Establishing and Sustaining Business Resilience in a Changing Reality

Integrating Adaptive Business Impact Resilience with Workforce Maturity

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The paper highlights that resilience outcomes are shaped more by workforce maturity than by the adoption of frameworks or tooling. It explores why avoidable disruption persists despite investment, and how sourcing and operating model choices can either reinforce or erode the internal capability required to make effective decisions under pressure. Taken together, these observations are brought together as a unified approach in which resilience arises from the interaction of these factors, rather than from any single initiative in isolation.

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Introduction: Resilience in a Changing Reality

Organizations today operate in environments characterized by increasing complexity, volatility, and interdependence[1]. Business resilience—the ability to sustain critical outcomes in the face of disruption—has therefore become a central concern for executives and boards.

Resilience is commonly understood in terms of outcomes:

- the continuity of critical services within acceptable limits
- the ability to absorb, contain, and recover from disruption
- the capacity to learn and adapt to reduce future impact

While significant investment has been made in resilience tooling, standardized processes, and governance frameworks, many organizations continue to experience recurring disruptions, degraded decision quality under pressure, and fragility in the face of novel conditions.

This paper argues that a key limiting factor is not the absence of frameworks or controls, but the mismatch between the complexity of modern operating environments and the maturity of the human systems expected to manage them.

The Limitations of Traditional Resilience Approaches

This limitation is reflected in industry data. Studies of significant IT outages indicate that approximately 80% of outages resulting in material business impact were **assessed by the organizations experiencing them** as at least partially avoidable, typically through improved decision-making, execution, or learning[2]. This indicates that a substantial proportion of disruption is not inherent or unavoidable but is often influenced by gaps in organizational maturity rather than solely by the absence of controls or technology.

Traditional resilience initiatives have focused on:

- standardized processes and controls
- predefined recovery procedures
- post-incident root cause analysis
- training and certification programs

These approaches are necessary, but not sufficient.
In practice, organizations frequently observe that:

- procedures are followed, yet outcomes still degrade

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[1] The COVID-19 pandemic is widely recognised as a catalyst that exposed and intensified existing organisational and operational vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to adaptability, decision-making under uncertainty, and sustained disruption (e.g., McKinsey Global Institute, *The Future of Work After COVID-19*; Deloitte, *Human Capital Trends*).

[2] **Uptime Institute**, *Annual Outage Analysis*, multiple editions (2021–2024). In survey-based reporting, a significant majority of respondents indicate that their most recent serious or severe outage was assessed internally as at least partially preventable, most commonly citing human, process, or configuration-related factors. These findings reflect respondent assessments rather than independent determinations of causality or preventability.

- incidents recur despite corrective actions
- decision-making quality declines under pressure
- compliance increases while adaptability decreases

This pattern suggests a structural limitation: procedural adoption does not guarantee adaptive capability.

Gartner has repeatedly noted in public research summaries that technology and process initiatives fail to deliver value when organizational readiness and operating models do not evolve alongside them[3]. While often framed in terms of governance and operating model change, this observation implicitly points to a deeper constraint: **the maturity of the workforce enacting those models**.

Maturity, Adoption, and Capability: Clarifying the Distinction

Maturity is often conflated with adoption. In many maturity models, higher levels are associated with:

- widespread use of defined practices
- consistent execution
- institutionalized processes

However, from a capability perspective, adoption is an outcome of maturity, not its cause.

The absence of an industry-accepted methodology for directly measuring workforce maturity does not invalidate its role in resilience outcomes, but it does limit the use of simple quantitative remediation targets. As with other complex organizational capabilities, maturity is best inferred from observed patterns of decision-making, learning, and adaptation over time rather than from static or point-in-time metrics.

Defining Workforce Maturity

Workforce maturity refers to the collective ability of individuals to:

- understand intent, not just instruction
- reason about impact and trade-offs
- exercise sound judgment under uncertainty
- adapt behaviour when assumptions no longer hold
- learn continuously from experience

These capabilities are cognitive and social in nature. They cannot be enforced through process or tooling alone.
Indicators of maturity are necessarily indirect and contextual, and are best inferred from patterns of decision-making, learning, and adaptation over time rather than from static assessments.

