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Natalia Vershinina, Peter Rodgers

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Natalia Vershinina, Department of Entrepreneurship, Strategy and Innovation, Audencia Business School, Nantes, France

Peter Rodgers, Southampton Business School, Department of Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

# **Self-regulation, micro-foundations and migrant entrepreneurs' capacities for resilience**

## **Abstract**

In this article, using the regulatory focus theory (RFT), we adopt a micro-foundational approach to illuminate how migrant entrepreneurs develop active forms of resilience within a small firm context. Conceptually we showcase how the fusing of individual and organizational interactions enables the enactment of generative resilience capacities. Our empirical study involves a qualitative, interpretative approach encompassing sixty-one interviews with migrant entrepreneurs across three urban centres in the UK. The enactment of resilience capacities is activated through legitimacy building, network building and resource and capability development. Theoretically we underscore the role of accumulated agency, which aids migrant entrepreneurs to overcome existing structural challenges and in doing so, build resilience capacities. Our findings also reveal the temporal nature of resilience capacity building, involving real-time, retrospective and prospective actions. We offer theoretical contributions, practical implications and signpost directions for future research.

**Keywords:** micro-foundations, self-regulation, migrants, entrepreneurs, resilience

## **Introduction**

Some organizations deal successfully with unexpected risks and uncertainties whilst others do not (Fiksel, Polyviou, Croxton, & Pettit, 2015). In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic, a narrative of the critical importance of resilience for individuals and organizations has emerged but nonetheless, resilience remains a fuzzy concept (Martin et al. 2016) and conceptually fragmented across various domains (Linnenluecke, 2017). In management studies, resilience has been studied primarily from the individual (Branzei & Abdelnour, 2010; Dewald & Bowen, 2010) and organizational (Denyer, 2017; Herbane, 2013; 2019) perspectives. Individual resilience literature argues that individuals possess a ‘resource pool’, which enables resilient individuals to prepare for and then deal with stressful situations (Cooper, Flint-Taylor, & Pearn, 2013). Entrepreneurial resilience (Branicki et al., 2018; Chadwick and Raver, 2020; Korber and McNaughton, 2018) is a subset of individual resilience and it reflects the notions of preparedness, persistence, or self-efficacy (Korber and McNaughton, 2018) consistent with entrepreneurial action. As Holland and Shepherd (2013) state, entrepreneurs repeatedly decide to “continue to pursue a previously selected entrepreneurial opportunity” (p. 333). Furthermore, it encompasses the cognitive and behavioral entrepreneurial traits, which foster the ability of entrepreneurs (Brockner et al., 2004) and their firms to adjust to new circumstances (Bernard and Barbosa, 2016; Korber and McNaughton, 2018).

The organizational perspective views resilience as a ‘reaction’ to a crisis or moment of adversity, in which resilience is seen as the capacity for the firm to ‘bounce back’ or the ability to absorb strain with little disruption to the ongoing business operations (Herbane, 2019; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). As such, resilience capacity is a multidimensional characteristic within

organizations, which enables firms both to absorb and respond to unexpected disruptions (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005) as well potentially even benefitting from such events. In this paper, we aim to expand the definition of resilience capacity, broadening its scope from organizational responses of ‘bouncing back’ from crises to accommodate individual level cognitive abilities that enable entrepreneurs to absorb and self-regulate their responses to external events and wider contextual factors. As such, we see resilience capacity as a *generative* capacity, enabling the transfer of individual level capabilities (Brockner et al., 2004) into firm-level resources, skills and competencies, which can be effectively utilized to respond to not only to severe disruptions but also to prosper within ‘everyday’ conditions. Emerging literature underlines the ‘passive’ part of resilience, highlighting individual entrepreneurs engage in preventative forms of self-regulation (Brockner et al., 2014) and how their firms reactively respond to potential areas of risk and then develop strategies to mitigate such risks (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005). Our

interest in this paper is on small firms as a nascent area of scholarly enquiry (Bullough et al., 2014; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Herbane, 2019). Small firms are different from large firms across various dimensions, including organizational culture, structure, resources and governance and suffer from a number of liabilities (Soundararajan et al., 2018). In the case of migrant entrepreneurs, such liabilities are very often amplified owing to factors such as structurally embedded marginalisation in host societies (Vershina et al., 2019). Critically, focusing our attention on small firms, especially migrant entrepreneurial firms, may offer novel insights into our understanding of resilience. Examining how small firms and their founders develop resilience capacities is particularly relevant in the wake of the ongoing COVID19

pandemic and its prolonged influence on the ability of firms to survive and thrive (Kuckertz et al., 2020; Shepherd, 2020).

