

The Role and Relevance of Resilience in the Nonprofit Sector: A systematic review of the literature

Grace Catherine De Oro – University of Maryland, Baltimore County

This review examines previous literature on resilience that focuses on nonprofit organizations. Growing literature examines organizational resilience in the context of nonprofits, however most scholars discuss resilience from a community perspective. This review employs Cochrane-Campbell protocols to establish a research question and keyword search protocols in advance. The main findings include themes in the literature around disturbances to the system, leadership and management trends, and financial resilience. Implications include insights for nonprofit managers when considering short- and long-term recovery plans and how to build a surplus beyond financial means. Ultimately there is a need for a holistic framework to bring together structures, people, and relationships in the discussion of fostering and being resilient. While bounce back is nearly impossible for smaller organizations, which are often in vulnerable financial situations to begin with, they still manage to evolve and survive.

Resilience, organizational resilience, non-profit organizations

Introduction

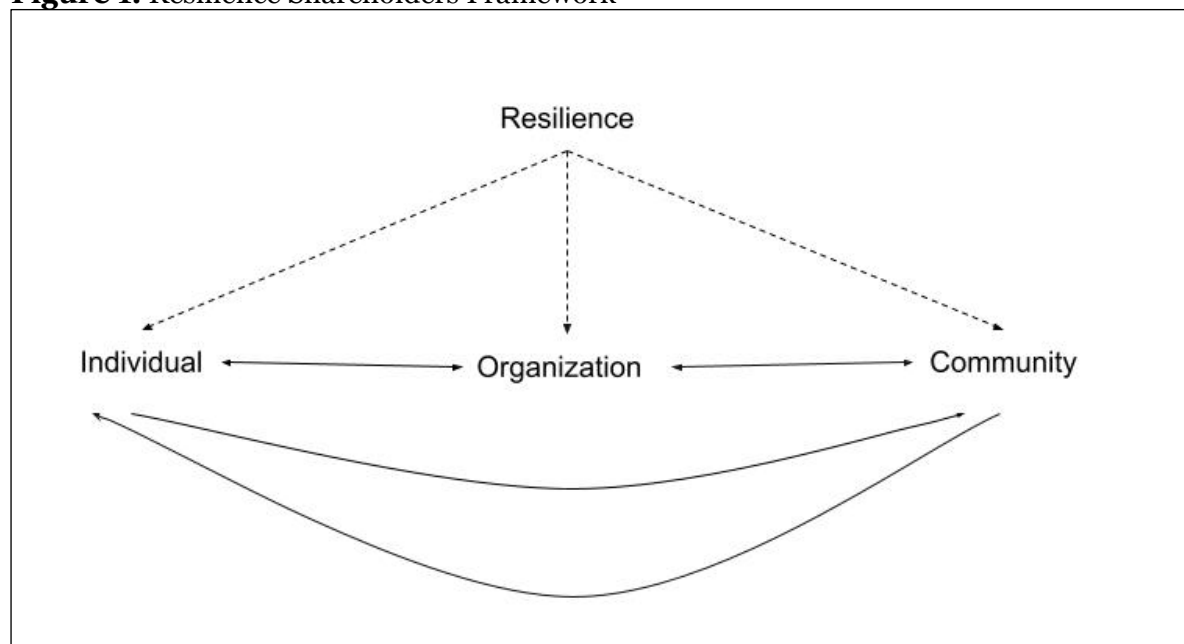
The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to a global crisis and disturbance that affected individuals and organizations. Nonprofit organizations are not immune to the pandemic's effects, resulting in declines and disruptions to how we live and the communities in which we function. More importantly, it threatened nonprofit organizations' ability to carry out their mission (Finchum-Mason et al., 2020; Maher et al., 2020,). The nonprofit sector plays an important and relevant role in disaster response after a large-scale human-made or natural disaster.

By examining how resilience is defined in the literature, this review explores how nonprofit organizations can define and build resilience. Examining resilience from the perspective of nonprofits is vital because of the role they play in serving a public need. Governments cannot solve every problem, and nonprofits can answer niche needs. This is not to say that government(s) do not play or have the potential to serve in a supportive role. Nonprofit organizations are unique as they operate in the third sector or third space, where public-private partnerships led by government and private interests work together to address a need. Nonprofits are answering the needs of the public, and there are opportunities for them to work alongside and with the government to solve problems. From an organizational perspective, individual nonprofits offer unique expertise and make decisions on how they function and carry out their mission. Self-governing is one of the five characteristics of a nonprofit that Salamon and Anheier (1997) used to define organizations in the sector, and it implies that they

have their own governance procedure and have a degree of autonomy (Anheier, 2014, p. 73). This structural-operational quality of nonprofits further supports why resilience is relevant to the study of them as an organization.

This review argues alongside Houston (2018) that recovery does not look like a return to ‘normal’ or homeostasis. What is normal is also up to interpretation in each instance because sometimes “normal” is no longer obtainable. This experience is consistent with the current COVID-19 pandemic, as we have referred to many things as the “new normal” (Corpuz, 2021). Corpuz (2021) argues that if society is open to change, the degree to which we are open will depend on our “capacity to adapt, manage resilience in the face of adversity, flexibility, and creativity without forcing us to make changes” (p. 1). Each disturbance provides a lesson, experience in coping, and/or failure that can be used in the future. A growing body of literature examines organizational resilience in the context of nonprofits, but most scholars discuss resilience from a community perspective. One cannot jump from the individual to the community level without recognizing an intermediate level where organizations are involved and contribute to the community (Figure 1). What is also unclear is what is happening or the contribution of the resilience of individuals to community resilience and vice versa. The path from individual to community resilience is not linear; the literature names public and private organizations involved in communities and their efforts, yet it fails to discuss what resilience looks like for organizations. Figure 1 shows multiple levels and shareholders of resilience (dashed lines) connected and contributing to each other (solid black lines). Just as individual resilience contributes or is related to an organization’s resilience, the opposite is true where organizational resilience contributes or is related to individual resilience.

