

RETHINKING ACADEMIC RESILIENCE: UNIVERSITY COMMUNITIES IN THE FACE OF A PROLONGED CRISIS

REFLETINDO SOBRE A RESILIÊNCIA ACADÊMICA: AS COMUNIDADES UNIVERSITÁRIAS PERANTE UMA CRISE PROLONGADA

REPLANTEAMIENTO DE LA RESILIENCIA ACADÉMICA: LAS COMUNIDADES UNIVERSITARIAS ANTE UNA CRISIS PROLONGADA



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ABSTRACT: This study develops an integrative framework of university community resilience to prolonged crises based on organisational resilience theory, servant leadership theory, and the educational partnership framework. The research employs theoretical synthesis and conceptual analysis, illustrated by the experience of Ukrainian universities in 2022–2024. The proposed model has three levels, namely, institutional, community, and individual, and four phases: anticipation, coping, adaptation, and transformation. The theoretical contributions of the study include the following: parallel resilience is conceptualised in terms of the ability of a university community to operate simultaneously across several phases of the crisis cycle within the proposed four-phase model; servant leadership is identified as the system-forming mechanism that ensures coherence across all levels of the model; the construct of resourcefulness-as-partnership is presented, as is the fundamental difference between compensatory partnership, which restores lost resources, and generative partnership, which creates new institutional capabilities.

KEYWORDS: Academic Resilience. University Community. Prolonged Crisis. Higher Education.

RESUMO: Este estudo desenvolve um quadro integrativo de resiliência da comunidade universitária a crises prolongadas, com base na teoria da resiliência organizacional, na teoria da liderança servidora e no quadro de parceria educacional. A pesquisa utiliza síntese teórica e análise conceitual, ilustradas pela experiência das universidades ucranianas em 2022–2024. O modelo proposto possui três níveis, a saber, institucional, comunitário e individual, e quatro fases: antecipação, enfrentamento, adaptação e transformação. As contribuições teóricas do estudo incluem o seguinte: a resiliência paralela é conceituada em termos da capacidade de uma comunidade universitária de operar simultaneamente em várias fases do ciclo de crise no modelo de quatro fases proposto; a liderança servidora é identificada como o mecanismo formador do sistema que garante coerência em todos os níveis do modelo; o constructo de engenhosidade-como-parceria é apresentado, assim como a diferença fundamental entre a parceria compensatória, que restaura recursos perdidos, e a parceria generativa, que cria novas capacidades institucionais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Resiliência acadêmica. Comunidade universitária. Crise prolongada. Ensino superior.

RESUMEN: Este estudio desarrolla un marco integrador de resiliencia de la comunidad universitaria ante crisis prolongadas, basado en la teoría de la resiliencia organizacional, la teoría del liderazgo servicial y el marco de asociación educativa. La investigación emplea síntesis teórica y análisis conceptual, ilustrados por la experiencia de las universidades ucranianas en 2022–2024. El modelo propuesto tiene tres niveles, a saber, institucional, comunitario e individual, y cuatro fases: anticipación, afrontamiento, adaptación y transformación. Las contribuciones teóricas del estudio incluyen lo siguiente: la resiliencia paralela se conceptualiza en términos de la capacidad de una comunidad universitaria para operar simultáneamente en varias fases del ciclo de crisis dentro del modelo de cuatro fases propuesto; el liderazgo servicial se identifica como el mecanismo formador del sistema que garantiza la coherencia en todos los niveles del modelo; se presenta el constructo de la ingeniosidad-como-asociación, así como la diferencia fundamental entre la asociación compensatoria, que restaura los recursos perdidos, y la asociación generativa, que crea nuevas capacidades institucionales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Resiliencia académica. Comunidad universitaria. Crisis prolongada. Educación superior.

INTRODUCTION

Long-term crisis is a qualitatively different challenge of higher education institutions in contrast with the acute and short-term emergencies. Shaya et al. (2022), who investigated how universities resisted in the pandemic, discovered that the quality of governance practices and communities as self-organising were the criteria that identified the survival.

UNESCO (2024) lists that the war dropped science spending in Ukraine by over a third (38.55%) in only the first year alone, more than 10,000 scientists were forced to leave their organizations, and a fifth (21%) of higher education institutions were physically damaged or destroyed. This state of affairs, as described by Protsyk (2024), constitutes a sincere resilience test of the overall Ukrainian higher education system throughout its acculturation into the European Higher Education Area.

