pointed out that a person with high EI can determine and perceive their emotions more precise, they know the way and when to reveal their feelings thus they have the capability to deal with the emotional demands of stressful encounters. A high level of emotional intelligence enables a person to control their own actions, being more resilient to accomplish their aim in life, which can control their negative feelings and maintain friendships with others (Kedri, 2001). Ong et al. (2006) proposed that emotional intelligence enables an individual to become more resilient, which means that resilience is more than a complement to psychological readjustment. In addition, stress resilience can be stimulated by EI (Schneider et al., 2013) and EI also improves well-being, reducing the undergo of stress (Urquijo et al., 2016). Hence, organizations can evaluate the level of resilience by using standard written tests in personnel selection to select job candidates with positive personal qualities and high EI for their organizations. Other than that, resilience can be shaped through EI training interventions to develop positive psycho- logical internal capacities in employees.

Contrary to previous studies, a positive relationship was found between cynicism and resilience in this study. In contrast the result finding is inconsistent with the study past study of Abraham (2000), Reichers, Wanous and Austin (1997) which stated that one of the potential reasons for resistance to change is employee cynicism. This is most probably because female respondents are the majority and past study showed female nurse demonstrated a high level of cynicism (Abubakar et al., 2017).

Following that, the result also revealed that female is more resilient compared to male. This finding is in line with the result of Quisumbing (2008) where males and females have different abilities to engage risk and cope with adversity, females depend on social support, whereas males more rely on individualistic coping mechanisms. Moreover, researchers have also found that females have more appreciative behavior, and they are being more willing to provide social support to others as compared to male who rather to be more dependent on their personal ability (Friborg et al., 2003). Consequently, the resilience level of an individual would be increase when they get social support from the others. Moreover, Mhango (2019) claimed that the influence of gender on the resilience level of an individual was greater than age.

In this study, age differences in resilience were found significant across age groups. Previous studies stated that the increasing age did not reduce the resilience level when considering with other factors elderly are not least resilient as young adults (Gooding et al., 2012). But some studies stated that the resilience level of older workers is low compared to younger workers. In this study, the age range of 17-20, 21-30, 31-40 and above 61 had indicated a significant influence on employee resilience as compared to the other age range. This finding is in line with the study of Bal et al. (2011) which pointed out that the older worker is having difficulty attempting new tasks and refusing to change. There are several developmental change studies indicating that in children and teenagers age between 5 to 17 years, their resilience factors like self-esteem will increase with their age (Stewart, 2004). This finding was proved by further studies, revealing that younger children demonstrate low self-esteem (Netuveli, Montgomery, Hildon and Blane, 2008).

Based on the findings, management are advised by forming diverse teams with people of all ages, younger workers may benefit from the experience and views of older coworkers who may more readily perceive the positive aspects of the challenging scenario. This may also enhance intergenerational learning and improve resilience levels for all employees.

6 Limitations and Future Research

There are some drawbacks to this study. Self-reporting techniques were used to assess the ideas of resilience, emotional intelligence, and cynicism. As a result, the social desirability bias may have had an impact on the findings. Because the study's data were gathered from the private sector in general, future researchers may investigate focusing on a specific industry that is experiencing high volatility. Qualitative methodologies such as focus group interviews could also be used in future studies on this topic. Adding a longitudinal component to this study would substantially improve understanding of the level of resilience in the consequences of organizational change.

7 Conclusion

Since the needs and landscape of organizations change rapidly, thus the crucial strategy is to foster the ability of employees to bounce back and evolve from challenges and adversity. Resilience also acts as a strong ally that enables organizations to stay profitable and maintain their competitiveness, even in time of turmoil. Resilience is known as the factor that determines the adaptive capacity of an organization that allows organizations to recognize and react to changes rapidly, whether it's seizing hold of the opportunity of a new business or tackling a latent threat. With this study, organizations are able to know what factors influence employee resilience and enhance the level of resilience of employees in a more effective way.

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