

6. ORGANISATIONAL ADAPTATION AND MEASURES TO THE SITUATION CREATED BY THE WAR (ERIKA SERES HUSZÁRIK, BOTOND GÉZA KÁLMÁN AND KITTI HAJMÁSI)

“Europe is the bridgehead of Eurasia, Germany is the model student and closest ally to the USA. At the same time, Ukraine is a key state during the conquest of Eurasia”.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1997⁹

6.1. ADAPTATION

The pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, which broke out in 2019 and has since turned into a global pandemic, has brought a new kind of uncertainty to previously successfully applied labour market practices. Quarantine obligations (Mahmoudi, 2022), closures, home office and factory shutdowns (Beibit et al., 2023) have caused significant damage to the economies of individual nations. Some of the companies survived suffering great (e.g. financial, knowledge, market) losses, while others went bankrupt. Jobs and positions have disappeared, working with personal presence has been replaced by the home office and various hybrid solutions, and at the same time we have witnessed the rapid expansion of flexible forms of work. The labour market actors had to react and adapt to the changed working conditions at the same time, quickly and efficiently. According to various sources, Covid-19 accelerated, rather than disrupted, HR trends that had already started/started (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Parry et al., 2021). Not all companies were equally affected by the global Covid-19 crisis (Dajnoki et al., 2023). Moreover, as we progressed between each virus wave, more and more companies indicated that they had found many new opportunities in this situation (Mura, Fóthy, Pásztóová, 2022;).

Nowadays, at the beginning of 2022, we are living in the period of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which will predictably mean additional economic and social challenges, to which all organizations must respond shortly. It has become clear that companies and workplaces themselves are vulnerable in many ways in their current form. Economic problems and the resulting temporary or permanent production stoppages represent an existential threat to companies, institutions and their employees (Poór et al., 2022). All of this threatens the loss of many jobs (Boiral et al., 2021).

However, it should be noted that the crisis caused by the war also offers an opportunity for individual countries and organizations to rethink their existing strategy. Virág (2020) draws attention to the fact that a state of emergency or war does not only have negative consequences, so it can, for example, contribute to the faster spread of technology that determines the development of the economy.

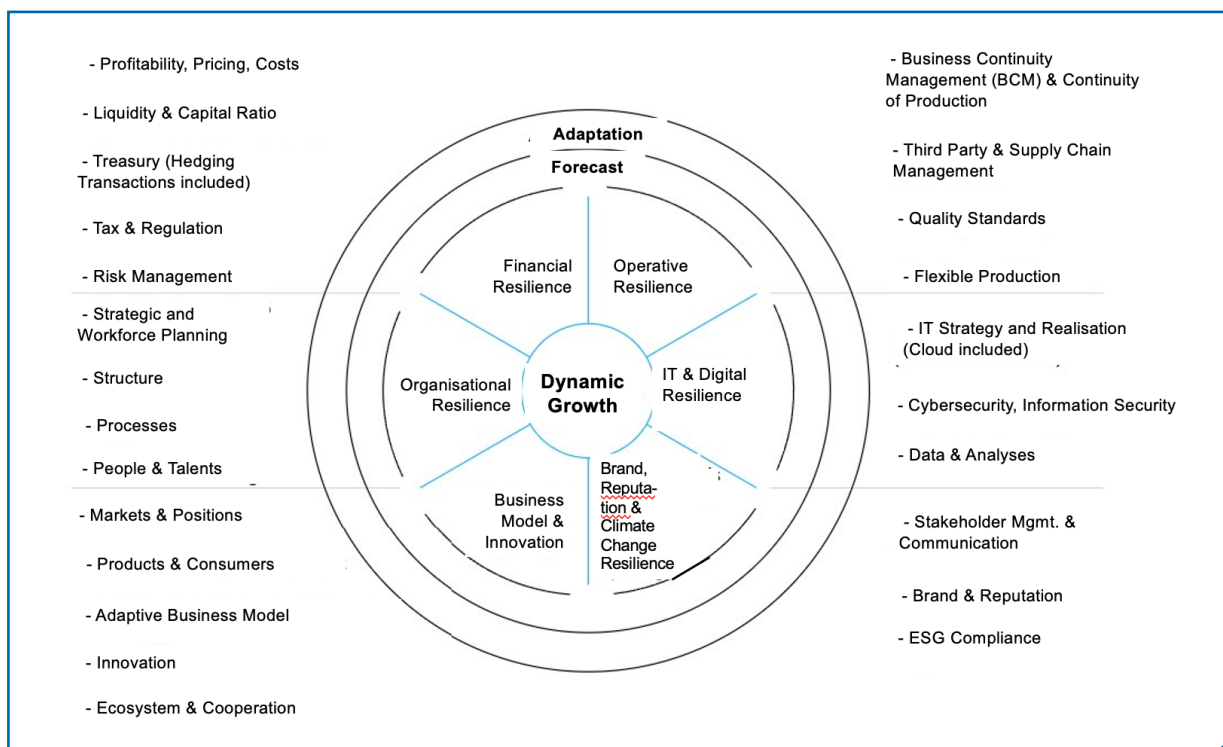
The Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its economic and social consequences presented organizations with new adaptation challenges. These challenges highlight the fact that, going beyond traditional operating models, organizations must find innovative solutions (Virág, 2020), which enable them to respond quickly to changes and minimize the negative effects of crisis situations.