Although there is currently an increasing amount of literature on the topic of university resilience, there remain three major gaps in the literature. To start with, the majority of conceptual models of resilience, such as the popular conceptualization of Duchek (2020), is designed with an acute, rather short-term crisis in mind and fails to consider the peculiarities of the chronic uncertainty. Second, scholarly resilience is researched on a predominantly individual level as a psychological trait of students or academic personnel; the community aspect, where values, trust and collective identity are developed, is theoretically underdeveloped. Third, the armed conflict context is also highly underrepresented in the global literature: Błaszczuk et al. (2025) mention they are one of the first to document the adaptive practices of Ukrainian universities in wartime in a systematic manner. Hill-Berry and Burris-Melville (2025) point to a parallel gap that lacks integrative theoretical models of integrating leadership, community and resourcefulness in a single conceptual framework.

Based on these gaps, the objective of this article is to develop an integrative conceptual framework for analysing academic resilience in university communities under conditions of prolonged crisis, with particular attention to the Ukrainian higher education experience during 2022–2024. The article focuses on resilience not as an isolated psychological trait or as a set of emergency measures, but as a multi-level educational and organisational process that connects institutional governance, community solidarity, individual agency, and external partnerships.

To achieve this objective, the study combines targeted literature review, conceptual analysis, and theoretical synthesis. Organisational resilience theory, servant leadership theory, the notion of the university as a community, and the educational partnership framework are brought together to construct a three-tier model composed of institutional, community, and

individual levels, and a four-phase crisis cycle composed of anticipation, coping, adaptation, and transformation. The analysis is illustrated by studies and reports on Ukrainian universities in wartime, which make it possible to examine how resilience is sustained through leadership, trust, digitalisation, academic integrity, and compensatory or generative partnerships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of the research is structured in five conceptual clusters, namely, academic resilience, servant leadership, digitalisation of education, academic integrity, and university social responsibility and partnership. Hill-Berry and Burris-Melville (2025) define leadership, resourcefulness, and community as three not well-integrated dimensions of university crisis resilience, and Hollands et al. (2024) predict the role of trust culture and distributed leadership. Trevisan et al. (2024) and Nguyen and Tuamsuk (2024) define digitalisation and academic integrity. Partnership was introduced as the fifth cluster based on OECD (2022, 2023) data, which states that external collaboration is the central practice of compensating lost internal resources in Ukrainian higher education institutions during 2022–2024.

Hollands et al. (2024) determined that organisational resilience is not a fixed property but a dynamic process created through the interplay of anticipative, adaptive, and learning processes. Bartusevičienė et al. (2021) showed that institutions which preserved academic continuity depended mostly on the existing social relationships within the community. Kurapov et al. (2026) registered high rates of anxiety and burnout, but also reported that the sense of belonging to the university remained a stabilising factor.

Adams et al. (2025) found that almost all existing studies on servant leadership in higher education have been conducted in conditions of stability, and there are virtually no studies on the role of servant leadership in crisis scenarios, especially in the case of armed conflict.

Trevisan et al. (2024) established that digitalisation is increasingly comprehended not only as a technological but also as an organisational and cultural transformation. Hashim et al. (2022) prove that sustainable digital transformation must be combined with the social responsibility and resilience of the university, warning that digitalisation without a value framework is likely to erode academic integrity in times of crisis.

Nguyen and Tuamsuk (2024) determined that online education has been one of the risk variables in academic honesty. According to Lavrysh et al. (2022), upholding academic

standards in the state of chaos was perceived by Ukrainian academics as a deliberate ethical choice and a form of institutional resistance.

As for social responsibility and partnership, OECD (2023) notes that universities keeping a lively social mission during the crisis tend to have better metrics of both operational resilience and social legitimacy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a theoretical study that is based on four scientific methods combined.

Targeted literature review was employed to construct the source base. The search in peer-reviewed databases (Scopus and Web of Science) was focused on the following key descriptors: academic resilience, servant leadership in higher education, university community, prolonged crisis, digitalisation of education, academic integrity, and resourceful learning environments, with the search results being restricted to the period 2018–2025. The analysis used 28 peer-reviewed sources and analytical reports by UNESCO (2024), OECD (2022, 2023), and UNICEF (2023), as the primary sources of data on the situation in Ukrainian higher education in the time of war.

The conceptual analysis was involved to explain the limits and relationship between some major constructs: resilience and sustainability, servant leadership and transformational leadership, and community and organisation. This guaranteed internal consistency of the proposed model and avoided conceptual overlaps that are a characteristic feature of the available literature.