Adoption Without Maturity

An operating model can be enforced on an immature workforce, producing:

- procedural compliance
- consistent execution

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[3] **Gartner**, public research summaries and commentary on digital transformation and operating models (e.g., *The CIO's Guide to Digital Transformation*). Gartner analysis has highlighted that technology and process initiatives may not deliver intended value where organizational readiness and operating models do not evolve in parallel, emphasizing the importance of operating context and governance.

- auditable artifacts

What it cannot reliably produce is:

- adaptive decision-making
- principled deviation
- anticipation of second-order effects
- resilience under novel conditions

This explains why organizations can appear "mature" in steady-state conditions yet fail sharply during disruption.

Reframing Resilience as a Human-Centred Capability

Resilience emerges from **decisions made in context**, often under time pressure, ambiguity, and incomplete information. Tools and processes inform these decisions, but do not make them.
Accordingly, resilience should be understood as a **socio-technical capability**, where:

- structures, tools, and processes provide constraints and information
- people interpret, prioritize, and act within those constraints

This framing is consistent with publicly articulated analyst perspectives emphasizing the role of operating model evolution in realizing value from technology and process investments: **operating models succeed only when people understand how and why to operate within them**.

The discussion to this point suggests the need for a unifying way of thinking about resilience that goes beyond frameworks, controls, or maturity targets. Rather than prescribing specific structures or solutions, such an approach focuses analysis on where business impact arises, how decisions are made under uncertainty, and which human and organizational capabilities constrain better outcomes. This perspective emphasises intent and outcome over adoption and provides a consistent basis for examining resilience across different operating models and delivery arrangements.

Adaptive Business Impact Resilience (ABIR)

Adaptive Business Impact Resilience is the capability of an organization to sustain critical business outcomes by enabling mature individuals and teams to continuously interpret, anticipate, and respond to changing conditions using an informed understanding of business impact.
ABIR is not intended as a framework to be adopted or a maturity state to be achieved, but as a practical articulation of the perspective outlined above—focusing resilience thinking on business impact and the human decision-making capability required to manage it under uncertainty.
This definition makes explicit that:

- adaptation is performed by people, not systems
- impact awareness must be cognitively usable under pressure
- resilience depends on the maturity of those making decisions

Maturity as a Core Dimension of ABIR

ABIR requires maturity across three mutually reinforcing dimensions:

Structural Enablement

- Clear decision rights and escalation paths
- Impact-oriented prioritization mechanisms
- Feedback loops that connect decisions to outcomes

Information and Context

- Timely visibility of business impact
- Framing that supports trade-off reasoning
- Reduction of noise in high-pressure situations

Workforce Maturity

- Development of judgment, not just rule-following
- Shared mental models of business impact
- Capability to adapt when predefined scenarios no longer apply
- Continuous learning mechanisms that update understanding over time

Without the third dimension, the first two degrade into compliance systems.

Learning, Judgment, and the Maintenance of Maturity

Workforce maturity is not static. It must be:

- developed intentionally
- reinforced through experience
- maintained as context, technology, and personnel change

A credible ABIR operating model must therefore include:

- learning mechanisms that emphasize "why," not only "what"
- evaluation of decision quality, not just outcomes
- recognition and reinforcement of sound judgment
- onboarding pathways that elevate new members to the required maturity level

This aligns with Gartner's public observations that operating model change is ongoing, not a one-time transformation.

Implications for Measurement and Governance

Incorporating maturity changes how resilience is assessed.
In addition to traditional metrics, organizations should consider:

- indicators of decision quality under stress
- consistency of impact-based reasoning
- ability to adapt procedures when assumptions fail
- evidence of learning influencing future decisions

This does not replace process or outcome metrics; it contextualizes them.

Conclusion

The analysis in this paper suggests that many resilience challenges persist not because organisations lack frameworks, controls, or investment, but because the human capability required to apply them effectively under pressure has not kept pace with complexity and change. Evidence that a significant proportion of serious incidents are assessed as at least partially avoidable reinforces the view that gaps in organisational capability, including workforce maturity, continue to influence outcomes in practice. Decisions about operating models and sourcing further shape this capability by determining where judgment, learning, and ownership reside. Taken together, these observations point to the importance of treating workforce maturity as an integral consideration in resilience thinking, rather than an implicit by-product of adoption.