

What drives interorganizational resilience?

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Jennifer van den Berg. Credit: Eindhoven University of Technology

Many organizations are today facing challenges that make them increasingly vulnerable, and few organizations demonstrate high levels of resilience. For her Ph.D. research, Jennifer van den Berg explored whether and how power dynamics influence organizational resilience, specifically by looking at employee participation and collaborative

practices. She defends her thesis on November 12th at the department of Industrial Engineering and Innovation Sciences.

Traditional and often rigid hierarchical structures in companies and organizations are increasingly being criticized. As a result, it is imperative to investigate how more flexible, horizontal structures could benefit organizational resilience.

Indeed, organizations are increasingly moving away from traditional hierarchical structures and towards more collaborative forms of governance, where people are stimulated to collaborate and jointly come to decisions. This, in turn, has implications for how power is dealt with, as collaboration inherently implies comprising one's autonomy.

For her Ph.D. research, Jennifer van den Berg explored how power dynamics influence organizational resilience by answering the following overarching research question: How do intra- and interorganizational power dynamics influence organizational resilience? The research drew on qualitative data collection such as in-depth interviews, documental data, and participant observations, and analysis focused on one or multiple change process(es) as a starting point.

Empirical studies

Van den Berg's research covered two [empirical studies](#), both drawing on the notions of power and resilience. "A Dutch homecare service provider formed the basis of the first study and showed that management needs to commit to empowerment as well as psychological safety as a requirement for organizational resilience," says van den Berg.

The study highlighted the need to include tactical and operational levels in decision-making for organizational resilience, and also suggested that a climate of psychological safety may need to extend beyond the team

level, to affect how employees and managers at different organizational levels interact with each other by speaking up and taking interpersonal risks.

"The second study in my thesis considered two interorganizational collaborations in Dutch maternity care and revealed that that individual professionals need to be willing to share power to stimulate the collaborative process," says van den Berg. "However, for this to work, they need to also retain some of their autonomy."

To create this willingness, they need to trust each other and actively create and maintain a (psychologically safe) environment for communication and mutual understanding. Due to the absence of a formal hierarchy and the voluntariness of the collaboration, commitment and trust appeared even more vital than in the first study.

Both studies highlight the need for a sustained commitment to power sharing as well as the maintenance and/or creation of a collaborative environment characterized by trust and psychological safety as necessary conditions for (inter)organizational resilience.

Relevance and necessity

Overall, van den Berg showed in her research not only the relevance, but also the necessity of various practices that contribute to (inter)organizational resilience, such as flattening of organizational structures, empowering employees, distributing decision-making, and securing psychological safety.

By investigating the underlying [power](#) dynamics in various organizational contexts, her research served to produce a deeper understanding of why many organizations are not resilient enough to survive and sustain their performance. Based on these insights, she also

delivered practical guidelines for creating and sustaining (inter)organizational [resilience](#).

More information: Thesis information: [research.tue.nl/en/publication... -rethinking-power-dy](https://research.tue.nl/en/publication/...-rethinking-power-dy)

Provided by Eindhoven University of Technology

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