Adaptability and the ability to anticipate future challenges are key to corporate growth and development. In this, both the new generation and the accumulated knowledge capital play an essential role (Malatyinszki 2015;

⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017) American politician of Polish origin who was an advisor to US President Johnson and a national security advisor to US President Jimmy Carter.

2020). Ahlawat et al. (2022) identified six key areas where foresight and adaptation are vital for companies to grow resiliently and be resilient.

Figure 6/1 Adaptation possibilities of organizations



Source: Ahlawat et. al, 2022

Corporate adaptation and the resulting measures can include (Ahlawat et al., 2022) for example more flexible scheduling of the workforce, increased use of digital technologies, further development of remote work and digital work environments, and strengthening of internal communication channels of companies. In addition, companies must examine their supply chain (Goreczky, 2020) and, if necessary, diversify it in order to reduce the risks caused by the war conflict.

In the crisis situation generated by the war situation, companies must not only pay attention to their internal operations, but also emphasize their social role (Mosgaard-Kristensen, 2023). Thus, for example, humanitarian assistance, support for refugees and promoting the integration of labour from war-torn regions can also be important goals. Companies must be prepared to take an active role in post-war recovery processes, thus helping economic and social regeneration. This may include developing sustainable operational strategies, strengthening social responsibility and expanding cooperation with local communities.

Possible positive effects of war-induced labour market changes should also be mentioned, such as increasing the diversity of the workforce, which can bring new perspectives and skills to domestic companies. Furthermore, the acceleration of technological innovation and automation, which can increase productivity and reduce labour shortages in the long term (Poór et al., 2022).

Overall, the need for robotization and the development of industrial production may come into focus even more, and thanks to the spread of working at home, it may lead to the development of a more balanced ratio of private life and work. These steps not only provide help in times of crisis but can also promote the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of companies in a world in which rapid and unpredictable changes will become more and more typical.

In connection with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the question may arise as to whether the war will have an indirect or direct effect on the labour market. Even before the outbreak of the armed conflict, it was possible to hear that, due to the labour shortage in Hungary, a further significant influx of foreign workers was expected, mostly from Ukraine. In this way, the shortage of drivers would mainly be alleviated by the companies dealing with transportation, but also by various manufacturing and processing companies. The process may be accelerated by the war, but it is not yet clear whether men between the ages of 18 and 60 who are under military service can leave the country under Russian attack at all (Nagy, 2022).

There is no doubt that in the case of companies, the ability to quickly adapt and the use of the opportunities offered in connection with the post-war opening become even more important factors than before (Goreczky, 2020). Businesses need new approaches to build resilience in critical times, which includes well-thought-out response to current challenges, anticipating risks and developing adaptability, thereby promoting successful growth (Ahlawat et al., 2022). In this chapter, we are looking for an answer to what tools would be effective and appropriate for domestic business organizations to use to eliminate the negative effects of the war that recently broke out in Ukraine, which is neighbouring our country.

6.2. MEASURES TO MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

During our questionnaire survey, we sought answers to the following few questions on how the negative effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war are judged, and what measures the respondents would consider effective in order to mitigate them. These reactions are partly general (Malatyinszki, 2009) and partly the consequences of the root cause, i.e. the armed conflict.

Table 6/1 Adaptation of the organization to the situation caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war (%)

Organisational adaptation	CZ	HU	SK	Total
Not enough time has passed since February to be able to measure the impact of the situation	18.0%	19.6%	20.7%	19.4%
There is no need to change, this situation did not cause any problems for us, and we can even grow for the time being	41.5%	23.6%	28.0%	28.0%
It is not possible to return to the situation before the war, new solutions must be sought.	18.4%	26.4%	34.8%	25.7%
I do not know	19.4%	26.1%	10.4%	22.7%
Other	2.7%	4.3%	6.1%	4.2%
Total (100%) n=	294	902	164	1360

Source: Authors' own compilation

The data in the above Table 6/1 show how the respondents think about the effects that have appeared since the outbreak of the war and directly affect economic organizations. The obtained results clearly confirm the uncertainty, since 19.4% of the respondents cannot even really see through it or are not aware of the situation and the possible losses, so they cannot even measure its impact on the organization. Another 22.7% chose the 'I do not know' option without explanation. Thus, the proportion of those who are unsure in the entire sample is 42.1%. Examining the individual countries, the proportion of those who are unsure is the highest among

Hungarian respondents (45.7%), and among Czech and Slovak organizations it is smaller and similar (34% on average).