Figure 1. Resilience Shareholders Framework



Literature Review

Aside from distinguishing individual and organization-level resilience, it is also important to define the difference between resiliency and resilience. Resiliency is an individual personality trait (derived from ego-resiliency), whereas resilience is a process (Bonilla, 2015, p. 10).

Establishing a clear definition of resilience is critically important to this analysis. A consistent definition should be used in the decision-making process to facilitate the formulation of compatible policy goals by a wide range of actors (Carlson et al., 2012). Researchers,

academics, practitioners, and policymakers need to be mindful of definitions that vary depending on the object of analysis. Biases can form based on a chosen definition, and it is our duty to recognize them during this process.

Conceptual frameworks and research models related to resilience are most common in psychiatry, developmental psychology, human development, medicine, epidemiology, and, more recently, risk management (Ledesma, 2014; Renschler et al., 2010; Rose, 2009). For several billions of years, biological systems have been resilient, with feedback systems focused on the ability to cope with stressors, not on the ability to predict or avoid them. Ecosystems are strengthened by having encountered stress (Lovins & Lovins, 1982). The Canadian ecologist Holling (1973) introduced resilience to understand the capacity of ecosystems that could persist in their original state even when affected by an outside variable (Lovins & Lovins, 1982). Wildavsky (1988) interpreted Holling's work on the "control of risk with the capacity to cope resiliently" as "low stability seems to introduce high resilience" (p. 78).

In 1996, Holling identified a broader kind of resilience, which he called ecological resilience, where "the magnitude of a disturbance that can be absorbed before a system changes the structure and transitions to another state" (p.33). Gunderson and Holling (2001) defined resilience as the capacity of a system to experience disturbance and maintain its functions and controls. Carpenter et al. (2001) extended the research by examining the magnitude of disturbance an ecological system could tolerate before fundamentally changing into a different region with a new set of controls. Meanwhile, Hamel and Valikangas (2003) stress that while recovery, flexibility, or crisis preparedness are important values of resilience, it is not the end-all; rather, they point to a distinct source of "sustainable competitive advantage" to achieve economic resilience. What begins to emerge is that resilience is a function of a system's vulnerability and its adaptive capacity (Dalziell & McManus, 2004).

Aaron Wildavsky, an American political scientist known for his pioneering work in public policy, government budgeting, and risk management, stated that "resilience is the capacity to cope with an anticipated danger after they become manifest, learning to bounce back" (1988, p. 77). He argues that societies face risks every day, and that social and technical systems are becoming more intertwined and interdependent over time (Wildavsky, 1988). Ultimately calling for an investment in resilience, not just prevention (Wildavsky, 1988; Wukich, 2013). Wildavsky is credited with introducing resilience to public administration, and he is the first to use the phrase "bounce back." In his book *Searching for Safety*, he hypothesized that "the growth of resilience depends upon learning how to deal with the unexpected" (Wildavsky, 1988, p. 77).

Dealing with the unexpected and adversity is difficult to predict. The anticipatory work of experts and governing authorities often falls short. While plans and theories look good on paper, in practice, we cannot accurately predict how many or what kind of disturbances we might encounter. Since the 2010s, many peer-reviewed articles and publications define resilience, resilient organizations, and resiliency. Most borrow some version or interpretation of Wildavsky's (1988) "bounce back" theory (Boin & van Eten, 2013; Okamoto, 2020; Valero et al., 2015). However, few studies properly cite or recognize Wildavsky's work, and the "bounce back" theory is accepted. Houston (2015) challenges this by offering his view of "bounce forward," representing a return to the pre-crisis baseline level on one or more measures. The emphasis on "forward" represents the passing time that occurs and is necessary for the return. It also recognizes that the return to the baseline is not simply how things were before (Houston, 2015, 2018).

Theoretical frameworks focus on examining an organization's financial health and vulnerability to determine if they are resilient and ultimately will survive. For example, the RISE Model used by Maher et al. (2020) strongly emphasizes financial capacity and financial impacts. While the model emphasizes a multi-response stage and a thinking-forward recovery

model, there is a strong message that financial capacity is a measurement of recovery and stabilization (Maher et al., 2020). Fewer studies focus on proactive recovery or a nonlinear model. Cyclical models, or those with feedback loops, include elements like realignment and reorganization with collective and collaborative efforts. Hutton's (2018) Proactive Recovery Transition Model shows that resilient organizations can exhibit leadership after a crisis to capture expanded services or audiences. It also identifies levels of integration with partners that combine resources to transition to longer-term recovery. As an organization becomes more integrated with personal connections, collective action, and collaborative oversight, it archives more sustainable resilience. Forces within the model also operate in reverse to make resilience sustainable. Evaluations conducted collaboratively by most integrated organizations might lead to the realignment of collective action groups and individual nonprofits (Hutton, 2018). A shortcoming in the literature is the use of recovery, sustainability, and resilience interchangeably. These terms are conceptually discussed in different ways throughout the literature when discussing organizational resilience.

The literature raises two questions: about nonprofits' practices and decision-making processes and how scholars evaluate nonprofit organizations. Practice questions aim to understand how the practitioner and the nonprofit organization make decisions or practices regarding resilience. Answers to these questions might include the organization's managerial or strategic practices. Meanwhile, the evaluation questions are posed to scholars or outside parties who aim to evaluate organizations. These questions aim to think critically about the framing and perspective used to approach an evaluation on resilience.

Practice Question

- 1) How do nonprofit organizations anticipate the unexpected while trying to develop and grow resilience?
- 2) What do "bounce back" or "bounce forward" practices look like for nonprofit organizations? Are they attainable in the long term?

Evaluation Question

- 1) How can we minimize the gap between theory and nonprofit organizations' practice?
- 2) What model (e.g., linear or feedback loop model) is most appropriate for modeling recovery where resilience is either a product and/or a part of an organization's functions?
- 3) What steps can we take as scholars to push beyond financial-based solutions when examining resilience?