In spite of the growing recognition of resilience across management fields, hitherto there have been few studies, examining how entrepreneurs develop resilience (Bullough & Renko, 2013; Bullough et al., 2014; Korber & McNaughton, 2018; Manfield & Newey, 2018), bounce back after failure (Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014) and also following crises (Doern, 2016; Herbane, 2019; Lai, Saridakis, Blackburn and Johnstone, 2015; Martinelli et al., 2018). The extant literature presents the ‘resilient capabilities’ argument, underlining that resilient entrepreneurs have higher propensity to act in times of adversity whilst non-resilient entrepreneurs are susceptible to the turbulent environment. Whilst there are debates around entrepreneurial competency development (Bullough et al., 2014) at the individual level, nevertheless, there has been little micro-foundational attention devoted to the concept of resilience capacities from a firm level and crucially, how resilience capacities at the individual level impacts at the firm level.

We adopt the regulatory focus theory (RFT) (Higgins, 1998) and a micro-foundational approach to examine the manifestations of resilience capacities that individual entrepreneurs and their firms accumulate and enact (Felin et al., 2012; Foss and Pedersen, 2016; Korber & McNaughton, 2018; Manfield & Newey, 2018). Taking such an approach enables us to explore the fusing of the individual and organizational levels of resilience capacities, taking into account that individual entrepreneur actions are embedded in a set of formal and informal structures and relationships (Thomas and Ambrosini, 2015). In understanding the interlinked nature of society and entrepreneurs (Lefebvre, 2006), the two constructs of the meso and micro levels and the dynamics between these two spheres form our

understanding of the context (Welter, 2019). Whilst extant literature has focused on the responses of entrepreneurs to crises, we focus on the ‘everyday’ – meaning what migrant entrepreneurs do when they are faced with the challenges of running their firm within a hostile environment with embedded structural constraints and unfavorable externalities. Our research question is: *What are the mechanisms and processes which enable individual level resources, motivations and strategies to transform into resilience capacities at the firm level?*

We answer this question through an in-depth qualitative study of sixty-one migrant entrepreneurs operating in three UK cities. We argue that these migrant entrepreneurs develop resilient capacities anchored in three main mechanisms involving: *legitimacy building* at the level of entrepreneur; *network building* thereby bridging the entrepreneur with his and/or her immediate context; and *resource and capability development* which fuse the individual and firm levels of resilience. In doing so, we develop a number of contributions. First, we extend the existing conceptualisation of resilience capacity by moving beyond the narrow attention given to the situations of crisis from which resilience is derived to focus on multilayered, dynamic and relational nature of resilience capacity. Second, we showcase the mechanisms of how migrant entrepreneurs, disadvantaged not only by running small firms, but also owing to their migrant status, through legitimacy building, network building and resource and capability development. Third, we extend the debates around the interwoven nature of resilience capacities at individual and firm levels, particularly highlighting the critical importance of time and associated strategies built upon past, present and future.

The paper is structured as follows. We first present the debates in entrepreneurship literature on organizational, individual and entrepreneur resilience.

We then outline the relevance of the regulation focus theory (Higgins et al., 1998) and the utility of a micro-foundational approach for our study. Second, we outline the methodological considerations of our study. Following this, we present our findings and then discuss them before drawing conclusions.

### **Organizational, individual and entrepreneur resilience**

Within the extant research, there exists a clear distinction between how resilience is conceptualized at the individual and the organizational levels and also between resilience to everyday challenges and those in respect to extreme events (Muehlfeld et al., 2017; Nisula and Olander, 2020) such as conflict or terrorist attacks (Branicki et al., 2018). However, hitherto, there has been little focus on the mechanisms of how individual resilience fuses with organizational resilience capacity, especially within the context of small, entrepreneurial firms where there is often a blurring between the individual and the firm.

