

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0506

Mon 06 Dec 2021

12:55 - 13:15

An Empirical Exploration of the Judgement and Evaluation of Resilience of Job Seekers in the Graduate Labour Market

Ciaran Burke¹, Tracy Scurry²

¹*UWE , Bristol, United Kingdom* ²*Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom*

Research Domain: Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

Abstract: Despite conceptual and methodological ambiguity, individuals are increasingly being evaluated for resilience in the context of education and employment. Organisations have a clear interest in evaluating and selecting graduates who are seen to have a capacity for resilience (ISE, 2019), yet there is limited evidence of whether they should and how this might be achieved (Britt et al., 2016). Whilst there is increased focus on higher education institutions' responsibility to develop resilience, there is limited exploration of employers' understandings of resilience and how they assess, measure and evaluate resilience in the recruitment and selection of graduates (Burke and Scurry, 2019). Drawing on semi-structured interview data from individuals involved in the recruitment, selection and/or management of recent graduates, we apply Bourdieu's (1977) structural constructivist lens to develop a multi-level framework that unpacks the process of evaluating graduate resilience from the employer's perspectives and practices.

Paper: Employers are increasingly citing resilience as "an essential quality for young people to have – to be able to cope with set-backs and criticism to be motivated to overcome obstacles, and to stay calm under pressure" (UCAS, 2018). In addition, there is an increasing emphasis on the need for graduates to demonstrate their potential resilience as a future employee with employers highlighting concern about a lack of resilience in entry-level hires (ISE, 2019). This is rooted in notions of the 'resilient employee' who is able to contribute to the overall resilience and success of the organisation (Bouaziz and Hachicha, 2018). As such, 'stronger' or higher levels' of student/graduate resilience is positioned as helping graduates adapt to challenging labour markets and secure employment. This positioning is not without its critics, and concerns have been raised over the potential for a 'deficit approach' to emerge -which values certain dispositions or traits above others without recognising wider structural inequalities and the need to develop appropriate resources (Stevenson, 2016).

Britt et al., (2016) highlight that, despite conceptual and methodological ambiguity, individuals are increasingly being evaluated for resilience in in the context of education and employment for purpose of development, support and evaluation. They argue that despite a clear interest from organisations in evaluating and selecting individuals who are seen to have a capacity for resilience

or are able to demonstrate resilience, there is limited evidence of whether they should and how this might be achieved.

Existing research highlights the range of factors which might shape an individual's capacity and ability to demonstrate resilience ranging from personal attributes and experiences, family, organisational and community factors (Britt et al., 2016; Schafer et al., 2009) yet dominant approaches to evaluation focus on individual assessment of personality traits. Much of the focus has been on occupations and professions seen to require high levels of resilience such as medics, police investigators and teachers (Fyhn et al., 2016). In these contexts, studies recommend adopting testing approaches during selection which focus on identifying individual characteristics and traits associated with being able to adapt to adversity and 'be resilient'.

Moving beyond often-agentic definitions of resilience and focus on personal traits, there is an increased focus on how resilience can be 'built' or developed (Jackson et al., 2007; McAllister and McKinnon, 2009). In a review of resilience interventions in the workplace, Robertson et al., (2015) argue that many attempts to measure and evaluate resilience use related yet distinct constructs (coping, recovery etc) which fail to capture the dynamic process of resilience over time and space. In addition, calls have been made for research that explores wider cross sections of workers and occupations – including those in precarious employment (Britt et al., 2016).

In recent years there has been an increased focus on higher education institutions responsibility to develop programmes and learning environments that promote resilience with a view to preparing students for the future of work. However, there is limited exploration of employers' understandings of resilience and how they assess, measure and evaluate resilience in the recruitment and selection of graduates (Burke and Scurry, 2019). Like other elements of graduate employability, resilience needs to be confirmed and endorsed by gatekeepers (Jenkins, 2014; Holmes, 2015) who, as existing research has shown, often reproduce the status quo and value particular forms of capital over others (Brown and Scase, 1994; Ingram and Allen, 2019; Friedman and Laurison, 2020).

This paper will present preliminary findings from a current study which explores how employers, define resilience and support the development of resilience for individuals as they enter and develop in their graduate role. Drawing on data gathered from semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the recruitment, selection and/or management of recent graduates, we unpack the process of evaluating graduate resilience from the employer's perspectives and practices. Through applying Bourdieu's (1977) structural constructivist lens we develop a multi-level framework to examine the judgement and evaluation of graduate resilience by employers. In doing so we contribute to current debates about graduate resilience by highlighting the ways in which the wider structural context shapes how resilience is understood, measured and evaluated and the consequences this may have as individuals seek to signal their resilience to employers during recruitment and selection processes.

References: Bouaziz, F., & Hachicha, Z. S. (2018). Strategic human resource management practices and organizational resilience. *Journal of Management Development*.

- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Britt, T. W., Shen, W., Sinclair, R. R., Grossman, M. R., & Klieger, D. M. (2016). How much do we really know about employee resilience?. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 9(2), 378-404.
- Brown, P. & Scase, R. (1994) *Higher education and corporate realities: Class, culture and the decline of graduate careers*. London: UCL Press.
- Burke, C., & Scurry, T. (2019). *Graduate Resilience: A review of the literature and future research agenda*. SRHE Research Awards.
- Friedman, S. and Laurison, D. (2020) *The class ceiling: Why it pays to be privileged*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Fyhn, T., Fjell, K. K., & Johnsen, B. H. (2016). Resilience factors among police investigators: Hardiness-commitment a unique contributor. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 31(4), 261-269.
- Holmes, L. (2015) "Becoming a graduate: The warranting of an emergent identity", *Education and Training*, 57(2), 291-238.
- Ingram, N. & Allen, K. (2019) " 'Talent-spotting' or 'social magic'? Inequality, cultural sorting and constructions of the ideal graduate in elite professions", *The Sociological Review*, 67(3), 723-740.
- ISE (Institute for Student Employers) (2019) *ISE Development Survey*, Available online: <https://ise.org.uk/page/ISEPublications>
- Jackson, D., Firtko, A. and Edenborough, M. (2007) "Personal Resilience as a Strategy for Surviving and Thriving in the Face of Workplace Adversity: A Literature Review", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 60(1), 1-9.
- Jenkins, R. (2014) *Social identity* (4th ed.) London: Routledge.
- McAllister, M. and McKinnon, J. (2009) "The Importance of Teaching and Learning Resilience in the Health Disciplines: A Critical Review of the Literature", *Nurse Education Today*, 29(4), 371-379
- Schafer, M. H., Shippee, T. P., & Ferraro, K. F. (2009). When does disadvantage not accumulate? Toward a sociological conceptualization of resilience. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift fur Soziologie. Revue suisse de sociologie*, 35(2), 231.
- Stevenson, J. (2016) *Reconceptualising Resilience: Problematising Deficit Discourses*. Presentation available at: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.659638!/file/Reconceptualising_Resilience_-_Prof_Jacqueline_Stevenson.pptx .
- UCAS (2018) "Preparing for Careers the Skills Employers are looking for". (online) available at: https://www.ucas.com/file/130381/download?token=zX_vZu_9