

Resilience as a core capability

Rethinking leadership in times of continuous uncertainty

In a GenAI-driven world where uncertainty is structural, resilience is no longer a defensive capability. It is a core leadership competency, shaping how organizations make decisions, adapt, and perform amid constant change.

When uncertainty becomes structural: why resilience matters

Generative AI as a systemic disruptor in an increasingly uncertain environment

Organizations today operate in an environment of persistent structural uncertainty. Geopolitical tensions, macroeconomic volatility, regulatory change and rapid technological advancement overlap and reinforce one another, fundamentally reshaping the conditions of corporate decision-making. Uncertainty is no longer an exception – it has become a defining feature of the current economic landscape.

In this context, the development of artificial intelligence takes on particular significance. Given the rapid pace of development in recent years, generative AI (GenAI) does not act as an isolated technological innovation but as a systemic disruptor. It accelerates market shifts and reshapes existing business models, working patterns and competitive dynamics, thereby intensifying uncertainty both in the speed and scale of change.

For executive leaders and board members, a central leadership question is coming into focus: **How can organizational steering and decision-making capability be maintained under conditions of sustained uncertainty?** This is not an operational detail but a matter that demands deliberate choices at the level of governance, operating model and leadership logic.





Why traditional transformation approaches are no longer sufficient

The core potential of GenAI lies less in individual efficiency gains than in its ability to challenge fundamental organizational assumptions. Client expectations, competitive dynamics and value-creation mechanisms are evolving in parallel and with increasing interdependence. This momentum puts pressure on classical transformation approaches – typically based on the assumption of a stable target state. In the past, the Target Operating Model (TOM) was defined, implemented and subsequently stabilized. Yet the target state rarely remains stable in an AI-dominated environment. Assumptions about markets, technologies and capabilities are changing faster than traditional transformation cycles. As a result, the “target” in TOM is itself moving.

Rethinking transformation: continuous, business model-focused innovation

Under these conditions, transformation can no longer be understood as a time-bound project with a stable end state. Instead, it becomes a continuous process of business model-focused renewal under dynamically changing conditions.

In an environment of sustained uncertainty, resilience becomes the decisive success factor of effective business transformation. Yet the traditional understanding of resilience – focused on returning to a stable baseline – falls short under these conditions. When business models and value creation logics must be continuously reassessed and adapted, what becomes critical is the ability to manage ongoing change effectively while maintaining operational performance. Resilience thus becomes the connective link between uncertainty and continuous transformation – and a key capability in an era of permanent, technology-driven renewal.

“Resilient organizations don’t seek stability; they seek viability amid uncertainty.”

Resilience as a key capability of continuous business transformation

Organizational and individual resilience: same term, different levels

Resilience is often discussed at the individual and personal level. Mental robustness, stress management and psychological stability are undoubtedly important prerequisites for remaining capable of action in uncertain environments. However, they are not sufficient to explain organizational resilience.

Organizational resilience is not the sum of individual personal traits. It emerges from the interaction of structures, decision processes, resource allocation mechanisms, incentive systems and shared interpretive frames. An organization may consist of highly engaged, psychologically resilient individuals – and still be fragile if decision-making is slow, responsibilities are unclear, or resources are optimized to the limit.

This makes resilience a property of the operating model, not merely a people-related issue. Individual resilience can temporarily compensate for organizational weaknesses, but it does not replace the need for organizational resilience.

Resilience as a meta-competence – anticipate, cope, adapt

A useful way to conceptualize organizational resilience is to view it as a meta-competence consisting of three closely interconnected components (see Ducheck, 2020).

The first is **anticipation**. Resilient organizations are able to detect relevant signals early and regularly challenge their own assumptions. In an AI-driven environment, this means not treating technological development as an isolated IT topic, but systematically considering its implications for business models, talent strategies, governance and competitive logics.

The second component is the ability to **cope** with acute uncertainty. When challenges materialize, the ability to make decisions with incomplete information becomes critical. Organizations that wait for completeness, consensus or perfection lose valuable time and room to maneuver. Resilience manifests in clear decision architectures, defined accountability and the ability to set priorities under pressure.