Methodology

This analysis was designed to systematically review the current literature on resilience, from the perspective of nonprofit organizations. To minimize selection bias, this study avoids strategies that would limit searches to specific publication years, theories, journals, or disciplines. This review has an interest in literature that considers the COVID-19 pandemic.

Selection Criteria

To ensure replicability, limits on the scope were used. The following criteria were imposed in this search:

- 1) Empirical: This analysis is interested in the state of the research on resilience in nonprofit organizations; therefore, eligible literature must be empirical, where the researchers used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Articles that did not include literature reviews, narratives, theoretical analyses, and theoretical models were not included.

- 2) Nonprofit *organizations / NGOs*: Research articles must include data and theories from nonprofit organizations or NGOs. Articles were included even if nonprofit organizations were a passing mention. There is no limit on whether these organizations are domestic (within the U.S.) or foreign (outside the U.S.).
- 3) Nonprofit *resilience or resiliency*: Research articles must reference resiliency or resilience from the perspective of nonprofit organizations. Articles that reference human resilience (psychology) and financial resilience in the context of the for-profit business sector are not included.

Data And Methods

The goal of this study is to produce reliable, systematic, and robust conclusions about the state of current research. To achieve this goal, the Cochrane-Campbell protocols, which include recommendations for systematic reviews, were utilized to establish a research question and keyword search protocols in advance. An eligibility criterion was established to produce a reproducible methodology to conduct a systematic review that attempts to identify the studies that meet the criteria while minimizing bias in the selection or interpretation process (Gazley & Guo, 2020). The data collection process took place in the spring of 2020 and included several stages, beginning with keyword searches of articles and abstracts only. Each article was reviewed further for criteria results shown in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) format (Figure 2).

Stage One of the article selection used the online archive EBSCO through the University of Maryland, Baltimore County's Library search engines and interlibrary loan services using the following keywords as search criteria where, in the full text and keywords include nonprofit resilience, and or nonprofit organizations and resiliency or resilience or resilient. There is no limit in the sample in regard to whether organizations are domestic (with in the U.S.) or foreign (outside the U.S.). Nor was there a time range filter when searching for articles. The preliminary sample included 246 articles.

In Stage Two of article selection, the sample was examined further to review the article's full abstract. If the abstract did not meet the three criteria, an article was removed from the sample. After reviewing the abstracts, the sample was reduced to 23 eligible articles.

Stage Three of article selection began with downloading the articles from EBSCO and the interlibrary loan system. Twenty-Two articles were available in the full text and were easily accessible. One article was removed from the final systematic review sample for an invalid link.

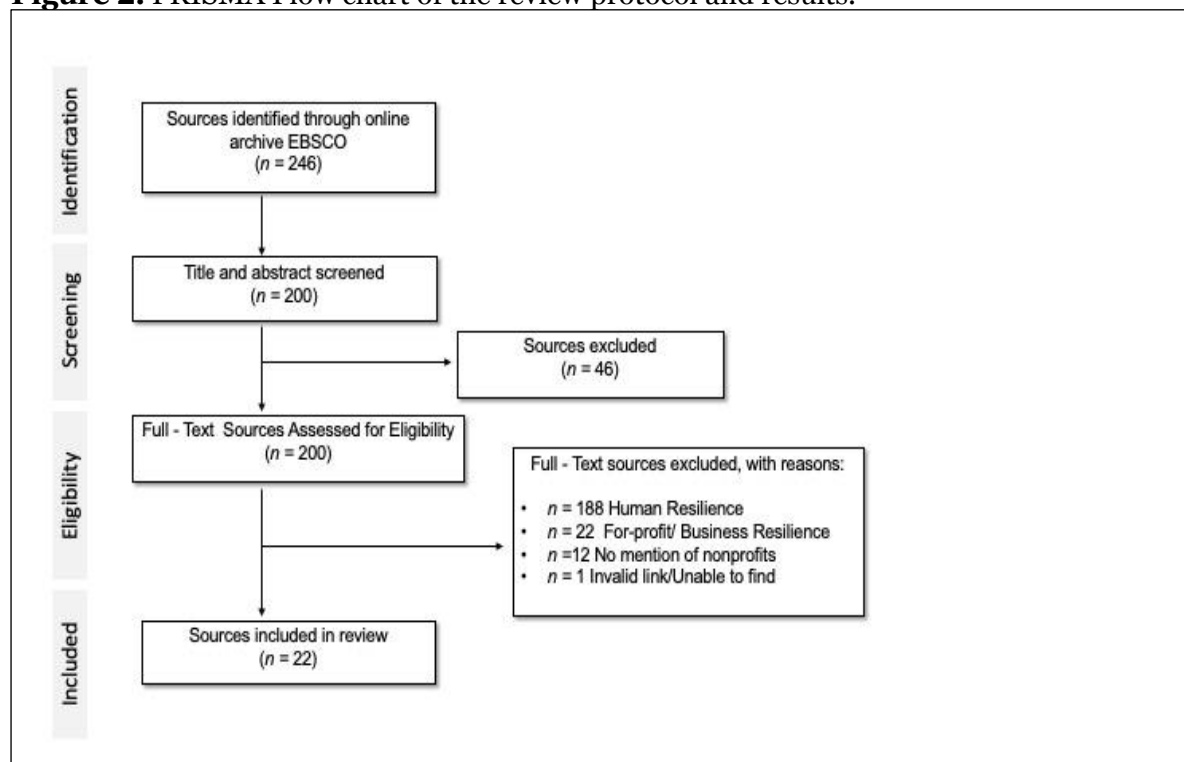
The final sample is broken down into themes to better grasp the literature. These themes were based on trends in the literature. While they do not aim to address the questions posed from the literature review, they do assist in answering the larger questions around nonprofit practices and decision-making processes and how scholars evaluate nonprofit organizations.

