What makes business organizations resilient? A quantitative survey

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Living in a complex and interconnected environment implies that changes are not incremental and linear but rather discontinuous and abrupt. Business organizations face highly diverse risks which they have to recognize, reflect and handle. Climate change and its consequences reinforce the need for business organizations to find ways of coping with direct and indirect impacts.

Resilience, as the capacity of systems to absorb disturbances and to reorganize without disruption or collapse, is a promising property. Resilience therefore focuses on the conservation of essential functions and structures of a system. The resilience idea therefore implies that the system`s design has to be pro-actively be changed in advance of turbulences or shocks. Criteria for a resilient system`s design can be building feedback mechanisms, diversity as well as redundancies, flexible structures, modularity and buffering capacities. Current writings of resilience within business management literature still lack of certain indicators for resilience. This paper shows results of a quantitative survey of business organizations in the German fish sector. Business organizations in that field illustrate a high level of resilience according to their constantly changing trade and production conditions. In relation to Leibenstein (1966), the fish sector evolved ways to survive while facing abrupt changes and discontinuities. Understanding better how business organizations cope with such challenges, gives relevant stimuli for resilience management research. Considering that business organizations play important roles within society and economy, having more resilient organizations is a key factor towards achieving more resilient societies because these organizations deliver essential functions and structures for society, especially in times of crises.

The aim of the paper is to evaluate how fish enterprises cope with changes and discontinuities. This aim will be addressed by (1) introducing the concept of resilience within business management in comparison to risk management approaches, (2) pointing towards which resilience management concepts exist so far, (3) analyzing the survey results in relation to current resilience management writings. Next, this is used to model first steps for a conceptual resilience-based framework.