The third component is **adaptation**. Sustainable resilience emerges from the ability to learn from experience and to deliberately adjust structures, processes and priorities. Organizations that institutionalize learning are able not only to absorb change, but to translate it into long term strength.

Mindset as the critical bottleneck

Structures, processes and technologies can be changed relatively quickly. Mindsets cannot. This is precisely why mindset becomes the critical bottleneck of organizational resilience.

Mindset shapes how uncertainty is interpreted: as an anomaly to be eliminated as quickly as possible, or as a permanent condition that can be actively shaped. It influences how organizations deal with failure, experimentation and the willingness to challenge established assumptions. Especially in the context of AI, mindset determines whether initiatives remain limited to incremental efficiency gains or serve as catalysts to fundamentally rethink how work and value creation are organized.

How resilience is fostered systemically

Resilience cannot be mandated. It emerges through consistent experiences in day-to-day organizational practice. Organizations strengthen resilience when they provide guidance without promising certainty and when they enable experimentation without diluting accountability. Resilience grows where learning is systemically embedded rather than dependent on individual engagement. Resource allocation plays a decisive role in this context. Adaptability requires capacity, buffers and slack – elements that must not be fully consumed by efficiency objectives.

In many organizations, efficiency has become the dominant management metric over recent years. Processes have been streamlined, resources systematically utilized at full capacity, redundancies eliminated and decisions optimized for economic efficiency. In stable environments, this paradigm has contributed significantly to performance improvements.





However, management research shows that rigorous efficiency optimization under sustained uncertainty can increase organizational fragility (see BCG Henderson Institute, 2020). What reduces costs and cycle times in the short term simultaneously erodes buffers, constrains flexibility and weakens the organization's ability to respond effectively to unexpected developments. Organizations that operate permanently at their limit lose their capacity to respond to surprises or to open up new development paths.

Efficiency becomes the opponent of resilience when it is elevated to the position of sole guiding principle. Against this backdrop, it is not the pursuit of efficiency per se that makes organizations fragile, but the adoption of efficiency as the only leadership logic.

When initiatives – for example in the context of GenAI and other new technologies – are viewed solely through the lens of efficiency and cost reduction, there is a risk that short term optimizations will undermine long term adaptability.

Resilience therefore does not emerge from resolving these tensions, but from consciously managing them: through continual prioritization and explicit decisions about when efficiency should be pursued consistently and when buffers should be preserved or deliberately expanded. Resilience is thus not the result of individual programs or initiatives, but the expression of a multitude of consistent decisions and actions.

Leadership as the cultivator of resilience

If mindset is the bottleneck, then leadership is the tool to expand it. Leadership shapes organizational resilience less through communication than through the decisions it makes: the priorities it sets, the trade-offs it accepts and the resources it deliberately holds in reserve.

In a world of continuous transformation, the core leadership task is no longer merely to manage change, but to sustain performance amid ongoing uncertainty. This means consciously navigating tensions: between stability and renewal, efficiency and redundancy, speed and diligence.

Resilient leadership explicitly takes responsibility for buffers and slack, even when these appear inefficient or unpopular in the short-term. It recognizes adaptability as a strategic asset and designs organizations in a way that allows them to learn continuously, evolve and remain successful under changing conditions.

**“Resilience is neither
a program nor an
initiative. It is a
leadership decision.”**





A final thought: resilience starts with leadership choice

The rapid pace of development in GenAI underscores that uncertainty is not a temporary phenomenon, but a permanent condition of business activity. Transformation, then, is no longer a project, but an ongoing responsibility; resilience is no longer a protective function, but a core leadership capability.

Organizational success in this environment does not hinge on individual initiatives or technologies, but on fundamental leadership decisions about how stability and continuous transformation are balanced. Resilience emerges where leaders consciously embrace tensions rather than eliminate them – between efficiency and buffers, short-term optimization and long-term adaptability.

In a world of continuous transformation, the central leadership challenge is no longer to find the fastest path back to stability. It is to design organizations that remain capable, adaptive and innovative without relying on stable foundations.

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Selected references and further reading

The references below provide additional context for the concepts mentioned and explore the perspectives discussed in the article in greater detail.

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