Data Trends and Findings

More than half of the 22 articles (Table 1) were published in 2021 or 2022. The articles ranged over eight years from 2014 to 2022, with natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Florence, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, identified as a disturbance. The methodology of the articles included both quantitative and qualitative studies, with some using mixed methods in their analysis and models. An important observation is how each

article and its author(s) choose to define and or articulate resilience in their study. Since there are varying definitions and defining variables, the scope of resilience is broad even in this smaller sample. A synthesis based on trends and themes is utilized to combine these varying definitions to increase the generalizability and transferability of the research. After reviewing the articles, three main themes were identified: Disturbances to the System, Financial Resilience, and Leadership and Management trends in Nonprofit Organizations.

Figure 2. PRISMA Flow chart of the review protocol and results.



In the sample, resilience is referred to as an interdisciplinary concept with the most common definitions using terms like “bounce back,” the “ability to absorb,” and “positive adaptability” (Table 2) (Cerquetti & Cutrini, 2021; Chen, 2021; Hutton et al., 2021; Kim, 2022; Maher et al., 2020; Okamoto, 2020; Paluszak et al., 2021; Pena et al., 2014; Rochet et al., 2008; Whitman, 2021). Cerquetti and Cutrini (2021) explain that the most utilized definitions take an evolutionary approach based on adaptability, transformability, configuration, and reorganization when discussing resilience. This is consistent with early resilience scholarship from the study of ecosystems in zoology (Holling, 1973, 1996). Disaster literature focuses on organizational resilience as a measure of a “complex blend of behaviors, perspectives, and interactions that can be developed, measured, and managed” (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005, as cited in Pena et al., 2014, p. 591). Because of a natural disaster, two variables are emphasized when discussing firm or sector resilience: the structure of the organization and the extent of participation in the community (Pena et al., 2014).

Twenty-first-century scholars warn that resilience is a buzzword in today's research and vocabulary (Martin & Sunley, 2015, as cited by Cerquetti & Cutrini, 2021). They warn scholars to be aware of its meaning and context since buzzwords can be used due to popularity with little to no understanding of the deeper meaning. The term is often used in discussions around financial resilience and vulnerability. Searing et al. (2021) call for moving beyond the use of vulnerability and survival analysis when looking at the resilience of a nonprofit organization because the results fail to provide answers on how service delivery continued and how to recover. This is a continued theme and critique where resilience is generally understood, but

from an analytic perspective, it lacks consistent qualitative or quantitative elements for analysis and use across disciplines.

Table 1. Literature Review Sample Summary

Authors	Publication Date	Article Title	Journal
Cerquetti, Mara; Cutrini, Eleonora	2022	Structure, People, and Relationships: A Multidimensional Method to Assess Museum Resilience.	Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly
Chen, Xintong	2021	Nonprofit Financial Resilience: Recovery from Natural Disasters.	Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations
Chen, Xintong	2022	Nonprofit Resilience in a Natural Disaster Context: An Exploratory Qualitative Case Study Based on Hurricane Florence	Human Service Organizations Management Leadership & Governance
Fathalikhani, Somayeh; Hafezalkotob, Ashkan; Soltani, Roya	2020	Government intervention on cooperation, competition, and competition of humanitarian supply chains	Socio-Economic Planning Sciences
Geller, Stephanie Lessans; Salamon, Lester M.; Mengel, Kasey L.	2010	Museums and Other Nonprofits in the Current Recession: A Story of Resilience, Innovation, and Survival	The Journal of Museum Education
Horvath, Aaron; Brandtner, Christof; Powell, Walter W.	2018	Serve or Conserve: Mission, Strategy, and Multi-Level Nonprofit Change During the Great Recession.	Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations
Hutton, Nicole S.	2018	Sustaining Resilience: Modeling Nonprofit Collaboration in Recovery	Professional Geographer

Hutton, Nicole. S.; Mumford, Steve W.; Saitgalina, Marina; Yusuf, Juita-Elena. (Wie); Behr, Joshua G.; Diaz, Rafael; & Kiefer, John. J.	2021	Nonprofit capacity to manage hurricane-pandemic threat: Local and national perspectives on resilience during COVID-19.	International Journal Of Public Administration
Irvin, Renee A.; Furneaux, Craig W.	2021	Surviving the Black Swan Event: How Much Reserves Should Nonprofit Organizations Hold?	Nonprofit And Voluntary Sector Quarterly
Kim, Min-Hyu	2022	Framing Effects, Procedural Fairness, and the Nonprofit Managers' Reactions to Job Layoffs in Response to the Economic Shock of the COVID-19 Crisis.	Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary And Nonprofit Organizations
Maher, Craig S.; Hoang, Trang; Hindery, Anne	2020	Fiscal Responses to COVID-19: Evidence from Local Governments and Nonprofits.	Public Administration Review
Moran, Kenneth A.	2016	Organizational resilience: Sustained institutional effectiveness among smaller, private, non-profit US higher education institutions experiencing organizational decline.	Work- A Journal of Prevention Assessment & Rehabilitation
Okamoto, Kristen E.	2020	'As resilient as an ironweed:' narrative resilience in nonprofit organizing	Journal of Applied Communication Research
Paluszak, Grzegorz Tadeusz; Wiśniewska-Paluszak, Joanna Alicja; Schmidt, Joanna; Lira, Jarosław	2021	The Organizational Resilience of Rural Non-Profits under Conditions of the COVID-19 Pandemic Global Uncertainty.	Agriculture
Pena, Anita A.; Zahran, Sammy; Underwood, Anthony; Weiler, Stephan	2014	Effect of Natural Disasters on Local Nonprofit Activity.	Growth & Change