Those who could answer could choose from two answers. The companies that are not affected by the conflict marked the 'No change...' option. This includes organizations that did not have a Russian and/or Ukrainian partner before the outbreak of the fighting and the consequent EU sanctions, and their supply chains were not affected by the changes. Their proportion in the entire sample is 28%. The frequency of respondents in this way is also the same among Slovak companies. This figure is higher than the results of a survey by the Slovak ČSOB bank and the Datank agency, according to which 15% of Slovak companies claim that they have not yet felt the negative impact of the war (Molnár, 2022b). 41.5% of Czech companies and 23.6% of Hungarians felt the same way.

These ratios can be paralleled with geographical conditions. The companies of Hungary and Slovakia, neighbouring the conflict-affected Ukraine, may have a higher proportion of direct business relations with Ukrainian business partners than the Czech Republic, which has no common border. The degree of Hungarian involvement is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in 2023, more than fifty Russian-owned companies were registered in Hungary, mostly business consulting and info-communication micro-enterprises (Dezső, 2023). Since the beginning of the armed conflict, a total of 133 Russian-owned companies have been established in the country (Cseke, 2023). At the same time, before the war, there were nearly 900 businesses in Ukraine owned by private or legal entities or shareholders with Hungarian citizenship (MNK, 2022). At the outbreak of the conflict in February 2022, approximately two thousand Ukrainian and one thousand Russian-owned companies were operating in Slovakia (Molnár, 2022a).

If we focus on those who chose the 'must be changed...' option, their proportion in the entire sample is 25%, which is 3 percentage points lower than the proportion of those not affected. This decrease is clearly a consequence of the responses of Czech companies, as only 18% of them indicated this answer, which is roughly half of the 41.5% of companies not planning to change. In contrast to the Czech data, the proportion of companies forced to change is 3 percentage points higher in Hungary and 6 percentage points higher in Slovakia than those that do not. The Slovak data on this issue also differ significantly from the results of the already mentioned ČSOB-Datank survey, according to which more than half of the Slovak enterprises answered that the war had had a moderate or severe impact on their business so far (Molnár, 2022b).

The next question of the research assessed the range of planned, possible measures, through which the negative effects of the war could be mitigated (Table 6/2) 'What measures are planned to mitigate the negative effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war?' the importance of the possible measures offered in the question could be answered on a five-point Likert scale (1= do not agree at all; 2= rather disagree; 3= neutral; 4= rather agree, 5= completely agree). The average of the scores of the five answers is 3, which is referred to as the theoretical average. The distribution of the averages calculated from the answers by country is described in 6/2. spreadsheet.

In the entire sample, there are four measures that the respondents indicated as more important than the theoretical average:

- » Increasing organizational efficiency (average 3.15)
- » General cost reduction (average 3.10)
- » Measures to help retain key people and talents (average 3.02)
- » More attention to innovation opportunities (average 3.01)

Based on this, it can be said that most people consider increasing organizational efficiency to be the primary task, in which retaining key people and innovation play the main role.

Table 6/2 Average of planned measures to mitigate the negative effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war (%)
(Explanation: 1= do not agree at all; 2= rather disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= rather agree, 5= completely agree)