Literature on individual resilience, rooted in the field of positive organizational psychology (Bardoel et al., 2014), sees resilience as an individual attribute, defined as “the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure” (Luthans, 2002 p.702). Two notable contributions to understanding individual resilience are related to sources of resilience; a pool of resilience resources and protective factors. The pool of resilience resources may involve levels of social support available and/or the quality of their personal relationships either in a work setting or externally (e.g. Kossek and Perrigino, 2016; Powley 2009). Such a ‘resource pool’ perspective states that resilient individuals can use these resources to prepare for and then deal with difficult situations when they occur. Connected to this, Bimrose and Heane (2012:339) argue that individuals possess qualities, which serve as protective factors, aiding individuals to navigate



challenging situations. Such protective factors may include self-esteem, self-efficiency, subjective wellbeing and self-determination (Bullough et al., 2014).

Research on resilience at the organizational level finds that there are considerable differences at the firm level in respect to how successful firms deal with and respond to contemporary challenges (Fiksel et al. 2015). Much of the literature here focuses on how firms respond to crisis episodes, examining to what degree firms have the capabilities to ‘bounce back’ or to absorb difficulties to their business operations without major disruptions occurring (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). For the purposes of this article, we define organizational resilience as “the amount of disturbance the organization can absorb before it loses its structure and function” (Linnenluecke and Griffiths, 2012, p.19). The latest thinking on organizational resilience encompasses the ability of the organization to develop dynamic business models and strategies, which can assist proactive responses to crises (Haase and Eberl, 2019), ideally before they even occur (Hamel & Valikangas, 2003), a process Denyer (2017) views as ‘foresight’, ‘insight’, ‘oversight’ and ‘hindsight’. In the field of strategy, these internal activities are presented as organizational strategic ambidexterity (Jansen, George, van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2008; Junni, Sarala, Taras, & Tarba, 2013), strategic flexibility (Bock, Opsahl, George, & Gann, 2012; Hitt, Keats, & DeMarie, 1998) but also include adaptability (Branicki et al., 2018), bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005), improvisation (Balachandra, 2019; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2006), resourcefulness (Powell & Baker, 2011) and coordination (Hayward et al., 2010). All of these in sum may act as resilience capacity of the organization, which “captures its ability to take situation-specific, robust, and transformative actions when confronted with unexpected and powerful events” (Lengnick-Hall and Beck, 2009, p.1). Within this burgeoning

literature, however, to date, the focus has been predominantly on crisis prevention and recovery, whilst failing into account the everyday nature of challenges, brought about by the structural constraints in which disadvantaged groups exist and develop resilience capacities.

Within the field of entrepreneurship, resilience has been examined in the context of firms responding to failure (Jenkins, Wiklund, & Brundin, 2014) as well as firms responding to crises (Doern, 2016; Herbane, 2019) effectively. Formal planning or its absence has been associated with resilience or vulnerability within the small firm context (Corey and Deitch 2011; Spillan and Hough 2003). In addition, some scholars employ the term “entrepreneurial resilience” in order to explain how individual entrepreneurs break rules to proactively deal with challenges their firms face (Kickul & Gundry, 2002) or engage in innovation and value creation (Arend, 2016; Paige & Littrell, 2002). Moreover, resilience research within the field of entrepreneurship underlines the significance of individual competencies (Bullough, Renko, & Myatt, 2014). As such, resilient entrepreneurs possess capabilities and a higher propensity to act (showcasing ‘I can do this’ behaviour) compared to non-resilient individuals, who are quickly discouraged by difficult market conditions (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Such a narrative aligns to classic stereotypes of the entrepreneur as the ‘super-hero’ (Burns, 2001). Whilst the focus on how entrepreneurs run resilient firms in response to adversity and extreme contexts (Baron & Markman, 2000; Bullough & Renko, 2013; Bullough et al., 2014; Markman, Baron, & Balkin, 2005) is relevant, there is an opportunity to better understand the fusing of the individual and organizational resilience capacity especially in the context of entrepreneurial small firms. Whilst resilience capacity is not particularly rare or extraordinary, there is a need to understand the sources and processes that enable

entrepreneurs to develop resilience capacity, particularly at the micro-level, and not only as a response to extreme events but also through the everyday functioning of their business.