Searing, Elizabeth A. M.; Wiley, Kimberly K.; Young, Sarah L.	2021	Resiliency Tactics During Financial Crisis: The Nonprofit Resiliency Framework	Nonprofit Management & Leadership
Țiclău, Tudor; Hințea, Cristina; Trofin, Constantin	2021	Resilient Leadership. Qualitative Study on Factors Influencing Organizational Resilience And Adaptive Response To Adversity.	Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences
Waerder R; Thimmel S; Englert B; Helmig B	2021	The Role of Nonprofit-Private Collaboration for Nonprofits' Organizational Resilience.	Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary And Nonprofit Organizations
Whitman, John R.	2021	Does Covid Portend a Shocking Future for Nonprofits?	Canadian Journal of Nonprofit And Social Economy Research
Witmer, Hope; Mellinger, Marcela Sarmiento	2016	Organizational resilience: Nonprofit organizations' response to change	Work-A Journal of Prevention Assessment & Rehabilitation
Routhieaux, Robert L.	2015	Shared leadership and its implications for nonprofit leadership	Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership

Table 2. Resilience Definition Themes in Systematic Literature Review

Definition Theme	Author, year
Bounce Back	Chen 2022
	Chen, 2021
	Paluszak et al., 2021
	Țiclău et al., 2021
	Waerder et al., 2021
	Horvath et al., 2018
	Pena et al., 2014
Ability to Absorb	Cerquetti et al., 2022
	Whitman, 2021
	Witmer and Mellinger, 2016

Positive Adaptability	Hutton et al., 2021 Paluszak et al., 2021 Țiclău et al., 2021 Waerder et al., 2021 Maher et al, 2020 Moran, 2015 Pena et al., 2014
Does not explicitly define resilience but uses the term, provides examples, and cites sources that do define resilience.	Kim, 2022 Fathalikhani et al., 2021 Searing et al., 2021 Irvin et al., 2021 Hutton, 2018 Routhieaux, 2015 Geller et al., 2010

Disasters and Disturbances to the System

Resilience refers to persistence in the face of disturbance across the literature. While some disturbances can cause temporary changes in environmental conditions, they cause pronounced changes in an ecosystem (Holling, 1973, 1996). Disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated large and small shocks throughout all levels of society and the globe. The Great Recession (2007-2009) is a prominent example of nonprofit resilience research on responses to external threats in the sample in the context of economic downturns (Horvath et al., 2018; Moran, 2015; Ticlău et al., 2021).

Literature from earlier years in the sample reference major events like the 9/11 Terrorist Attack, Hurricane Katrina, and the Great Recession (Horvath et al., 2018; Moran, 2015; Pena et al., 2014). These events were highly destructive, as they continue to have long-term effects and influence policy and our lives more than ten years later (Horvath et al., 2018; Moran, 2015). While many disasters are challenging to prepare for because of unpredictability, hurricanes provide a unique circumstance. The common roles of nonprofits in disaster relief include assisting in providing up-to-date information, assisting the community with FEMA-related processes, and distributing goods (Pena et al., 2014). Preparation for major weather events includes an extensive system of infrastructure, data, and technology that nonprofit organizations, the public, and governments can use to better prepare for the initial shock and recovery. For example, in a qualitative study on nonprofit resilience and natural disasters, those who experienced Hurricane Matthew reported that learning from the outcome helped them prepare better to recover more effectively and efficiently from Hurricane Florence just two years later (Chen, 2022).

Nonprofits remain on the frontline of natural disasters like hurricanes by providing immediate response and long-term assistance to individuals and communities, unlike FEMA, which will deploy and eventually dissolve their efforts (Pena et al., 2014). Hutton (2018) argues that after a disaster, the preexisting nonprofit organizations that exhibit the most resilience do so by altering their operations “to share the burden.” Typically, no single agent has enough resources to manage and respond to a disaster. Thus, coordination and interactions among various aid agencies are necessary (Fathalikhani et al., 2021). This supports the claim that governments cannot answer all public needs, and that there is a niche role for nonprofit organizations. Other actors who support the government may include aid agencies like local and international NGOs, the military, and private sector organizations (Fathalikhani et al., 2021; Pena et al., 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed many weaknesses including the healthcare system and threatened the financial capacity of public and nonprofit organizations (Maher et al., 2020). The pandemic is a unique disturbance to the system because the unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 caused a “dramatic increase in uncertainty” across the globe (Paluszak et al., 2021). Unlike our experiences with hurricanes the only major event the United States experienced comparable to the COVID-19 pandemic is the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918.

The shocks or results of COVID-19’s disturbances have an immediate and abrupt effect on the normal function of nonprofit organizations (Ticlău et al., 2021). With growing pressures to maintain an organization’s functions, adaptation and change are necessary (Maher et al., 2020; Ticlău et al., 2021). Instability or changes in external funding sources, as well as the supply chain, remain consistently identified by the nonprofit. Although during this time, funding sources ranged from individual donor donations, grants, federal funding, and local government funding, there was a significant concern about the financial status of organizations (Maher et al., 2020; Searing et al., 2021; Ticlău et al., 2021).

Leadership and Management Trends

Nine articles focused specifically on nonprofit leadership and personnel resilience rather than the organization. A focus on leadership and personnel is salient because all organizations are made up of individuals with a particular purpose or goal in mind. It is vital to examine internal and external factors, including revenue, leadership, and partnerships. Hutton et al. (2020) call for focusing on “process, practice, and people” through financial management, strategic planning, and staff management. It is important to remember that nonprofits are embedded in their communities and play a role in the community’s adaptive capacity. Scholars should examine nonprofits as an organism because they cannot provide the services and meet their missions without the individuals that keep them alive and the system they exist in.

Adopting a more holistic approach to evaluation is essential to understand how organizations are resilient and foster resilience. While it may seem more pressing to identify the external factors and threats facing a nonprofit organization, it is the internal factors, resources, and tactics contributing to the organization’s main functions. Searing et al. (2021) identify five tactical themes based on resources utilized: financial, human resources, outreach programs, services, management, and leadership. While the tactical themes are diverse, the resiliency tactics mentioned focus primarily on financial affairs and administrative tasks when considering resilience. The literature supports and argument for nonprofit organizations dedicating resources and time to resiliency, starting with organizational management fundamentals.