Theoretical synthesis allowed incorporating four conceptual traditions, namely servant leadership theory (Eva et al., 2019), organisational resilience theory (Williams et al., 2017; Duchek, 2020), the philosophy of the university as community (Tierney & Lanford, 2018), and the idea of resourceful learning environments into one three-tier and four into a unified three-tier, four-phase model in which causal relationships among constructs are explicitly established.

Heuristic validity of the model was tested through comparative conceptual analysis mapping the structural logic of the model with publications about Ukrainian university practice in 2022–2024 (Khilkovska et al., 2025; Kurapov et al., 2026; Lavrysh et al., 2022; Protsyk, 2024). These sources are not an empirical foundation in a strict methodological sense but only conceptual drawings.

The study information base includes 28 peer-reviewed articles of Scopus and Web of Science, four analytical reports of international organisations (UNESCO, OECD, UNICEF), and a monograph chapter and research publications that describe the experience of Ukrainian universities in the armed conflict.

RESULTS

A Model of Integrative Academic Resilience of the University Community

The model is based on three complementary conceptual traditions in terms of the theoretical background. To begin with, Williams et al. (2017) proposed the concept of organisational resilience as a dynamic process that involves the three consecutive steps, namely, anticipation, coping, and adaptation. This three-phase reasoning was applied to the university level and augmented with a fourth step—transformation which is unique to the institute that is not run in conditions of short-term shock but on the basis of long-term crisis. Second, based on 55 in-depth interviews with the leaders of the U.S. institutions of higher learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Liu et al. (2022) showed that the ability of leaders to maintain consensus on values among the community in the conditions of the failure of the external support structures is the core mechanism of institutional resilience. Third, comparing the strategies of Ukrainian universities during the armed conflict as examined by Khilkovska et al. (2025) revealed that the unity in operation of the institution was significantly higher when the governance was characterised by a distributed leadership with the introduction of a clearly formulated mission than when governance was strictly centralised.

Table 1 demonstrates the structural logic of the model: every institutional, community, and individual level has its resilience mechanisms, although all the three levels are interdependent and work together as a whole system.

Table 1.

Three-Tier Model of Integrative Academic Resilience of the University Community

Level	Key Actors	Resilience Mechanisms	Indicators
Institutional	University leadership	Servant leadership strategy; digital infrastructure; crisis protocols	Continuity of the educational process; preservation of academic integrity
Community	Faculties, departments, student associations	Value consensus; horizontal communication; inter-institutional partnership	Level of intra-community trust; activity of partnership networks
Individual	Academic staff, students, administrators	Psychological resilience; digital competence; self-organisation	Academic performance; preservation of professional identity

Note. Developed by the authors based on Williams et al. (2017), Liu et al. (2022), and Khilkovska et al. (2025).

At the institutional level, the concept of resilience is manifested in the ability of the university leadership to conduct operational decisions within a state of uncertainty without losing the transparency of the communication with the population (Khilkovska et al., 2025).

This finding can be validated by Khilkovska et al. (2025): Ukrainian universities of 2022–2024 were forced to evacuate students at once, switch to distance learning and create new educational programmes, that is, they had to be anticipative, coping, and transformative at the same time. Unlike directive management, servant leadership allows such parallel operation, since it does not concentrate the responsibility in a single decision-making centre but shares the responsibility among the members of the community (Liu et al., 2022).

The structural logic of the model is empirically supported by the experience of Ukrainian universities in 2022–2024. With a 38.55% drop in science spending and physical destruction, UNESCO (2024) documents a 21% drop in 1/5 of institutions of higher education, but most of the universities maintained the academic year, which suggests that institutional resilience was a function of non-material resources, not material reserves. Kurapov et al. (2026) note a high level of anxiety and burnout among the staff and students and a stable sense of institutional belonging, which represents the compensatory mechanisms of the community level noted in the model. A further example of the level of stress at the individual level is shown by the results of PISA 2022 (UNICEF Ukraine, 2023) where Ukraine is in the second place among 42 participating countries on the indicator of student stress resilience.

Servant Leadership as a System-Forming Factor of Academic Resilience

According to Eva et al. (2019), the idea of servant leadership conceptualized by them in their systematic review of the area is characterized by a stable focus on the requirements of the followers instead of the demands of the position of the authority. These dimensions turn out to be functionally essential in the situation of uncertainty and crisis when the crumbling of formal leadership frameworks makes leaders depend on the trust of relationships instead of the hierarchy.

When applied to the Ukrainian case, Savrasova-Viun et al. (2025) demonstrate that servant leadership as a factor of sustainable community development can bring about three intersecting effects, namely, the consolidation of collective identity based on shared values, the

mobilization of distributed agency among community members, and the establishment of what the authors call relational resilience.