### **Regulatory focus theory and a micro-foundational approach to understanding resilience**

Regulatory focus theory (Brockner et al., 2004; Higgins, 1998) explains how people adopt self-regulation behaviour which enables them to bring themselves into alignment with their own goals and motivations. The authors present two types of regulation; *promotion focused* people are driven by their motivations and need for advancement, whilst *prevention focused* people prioritise security and safety needs in a quest to avoid possible losses. Whilst for certain aspects of entrepreneurship, the promotion aspect is necessary, the prevention focus is essential for the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities and their ongoing survival, especially in constrained environments. As such, this theoretical lens may have utility in explaining firm-level resilience capacities, which are derived from the individual motivations and supported by associated resources, which individual entrepreneurs may regulate.

Self-regulation operates as patterns which people develop when they experience a challenge, when they are stressed or tired, which in essence reduces their capacities for self-regulation (Baumeister and Heatherton 1996). These episodes are common for all types of entrepreneurs but specifically are amplified for migrant entrepreneurs, operating in severely constrained environments, who experience depletion of self-regulatory capacities with associated decreased performance and wellbeing (Baumeister et al. 1994; Tangney et al. 2004). However, the upside of self-

regulatory capacities is the ability for entrepreneurs to dig deep and find internal strength as well as external resources to overcome the everyday challenges, which has a profound positive effect on entrepreneurs and their firms (Ho and Singh 2020; Shepherd and Patzelt 2015; Stephan 2018). Therefore, thinking theoretically, the sustaining of self-regulation in fact builds resilience capacities for entrepreneurs and their ventures. Arguably, self-regulation may differ along three dimensions; first, the underlying motives which people are trying to satisfy in relation to the entrepreneurial venture; second, the nature of the goals that they are trying to attain; and third, the types of outcomes that people see as salient. Therefore, self-regulation behaviour of entrepreneurs is associated with specific psychological-cognitive qualities (Venkataraman, 1997), and can explain when and why entrepreneurs will be more or less successful in their endeavours. The success of people in their self-regulatory efforts can be explained by three broad set of factors: (1) resources, such as forms of human, social, economic, symbolic capital (Vershina et al, 2011) and the context (Welter, 2019) in which they operate; (2) motivation that drives their venturing processes and finally (3) the tactics and overarching strategy, which encompasses the means, plans and actions individuals mobilise to transform resources into the successful completion of the task objectives. **ADD MORE on preventative nature of self-regulation**

Such a theoretical perspective, especially the acknowledgement of the preventative nature of self-regulation amongst entrepreneurs, may have the utility in explaining the need for resilience capacity building at the firm level and how individual entrepreneurs self-regulate by converting their motivations, resources embedded in the context into strategies that produce resilience capacity for themselves and their firms. Such a perspective offers an opportunity to explore the dynamic interplay of entrepreneurs within their context (Byrne and Shepherd 2015;

L'evesque and Stephan, 2020; Shepherd and Patzelt 2015; Stephan 2018; Wiklund et al., 2019).

We take a micro-foundational perspective (Akhtar et al., 2018; Felin et al., 2012; Foss and Pedersen, 2016; Weber & Tarba, 2014), which has the capacity to offer insights not only from the firm-level but also to explore deeper, individual level actions and crucially the dynamic interplay between them. Eisenhardt et al. (2010:1263) understands micro-foundations as “the underlying individual-level and group-level actions that shape strategy, [and] organization.” In focusing on both the meta and the micro-levels, a micro-foundational approach transcends criticisms of focusing solely on individual-level actions whilst not taking into account contexts which shape such actions (Seidl & Whittington, 2014). As Felin et al. (2015) posit, “microfoundations broadens research because it places an emphasis on not just individuals, but individuals in particular macro contexts: firms, organizations, institutions, and markets” (2015:599).

Whilst previous research on entrepreneur resilience has underscored the importance of entrepreneur cognitive abilities, qualities and competencies, the micro-foundational perspective explores what people *do* (Johnson et al., 2007; Stoyanov, 2018), especially on an everyday, mundane level (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). With the clear focus of what entrepreneurs do rather than what they possess, in this article we examine the ‘doing’ of resilience. In illuminating the agentic behaviour of entrepreneurs, the notion of ‘doing’ is particularly useful to elaborate on how individual entrepreneurs seek to transform difficult situations (resource constraints, lack of legitimacy, lack of market power) into business opportunities. The ‘doing’ might represent a resilient response to dealing with issues emerging in the ‘everyday’. This potentially involves the daily re-negotiation of

informal practices within small firms, experiencing vulnerabilities and liabilities (Soundararajan et al., 2018).