Additionally, organizations are the product of the routines and practices they adopt (Horvath et al., 2018). This is crucial for collective action. Searing et al. (2021) attest that there is a need for nonprofit managers to balance the goals of organizational persistence with those that allow continued delivery of human services during a time of crisis. To sustain resilience, nonprofit collaboration in recovery should also be considered (Hutton, 2018). With the goal of a sustainable recovery process, there is a need for mitigation and preparation phases to strategically plan for sustainable resilience and, secondly, a long-term continuation of resilience post-disaster (Hutton, 2018).

While using survival analysis and financial vulnerability is common in analyses, it does not answer the practical question of how organizations adopt, foster, and implement resilience (Horvath et al., 2018; Searing et al., 2021). One strategy includes mapping out an organization’s strengths and weaknesses while also paying attention to the perceptions and insights of stakeholders outside of the organization’s management. Leadership and

management are important because the individuals involved in decision-making processes and day-to-day activities are crucial data points as the boots-on-the-ground and first-person perspectives.

Managers and Management Styles

The attitudes of nonprofit managers, specifically optimism, are noted as an explanation for relative success in nonprofit organizations. Managers who “do not take defeat easily” and who remain positive are accustomed to “beating the odds” even when they are not in their favor (Geller et al., 2010, p. 138). In the Geller et al. (2010) study, about half of the respondents believed their “future is bright” because they used the crisis as an opportunity to redesign their organizations to improve conditions in both the short and long term. One organization in this study explained its growth as being a “leaner, healthier organization” thanks to examining the procedures and programs that were in place (Geller et al., 2010, p. 138).

Nonprofit organizations were urged to adopt managerial practices associated with the business sector in the 1990s and early 2000s to articulate goals and the specific processes to achieve them (Horvath et al., 2018). The use of strategic planning to develop organizational goals and the specific steps to achieve them started to be utilized by hiring consultants, undergoing financial audits, and using quantitative performance. This strategic planning empowers nonprofit organizations to practice planning through everyday activities for the organization's members at all levels, from the board to volunteers. It ensures that mission-driven organizations do not pursue activities vaguely related to their goals without planning strategically (Geller et al., 2010; Horvath et al., 2018).

An organization's mission is not static and serves as the lens through which it will work within its area of focus. It often motivates organizations through values and morals, and it strongly disapproves of deviations from them. This does not mean nonprofit organizations do not change their mission over time. Influences by external factors create new needs and require new services, such as in the case of disasters.

Nonprofit organizations that are invested put considerable thought and practice into plans over time, which include personnel updates, seeking outside input, and making all parts of the strategic plan actions of the staff, departments, and volunteers and ultimately shape how they respond to crisis (Horvath et al., 2018). Being able to stay the course allows for the organization to standardize routines and practices. Rather than spending a considerable amount of time trying to “bounce back” they are working proactively. Pauluszak et al. (2021), argues that a disruption is the beginning of transformation and “bouncing forward.” Transformation resulting from external disturbances lead to a “thriving organization” that has a new resilience (Pauluszak et al., 2021). So, while a disruption is not something a nonprofit organization wants, there is an opportunity for a positive outcome in the context of resilience. Ultimately, strategic planning offers the organization, its managers, and the individuals that make up the organization a future orientation.

Characteristics of Nonprofit Organizations

When looking at an organization as a whole there are significant variables like size and age to consider. Larger organizations can better overcome and manage the situations due to higher levels of formal management and crisis response (Ticlaú et al., 2021). For smaller organizations, regardless of the sector, the focus is the organization's survival. While smaller organizations tend to rely on their “ad-hoc solutions” because they tend to work and keep them afloat, they do not translate to a higher level of resilience long-term. Mature and more established nonprofit organizations have the advantage of integrating and implementing mechanisms through management and leadership. These mechanisms can be used more efficiently and effectively to respond to shocks through their learned experiences. However,

learned experiences are only as helpful as the leadership that chooses to adopt or innovate in the future. Learned experience is especially helpful for emergency and disaster aid nonprofits. Chen (2022) calls for future studies exploring recovery strategies that address staffing, needs for services, and the development of best practices. Nevertheless, having a plan does not make all nonprofit organizations immune to disaster impact. It can help them cope with the impacts, especially for those whose services were impacted (McManus et al., 2008, as cited by Chen, 2022).

Financial Resilience

Financial health is examined to determine the success or failure of an organization from the nonprofit sector to the business sector. In the case of nonprofits, financial vulnerability is most analyzed and critiqued. Research and literature stress how an organization can and should reduce its financial vulnerability. It is important to recognize that in trying to build financial resilience, there is competition among nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits are often financially independent of the government and usually are funded in other ways. When challenges or tragedies exist, the competition increases, and as there are limited numbers of donors or funds, there is competition for financial resources (Fathalikhani et al., 2021). While competition creates more challenges, competition in nonprofit organizations allows social welfare to be provided at a higher level with fewer financial resources needed (Fathalikhani et al., 2021). What has not been explored is how nonprofits “bounce back” to their original performance level (Chen, 2021). When they are already in a poor financial state due to internal or external reasons, does the organization ever fully bounce back? This offers an opportunity for exploration from a managerial and theoretical perspective.

Chen (2021) defines nonprofit financial resilience as “the ability or capacity of an organization to bounce back to at least its original financial performance level after a disruptive event” (p. 1010). Organizational resilience characteristics such as nonprofit size and financial resources are associated with total expense recovery. Meanwhile, the diversity in revenue and the organization’s age were not statistically significant. Early results from research that focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic and the nonprofit sector showed that organizations with financial reserves exhibited more resilience in the wake of extraordinary financial shock and fewer disruptions to their mission-related programming compared to other organizations lacking significant savings (Kim & Mason, 2020 as cited in Irvin & Furneaux, 2021).