Based on these two theoretical contributions, Table 2 gives a comparative study of servant leadership dimensions and their functional roles in the proposed model of integrative academic resilience.

Table 2.

Servant Leadership Dimensions and Their Functions within the Model of Integrative Academic Resilience

Servant Leadership Dimension	Function in Crisis Conditions	Level of the Resilience Model
Empowering and developing others	Activates distributed decision-making; reduces dependence on centralised authority	Institutional / Community
Humility	Sustains psychological safety within the community; prevents leadership paralysis	Community / Individual
Authenticity	Maintains trust and value consensus under conditions of uncertainty	All levels
Interpersonal acceptance	Supports the psychological resilience of staff and students	Individual / Community
Providing direction	Preserves institutional mission clarity during structural disruption	Institutional
Stewardship	Protects shared academic and ethical norms	Institutional / Community
Creating value for the community	Activates partnership networks; strengthens social responsibility	Community / Institutional

Note. Dimensions of servant leadership adapted from Eva et al. (2019), functional analysis developed by the authors in relation to the three-tier resilience model.

Savrasova-Viun et al. (2025) empirically support this step-specific logic by showing that the leaders within the community in Ukrainian institutional settings who demonstrated behaviours of servant leadership in the acute post of the conflict were much more successful in maintaining collective functioning than those who switched to directive or transactional leadership styles.

This finding supports the main assertion of the model servant leadership is not an added value aspect of good crisis management, but the indispensable system-established element that will turn a university community out of the long-term crisis changed, or just shrunk.

Resourcefulness through Partnership as a Mechanism of Academic Resilience

When crisis causes a university to exhaust its internal resources, both financial, human, and infrastructural, the only mechanism that can be used to maintain the functionality of an institution is the active production of external resources by partnership. OECD (2022) notes

that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine created a dramatic disruption of higher education: universities simultaneously lost physical infrastructure, displaced students and personnel, and lost domestic sources of funding. Higher education establishments in Ukraine built resilience by actively establishing an external collaboration web: the mass development of academic agreements with European universities, mobilisation of international funding via EU grant programmes, and the introduction of free digital learning platforms by international technology companies (OECD, 2022).

Meanwhile, Ukraine was the second out of the 42 countries in the PISA scorecard of student resistance to stress. Even the fact that this assessment could take place is a direct testament to being resourceful by way of partnering (UNICEF Ukraine, 2023).

Kravets and Slobodanyuk (2024) show that partnership in education is not a simple distribution of resources but a production process that generates new educational possibilities: long-term collaboration creates co-creation of new educational material, shared professional competencies, and institutional networks of trust that act in the long term even after the end of a given project.

Based on these three sources, Table 3 includes a typology of the forms of partnership and their role in academic resilience at different levels of the proposed model. The difference between the compensatory and generative partnership lies in the conceptual logic of Evenseth et al. (2022) who distinguish between reactive resilience that restores what has been lost and the proactive resilience that forms new organisational capabilities.

Table 3.

Typology of Partnership Forms and Their Contributions to Academic Resilience

Partnership Type	Primary Partners	Resource Generated	Level of Resilience Model	Example from Ukrainian Context
Academic mobility partnership	Foreign universities, European networks	Human capital; knowledge transfer	Institutional / Individual	Joint degree programmes; staff and student exchange during displacement
Research partnership	International research organisations, foundations	Financial resources; scientific continuity	Institutional	Continuation of research projects through international grants
Digital infrastructure partnership	EdTech organisations, IT companies	Technological resources; platform access	Institutional / Community	Free access to learning management systems; donated hardware
Civic partnership	NGOs, community organisations, local authorities	Psychological support; logistical resources	Community / Individual	Student welfare programmes; shelter and relocation support

Policy partnership	OECD, UNESCO, EU institutions	Normative frameworks; legitimacy	Institutional	Alignment with EHEA standards; international quality assurance
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Note. Developed by the authors based on OECD (2022), UNICEF Ukraine (2023), and Kravets and Slobodianyuk (2024).

Table 3 shows that partnership creates qualitatively new forms of resources based on the partner and the level of the resilience model at which it is functioning. Imperatively, none of the types of partnerships is adequate by itself: academic mobility partnerships can replenish human capital but not the psychological support that civic partnerships offer, whereas policy partnerships can create normative legitimacy but fail to realize technological infrastructure requirements of disrupted institutions.