	What measures are planned to mitigate the negative effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war?	CZ		HU		SK		Total	
		Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
1.	It is not necessary to do anything	2.76	294	2.33	899	2.27	165	2.42	1358
2.	Searching for new procurement alternatives	3.10	292	2.43	901	2.90	164	2.63	1357
3.	Strengthening the supplier network	3.09	293	2.69	899	2.94	162	2.80	1354
4.	Domestic commodity funds, ensuring self-sufficiency	2.76	292	2.52	895	2.74	164	2.60	1351
5.	Maintaining export registration	2.47	291	2.13	896	1.99	164	2.18	1351
6.	Entering new markets	2.74	291	2.45	901	2.57	164	2.53	1356
7.	Increasing organizational efficiency	3.32	290	3.06	898	3.32	163	3.15	1351
8.	Supply chain reorganization	2.69	293	2.36	900	2.68	161	2.47	1354
9.	Stronger automation, introduction of new technologies	2.75	292	2.53	896	2.48	163	2.57	1351
10.	Applying more flexible contracts	2.74	292	2.60	904	2.70	164	2.64	1360
11.	Improving Cybersecurity	2.96	291	2.63	897	2.67	164	2.70	1352
12.	Increasing mental support for employees due to uncertainty	2.95	292	2.68	899	2.75	163	2.75	1354
13.	Revising strategy	2.46	290	2.68	896	3.05	162	2.67	1348
14.	Stronger/renewed marketing activity	2.89	292	2.62	901	2.85	163	2.71	1356
15.	More attention to innovation opportunities	3.10	290	2.96	897	3.10	162	3.01	1349
16.	Rescheduling or postponing investments	2.79	291	2.48	890	3.04	163	2.61	1344
17.	Using business consultants in order to solve organizational/operational problems	2.29	287	2.10	901	2.15	162	2.15	1350
18.	Development, strengthening and increasing the professionalism of HR functions	2.61	291	2.54	899	2.33	163	2.53	1353
19.	Measures to help retain key people and talents	3.12	291	2.98	902	3.06	163	3.02	1356
20.	Launching complex knowledge management programmes	2.50	292	2.40	897	2.25	161	2.40	1350
21.	Rethinking employment conditions	2.76	293	2.55	899	2.66	161	2.61	1353
22.	Starting and strengthening training programmes	2.71	287	2.61	894	2.29	163	2.60	1344
23.	General cost reduction	3.27	292	3.02	900	3.24	162	3.10	1354
24.	Strengthening internal communication	3.14	290	2.93	899	2.98	162	2.98	1351
25.	Other	0.79	160	0.70	399	0.47	68	0.70	627

Source: Authors' own compilation

Unfortunately, however, the general cost reduction nominated in second place has the opposite effect, as savings can mostly be made on wages, investments and fixed costs. That is why it is questionable whether the modern (stimulating development) or the old (restrictive) crisis management actually prevails. Analysing the individual countries, the same four issues were nominated as the most important by Slovak and Hungarian companies. According to respondents in the Czech Republic, the order of importance is somewhat different. Here, innovation was not included among the four most important tasks, its place is occupied by internal communication. One of the four least preferred answers in the entire sample is 'It is not necessary to do anything', for which Czech companies gave the highest score.

Among the most important measures is the retention of key people, which is a typically modern response, highlighting the importance of human resource management, which must be managed not only globally, but also locally (Tésits et al., 2008). The respondents believe that in order to mitigate the negative effects of the war, the main focus should be on retaining key people. Based on the data not included in the table, according to 22.2% of them, this is completely typical), secondly, general cost reduction should be sought (21.7%) and thirdly, the increase in organizational efficiency is considered appropriate (21.1%). The importance of retaining key people also stems from the fact that there has been a labour shortage in Hungary for years, which is only getting worse, as can be seen from a 2018 study (Poór et al., 2018). In addition, it is also clearly visible that a significant number of organizations pay special attention to the mental support of employees (19.7%) in the context of 'Health and safety'. In terms of eliminating the negative effects of the war, the use of business consultants suffered the most serious loss, as 37.2% of the respondents stated that the use of this function is the most indispensable. This is consistent with the low presence of external consultants among the SME players in the region, as Győri and Czakó (2018) found in their previous study. About the same number of people saw the strengthening of the supplier network and possibly the search for new procurement alternatives as clearly expedient (14.8% and 14.6%), while entering new markets (16.3%) and revising the strategy (16.7%), the monitoring of innovation opportunities (17.3%) and the strengthening of internal communication (19.5%) are thought by more people to be particularly effective solutions.

In the case of HR solutions used to deal with the negative effects of war, except for the retention of key people, the general opinion tends to shift towards the opinion that is considered less effective.

In summary, it can be said that based on the answers received, it is not possible to draw a clear conclusion as to what the respondents consider to be a highly effective, less effective, or ineffective solution overall. The obtained results typically prove that business organizations try to deal with the adverse effects of the war situation with unique solutions, which is supported by the almost identical results of the answers to these questions of the questionnaire. This dispersion of the results is also significantly influenced by the fact that more than a third of the respondents (35.5%) believed that not enough time had passed since the outbreak of the war to meaningfully measure the effects occurring during the research period, and during operation can be sensed. In relation to this issue, the best thing to say is that the high level of uncertainty that business organizations experience during their daily operations is almost palpable, and they are constantly trying to find possible solutions to avoid the adverse effects of the war situation. Only time will confirm their effectiveness when the war is over.

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