### **Empirical context: migrant entrepreneurship**

The empirical setting which forms the context of this research study is migrant entrepreneurship (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017; Ram et al., 2008; 2017; Rodgers et al., 2019; Vershinina et al., 2011). For the purposes of this article, we adopt Smallbone (2005) definition of ethnic minority entrepreneurs, who “...have been understood to be immigrants in the countries concerned or children or grandchildren of immigrants. Immigrants are defined as persons who have been born abroad. Irrespective of their nationality and irrespective of whether they are considered to be ethnic minorities in the countries concerned, immigrants also include the offspring of immigrants [...]’ (p. 2). Within the literature on ethnic minority entrepreneurship, much focus has been on understanding the specific challenges for migrants developing entrepreneurial activities and the ways in which they seek to overcome their disadvantaged positionality (Villares-Varela & Essers, 2019) within new host markets. Beyond the well-known liabilities of being small (Soundararajan et al., 2018) and new (Vershinina et al., 2019), migrant-owned entrepreneurs and their firms are prone to experiencing liabilities of foreignness (Zaheer, 1995), outsidership (Johanson & Valhne, 2009), otherness (Pio & Essers, 2014; Ram et al., 2019) and ethnicity (Bolzani & Boari, 2018). Moreover, scholarly work has evidenced how migrant entrepreneurs develop their business operations, relying primarily on their ethnic networks (Portes, 1995) and the communities in which they live and work (Stoyanov, 2018). Importantly, social capital has been underlined as a key driver enabling migrant entrepreneurs to operate mainly within ‘ethnic economies’ (Light et al., 1994; Rodgers et al. 2018), thereby selling ethnic goods and services, employing

co-ethnic workers, drawing on co-ethnic resources, embedded within ethnic enclaves (Portes & Jensen, 1992). Seeking to move beyond the theoretical models, predicated on ethnic resources i.e. what resources migrants possess, have access to and can mobilize, akin to the “resource pool” perspective (Kossek and Perrigino, 2016), the mixed-embeddedness framework (Kloosterman, 2010; Kloosterman & Rath 1999) offers a more balanced approach, underlining the critical importance of the interlinked nature of economic and social relationships of migrant entrepreneurs, operating within specific institutional structures (Ram et al., 2017; Ram et al., 2019). Facing relative disadvantages within the labour market in the host society, experiencing blocked mobility (Gold & Kibria, 1993), many migrants turn to entrepreneurship and set up their own businesses as an alternative to waged employment. Scholars have paid much attention to how migrant entrepreneurs resource new ventures, specifically focusing on the facilitation of different forms of capital (Nee & Sanders, 2001; Ram et al., 2008; Verzhinina et al., 2011), with social capital and its potential for convertibility into other forms of capital taking center stage. Furthermore, within the literature, there has been a lack of academic scrutiny of how migrant entrepreneurs ‘do’ their business at the micro-level, often within a discriminatory terrain (Ram, et al, 2017). Such an empirical context of discrimination may prove fruitful for investigating the emergence of resilience at both individual migrant entrepreneur and organizational levels, and fusing of these to pool together necessary resilience capacities. This dynamic *process* of how migrant entrepreneurs adjust to the new host environment (Dewald and Bowen, 2010) is in fact a vehicle through which they may also generate resilience capacity (Haase & Eberl, 2019), a process we investigate in this research study.

## **Methodological approach**

Within this exploratory, qualitative study we examine data generated through a series of semi-structured interviews with Eastern European migrant entrepreneurs operating diverse businesses in three urban centers in the UK over the period of 2012-2019. The age of the businesses ranged from three to twelve years old and the firms employed between two and thirty employees. The firms represented a variety of sectors and the participants were aged between twenty-two and fifty-seven years old (see Table 1). Thirty-seven interviewees were male and twenty-four were female. Interviewees were from different nationalities including Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (all EU member states) and also from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova (non-EU member states).