Another theoretical input of this part is the difference between compensatory and generative partnership. Kravets and Slobodianyuk (2024) show that the generative partnership is more lasting and leads to better long-term resilience than the compensatory one, which is exactly the reason why it is able to change the institution but not to restore it to its pre-crisis position.

The combination of the three constituents of the model integrative academic resilience, servant leadership as system-forming factor, and resourcefulness through partnership comprises an organic theoretical framework that encompasses both the structural and the relationship aspect of university community resilience in the case of long-term crisis.

DISCUSSION

The three-phase model of Williams et al. (2017) is extended by the introduction of a transformation phase. The parallel resilience concept also tackles a gap that is not recognized by other frameworks. Riggio and Newstead (2023) note that a successful crisis leader must be able to sustain multiple strategic horizons at the same time, which explicitly proves the rationality of parallel resilience.

Tierney and Lanford (2018) develop a compelling argument that university culture is not the consequence but rather the core of how the community members perceive the crisis events, how the responsibility is shared, and which values are utilized to make a decision in uncertain situations. Well-established universities that show high resilience are not necessarily those that have a better crisis response plan, but those whose culture is an infrastructure of resilience (Tierney & Lanford, 2018).

A large-scale systematic review and network analysis of the literature on servant leadership by Canavesi and Minelli (2022) have determined that the style of leadership is systematically linked to the increased levels of organisational trust, psychological safety, and readiness to change all of which are the most lacking qualities in a crisis situation. Interestingly enough, Canavesi and Minelli (2022) report the lack of research that would test the role of servant leadership in the context of institutional crisis, which is precisely the aspect that is bridged by the current study by incorporating the given construct into the scholarly model of resilience. As shown by Riggio and Newstead (2023), transactional leadership, which works in a stable environment, becomes ineffective in crisis situations due to the destruction of the exchange structures on which it operates, whereas servant leadership reverses this process by adjusting the institutional reaction to community demands, which is much more resilient in the face of a sustained crisis.

Evenseth et al. (2022) show that organisational resilience constructed based on reactive mechanisms is susceptible to future crises as compared to resilience constructed with the help of proactive organisational learning. The implications of this finding have a directly practical consequence to the university crisis policy: investments in generative partnerships are to be perceived not as expenditures of crisis periods, but as investments in institutional resilience in the long run.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this article was to develop an integrative framework for understanding academic resilience in university communities during prolonged crises. This objective was achieved by articulating organisational resilience, servant leadership, university community, and educational partnership into a single analytical model. The proposed framework clarifies that academic resilience is not limited to maintaining classes during disruption; it refers to the capacity of the university community to preserve its educational mission, academic integrity, internal trust, and capacity for transformation while operating under sustained uncertainty.

The analysis shows that resilience depends on the interaction of three levels: the institutional level, where governance, digital infrastructure, crisis protocols, and strategic decision-making are organised; the community level, where value consensus, horizontal communication, and partnership networks sustain collective functioning; and the individual level, where students, academic staff, and administrators mobilise psychological resilience,

digital competence, and self-organisation. In prolonged crises, these levels do not operate sequentially or independently. Their simultaneous activation explains the concept of parallel resilience, understood as the ability of a university community to anticipate, cope, adapt, and transform at the same time.

Servant leadership emerges as the central mechanism that connects these levels and phases. Its importance lies in the production of relational resources, such as trust, mutual support, shared responsibility, and clarity of mission, which are especially necessary when formal structures and material resources are weakened. In this sense, leadership is not treated as a merely administrative function, but as a pedagogical and organisational practice that sustains the community and allows it to continue learning, teaching, researching, and making decisions under crisis conditions.

The study also indicates that partnership is not a secondary or external factor, but one of the main ways in which universities remain academically functional during prolonged crisis. Compensatory partnerships restore lost resources, such as infrastructure, mobility opportunities, technological access, and financial support. Generative partnerships go further by creating new institutional capabilities, including shared programmes, international research networks, innovative digital environments, and new standards of academic cooperation. The community dimension, which appears throughout the model, is therefore not an additional variable: it is the space in which leadership, resourcefulness, digitalisation, and academic integrity become educationally meaningful.

The practical implication of the model is that university leaders and education policy makers can use it to diagnose institutional vulnerability, organise crisis strategies, evaluate partnership programmes, and design support policies that go beyond emergency funding. At the same time, the study is limited by its theoretical and conceptual design, since the Ukrainian experience is used as an illustrative case rather than as the basis for a full empirical validation. Future research should test the model in different institutional contexts, compare universities affected by distinct types of crisis, and examine how the community factor contributes to long-term educational continuity, institutional transformation, and academic quality.

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