The post-disaster recovery time varies between 3 to 5 years; some even fail to reach their original financial levels after 10 years (Chen, 2021). This shows how the effects of a disaster can cause long-term damage to an organization and even lead to its mortality. Data suggests that around three months of operating reserves is best to ensure the stability of programming in the event of financial shocks; however, this is only true for the most prominent nonprofits (Irvin & Furneaux, 2021). For medium to small nonprofits, three months of operating reserves are hard to accumulate and sometimes brutally inadequate to ensure stability. Meanwhile, medium-sized organizations need about five and a half months of reserves.

Why one strategy is selected over another is not always clear. However, there is some evidence that an organization's mission may play an important role as a call to action or constraint to act (Horvath et al., 2018). Declining revenues, increased costs, declining endowments, increased competition for resources, and increased demand all contribute to the fiscal stresses nonprofit organizations face (Geller et al., 2010). Despite these findings, a 2010 study found that although the sample of nonprofit organizations and museums were facing daunting fiscal pressures, they were considerably resilient (Geller et al., 2010). To achieve resilience in these difficult economic conditions, nonprofit organizations and museums use coping strategies such as fundraising, belt-tightening, entrepreneurial expansions, and optimism (Geller et al., 2010).

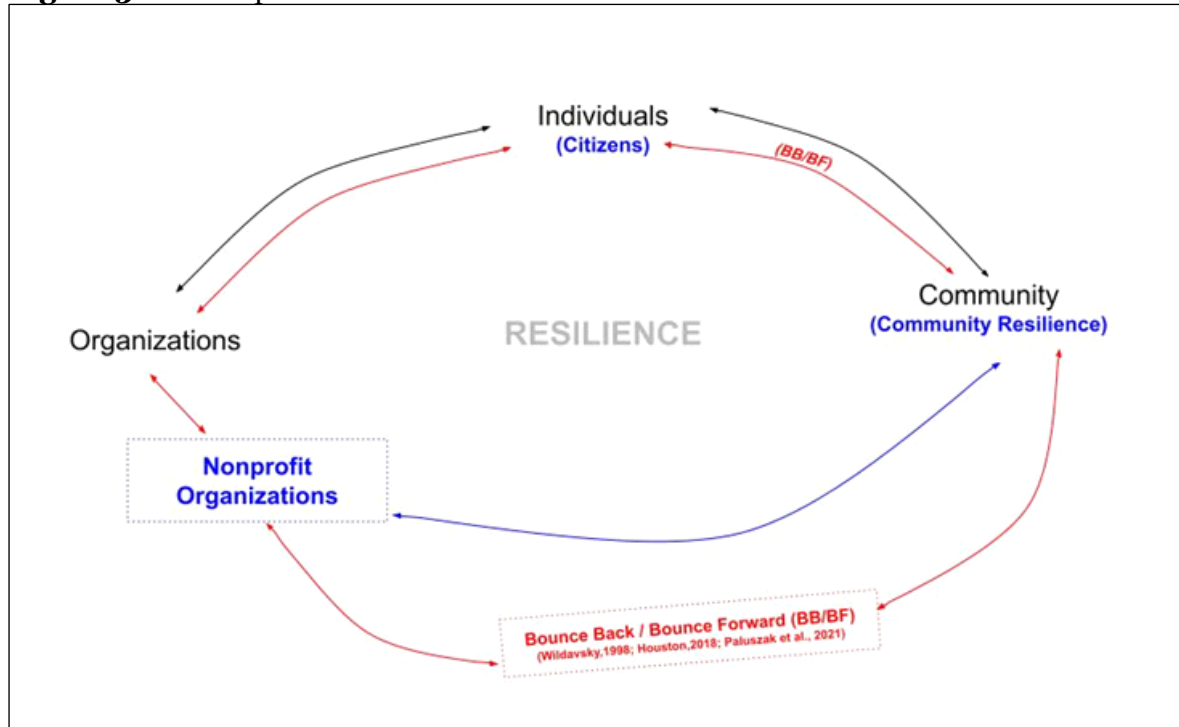
Furthermore, fundraising, while a common practice of nonprofit organizations, is not always the answer. Geller et al. (2010) found that targeted efforts focused heavily on donations from individual donors, foundations, and corporations rather than on state, local, and federal funds that they usually were dependent on. Nonprofits were also more likely to use creative fundraising approaches like applications to smaller local banks for smaller loans to support specific projects.

Belt-tightening is used to cut administrative costs, while others may tap into collaborative efforts and relationships with other nonprofits to increase financial resources. Nonprofits often lean heavily on their social capital, especially those rooted in communities (Pena et al., 2014). They benefit heavily from their local knowledge, networks, and credibility within the community to gain support both financially and otherwise. Other belt-tightening strategies include hiring freezes, paring down programming, increasing reliance on volunteers, and shifting to cheaper products or services (Geller et al., 2010). Many eco-friendly tactics ended up being the most innovative and cost-effective by just simply cutting the use of gas and electricity because office spaces were not being used, along with fewer travel expenses. Innovative and entrepreneurial expansions also served as defense measures to help cope with cuts. Improving and expanding market efforts and implementing or expanding advocacy efforts are among the most successful coping strategies.

Discussion

The dialog around resilience in the context of nonprofit organizations is new and emerging in the literature. This study has limitations as the sample was retrieved in the spring of 2022, includes only English text, and focuses specifically on the organizational perspective. Grey literature was not included, and newly published studies consistently joined the conversation. However, a plethora of literature focuses on community and individual resilience from a physiological perspective, as well as emergency management literature. While these contribute to the literature, this review focused specifically on an organizational perspective, focusing on nonprofit organizations. Selection bias and human error should be considered, as I am the sole investigator who screened the titles and abstracts of each piece of literature. Word choice or poorly written abstracts and titles could have also affected the sample as they were utilized during screening.