To overcome the potential for sampling bias, we engaged in the referral driven sampling method (Heckathorn and Cameron, 2017), which enabled us to achieve a maximum variation sample (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). We gained access to a range of Eastern European communities in several locations across the three cities of Birmingham, Leicester and Sheffield in order to avoid over-representation of one group and/or one place. The three cities were chosen as representing key regional centers in which large groups of migrants live and work. In addition to gaining access to entrepreneurs, we also approached key informants from formal and informal local migrant organizations through existing personal networks, premium services on social media outlets (LinkedIn) and local migrant support organizations. The key informants (Palys, 2008) were particularly useful for gaining an overview of the experiences of the target group of migrant entrepreneurs and in doing so, assisted triangulation within the research study (Gray, 2013). The sampling goal in identifying Eastern European migrant entrepreneurs was to reach maximum



variation regarding their country of origin, duration of time in the UK, the business sector, location of business, entrepreneur's age and education. Maximum variation sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Patton, 2002) is particularly useful as it allows generating a wide range of insights across heterogeneous cases, selected on the basis of set criteria. Whilst each case varies as much as possible from the other, the detailed descriptions that each case produces offer unique features as well as, most importantly, shared patterns that cut across all the cases.

Semi-structured interviews were deemed an appropriate research method (Bryman, 2012) as it enables the researchers to generate rich accounts around structured themes, central to the core research question of this study. This approach is particularly valuable in specific contexts, where respondents may not be fully open to sharing their experiences.

To ensure confidentiality, we have anonymized all names of respondents. We undertook sixty-one interviews, which lasted between fifty and eighty-five minutes. The interviews were recorded and conducted either in the Russian language or in the English language with the consent of the interviewees. The two authors are fluent in the Russian language and this assisted the development of rapport with some of the interviewees and ensured consistency in the translation of the transcripts into the English language. We also approached an independent translator to verify the quality of the translation. The interviewees talked about their migrant journeys to the UK, setting up of their business and the day-to-day challenges of running their businesses in the host society. During the interviews and subsequently during translations of the interviews, both lead authors remained critically reflective of their own positions and influence (Golombisky, 2006) on the interviewees and the generated data in an effort to eliminate any researcher bias from

their own backgrounds (Stoyanov, 2018). The majority of the time in each interview focused on discussing the routines and how the migrant entrepreneurs on an everyday level ‘did’ their business. Within our conversations with the interviewees, we probed for specific actions, asking for concrete examples of how migrant entrepreneurs dealt with the myriad of challenges facing them on an everyday basis. In doing so, a powerful narrative emerged within which we could decipher the everyday, mundane, unremarkable but yet powerful yet resilient actions of migrant entrepreneurs.

In order to analyze our data, we followed Braun & Clarke (2006)’s qualitative, thematic analysis procedure. The step-by-step process (see Table 2) involved firstly the reading of individual transcripts to ensure we were fully aware of the issues involved. We started coding the data through which various manifestations of the ‘doing’ of entrepreneurship emerged. It became evident that the micro-foundational approach to understand the everyday nature of entrepreneurship had the capacity to reveal not only the meta-strategies within the institutional context of the host environment but also the different tactics which individual entrepreneurs enacted in order to navigate this contextual terrain. In doing so, we began to see the structure within our generated data relating to three specific groups of tactics; legitimacy building, network building and resource and capability development. These key issues underpinned the first and second order thematic analysis, as illustrated in Table 3. Our second and third order themes have emerged through the iterative comparison of interviews (Silverman, 2005). Through this data transformation, the dimensionality of the concept of individual and firm level resilience capacity was distilled including its temporal characteristics, which we develop in the discussion section. The conceptual framework is outlined in Figure 1. We now move on to outline our findings.

## **Findings**

Our findings section is structured as follows. Firstly, we examine the everyday experiences of migrant entrepreneurs running small businesses in the UK. Migrant entrepreneurs develop set of diverse but ultimately complimentary micro-level resilience capacities, based on preventative self-regulatory behaviour. These resilience capacities counteract the structural impediments faced by these migrant entrepreneurs as well as the various liabilities they face on a daily basis. Secondly, we reveal the processes that comprise the resilience capacities at the nexus between the individual and organizational levels, including *legitimacy building* process, *network building* process and *resource and capability development* processes. We present the data structure in Table 3 and utilise a selection of key illustrative quotes in highlighting our key findings.