Resilience in public administration was defined by Arron Wildavsky in 1988; only after examining multiple decades of published research can we begin to accumulate enough literature to begin the conversation about how we can define resilience and build a holistic framework. A holistic framework would bring together structures, people, and relationships in the discussion of fostering and being resilient. Scholars need to move beyond measuring success based on financial status. While financial resilience is an essential pillar of organizational resilience, there are assets of equal importance. Social assets are integral to understanding resilience, including building and sharing knowledge among the organization and networks. Managers and leaders who have lived experiences are essential to building resilience. The literature supports that “bounce back” is nearly impossible for smaller organizations, who are often in vulnerable financial situations to begin with, and yet they still manage to evolve and survive (Chen, 2021, 2022; Geller et al., 2010; Horvath et al., 2018; Ticiău et al., 2021; Pauluszak et al., 2021).

Figure 3. The Adaptive Process of Resilience with Shareholder Framework

The Adaptive Process of Resilience with Shareholders Framework (Figure 3) builds off the Resilience Shareholders Framework (Figure 1) to better depict resilience as a process. Each shareholder (individual, organization, and community) is connected by a black arrow, showing how resilience from one shareholder contributes to another. The blue arrow shows the “how” or the process that nonprofits are contributing to community resilience; the blue arrow only goes one direction, unlike the other arrows in the figure. It is the “how,” the process, and the work of nonprofits to build and contribute to community resilience. The red arrows show “bounce back” and “bounce forward” in both directions as part of the resilience process.

The adoption of the “bounce back” or “bounce forward” approach has advantages and disadvantages; however, when looking at the sample, the literature published in the last few years shows that bouncing forward is a better approach to building resilience. While these approaches may be an active decision through management and strategic planning, I do not think a baseline recovery is always possible. It is also critical to remember that strategic planning is a double-edged sword, as strategic plans can be constraining when they are being followed conservatively. Other times there could be a need to throw out any strategic plan all together calling for innovation. Disturbances provide unique circumstances that require the organization to innovate and transform in its attempt to survive and thrive.

Nonprofit organizations could benefit from surveying their financial and social assets. By identifying these assets internally or having a third party assist in the process, nonprofits can identify the tools in their toolkit that can be strategically used during crises. Community asset mapping is a tool used to collect information about the strengths and resources of a community and can help uncover solutions. Community asset mapping is utilized in public health and education policy, where the goal is to improve the community (Lou et al., 2022). Asset mapping is helpful when you want to start a new program, make program decisions, or mobilize and empower a community (Lou et al., 2022). An advantage of asset mapping is that it promotes community involvement, ownership, and empowerment, which is a strong point for nonprofit organizations. Community asset mapping can be applied and translated to nonprofit organizations to prioritize resilience.

Based on this systematic review, an asset I believe we should explore is how organizations may have resilience, mainly because people are resilient by nature. Missions have a role in an organization's resilience because they can be more strategic through management and leadership. We must remember that organizations are made up of people; without their values and morals, the work that brings missions alive would not be possible. Collaborative efforts and coalitions with other organizations are crucial to building resilience to expand our relationships and social capital. Resiliency is an individual personality trait, whereas resilience is a process (Bonilla, 2015).

Conclusion

Disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters are increasingly putting pressure on nonprofit organizations to join forces in solving social and humanitarian problems. Their role as primary actors in the communities devastated by disasters makes them especially important to understand when trying to grasp resilience from an organizational perspective.

This study contributes to both research and practice, first by highlighting the role of resilience in the nonprofit sector in the literature by building on the work of Carlson et al.'s (2012) literature review on resilience. The analysis also supports the argument for a more unified or standardized approach to defining resilience. We need consistency and an understanding of the definition to measure resilience and develop a way to increase resilience. Literature published in the past three years is becoming more consistent with using themes and terms around the definition of resilience.

This study provides insights to practitioners on when managers should consider short-term and long-term recovery plans and how to build a surplus beyond financial means. For some nonprofit organizations, short-term goals are only obtainable based on internal and external variables. External forces like disasters and disturbances show us just how resilient some nonprofit organizations can be in the short term through creative thinking, optimism, and entrepreneurial spirit. Future research should examine the organizational choices or changes due to external or internal forces. This will help to understand the organization's priorities and mindsets when experiencing these forces. You might hypothesize that these new experiences and perspectives will require a short- or long-term change. Asking about short-term impacts can help identify the organization's immediate priorities. At the same time, long-term impacts tend to require more reflection and are sometimes not as apparent in the moment.

Future research areas could include the interchangeability with terms such as sustainability and recovery. In trying to define resilience understanding the terms at the practice level will help us to understand if there are differences. This research could be better supported by the emergency management and disaster response literature, which is present in this analysis but not at a level to support the distinction in this analysis. Another area for future research is specific organizational assessment tools that nonprofits could adapt or employ from other disciplines. The literature offers asset mapping as one tool, but exploring others to frame resilience from an organizational perspective is unclear. Lastly and more abstractly, the concerns around resilience as a buzzword; there are dangers and concerns regarding buzzwords in both policy and practice. A comparison of use in policy and practice might spark stakeholders to ask: Is resilience the word we want to use? Or should we use resilience in this way?

When managers think of resilience as a process and a verb in their organizations, they can build it into their daily practices. We cannot cite or call for resilience without a robust comprehension of its meaning in the context. If we can agree that resilience is a process and

is only possible through the work of individuals first and second organizations, we can continue to work towards strengthening our frameworks and theories of analysis.

Disclosure Statement

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Author Biographies

Grace De Oro is a graduate of the University of Maryland Baltimore County's School of Public Policy where she completed this research and defended her dissertation in July of 2024 titled, *Bouncing Forward: Exploring Nonprofit Resilience through Emergency Management*. Grace works in higher education supporting students in historically minority groups and first-generation college students. She designed and instructed a first-year seminar in Fall of 2024 based on her dissertation research and this article on resilience.