### ***Legitimacy building***

The central tenet within all of our discussions with interviewees was how they sought to deal with the various liabilities of operating a small firm and being a migrant, i.e., being face with difficult situations and findings ways to overcome these. Whilst studies have identified the structural impediments and various liabilities that migrant entrepreneurs face (Pio & Essers, 2014; Soundararajan et al., 2018), our findings reveal the everyday actions that migrant entrepreneurs pursue in order to counteract the challenges facing them. As such, our data showcases the diverse ways in which our interviewees engage within ethnic, co-migrant and wider communities in order to leverage their positionality (Villares-Varela & Essers, 2019) and in doing so, develop resilience capacities. As one interviewee stated, '*You need to keep your fingers in many pies. You need to be known not only in your own ethnic community. You need to*

*develop a quality reputation across the whole of the city'* (INT: 36). Many interviewees during their entrepreneurial journey had been compelled to re-think how they ran their businesses, considering issues such as which suppliers to use and which customers to target. This led to learning from the process and engaging in the reconfiguration of their business processes. As one interviewee explained, *'My English is still not the best. However, for my business, marketing is very important. I soon realized I needed to recruit native English-speakers'* (INT: 7). However, other migrant entrepreneurs spoke about an alternative perspective in which their business was being reconfigured around ethnic resources within the ethnic enclave. As one interviewee stated, *'I have chosen to stay close to my roots here. This community helped my parents when they arrived and I'm happy to give back through my business'* (INT: 57). Furthermore, our interviewees spoke at length about the importance of building trust in their business through the gaining of external recognition, either through the obtaining of relevant professional certification or even applying for and winning local business awards. As one interviewee stated, *'I am proud to say that last year I won an award at a local business association in Sheffield. Since then, the phone hasn't stopped ringing'* (INT: 32). Finally, our interviewees also spoke about the importance of technology in their business. Whilst some interviewees only engaged with professional website design, outsourcing some services to call-centers, other interviewees adopted a technology-driven business strategy. Some interviewees justified such actions not only on financial grounds but also more critically as a means to dilute the 'ethnic' marker of their business and themselves as an ethnic entrepreneur. As one interviewee stated, *'Technology has been a game-changer for my business. It enables me to look just like another business, without being judged on other things'* (INT: 60). In essence, our findings

revealed that the “doing” of the everyday activities involved in *legitimacy building*, generated individual resilience capacities such as building legitimacy by overcoming personal impediments, developing language proficiency and the expansion of the ‘resource pool’ within the ethnic business represents the accumulation of resilience capacities at the organizational level.

### ***Network building***

Existing research on migrant entrepreneurship underscores the critical importance of the embeddedness of migrants within co-ethnic networks (Portes, 1995) and increasingly the importance of the transnational nature of such ties (Rodgers et al., 2018). Our data reveals how migrant entrepreneurs use co-ethnic ties as a foundation for stability of the business. As one interviewee stated, ‘*My business relies on Lithuanian customers. They order what they want and we supply it. It’s our bread and butter*’ (INT: 14). However, other interviewees spoke about the need to invest resources into developing co-migrant networks often based around shared language and shared migration experiences. As one interviewee elucidated, ‘*In Leicester there is a huge Eastern European community now. A lot of us still speak Russian. I’ve got lots of contacts now from different countries. Speaking to them has helped my business, generating more customers and also giving me access to new suppliers*’ (INT: 23). Furthermore, several interviewees also sought to activate their networks beyond the co-ethnic and co-migrant groups and actively pursued connections with host society businesses and organizations. As one interviewee explained, ‘*The big contracts are at the city level. In our sector, you need to know the right people within the region. I’ve spent lots of time networking, going to business events*’ (INT: 2). Finally, our data reveals how migrant entrepreneurs engage and invest in developing transnational networks between the host and home societies.

Whilst network building as an overarching action is deployed for the purposes of developing business operations at organizational level and generating organizational resource capacity, nevertheless, migrant entrepreneurs simultaneously engage with co-ethnic, co-migrant, mainstream and transnational networks in order to develop more proactive resilience capacity mechanisms within and beyond the organizational boundaries to counteract any potential exclusion on the basis of their liabilities.

### ***Resource and capability development***

Legitimacy and network building depend upon the external-facing activities of the migrant entrepreneurs, who either act reactively in response to discrimination (legitimacy building) or act proactively to diversify networks in order to de-risk the business (network building). We now focus on specific internal-facing actions involving developing internal resources and capabilities. Across all the interviews, there was a clear desire to streamline business operations. Entrepreneurs talked at length about the need to constantly be prudent and calculative, understanding the importance of financial control. To this end, several interviewees spoke about diversification of access to financial capital. As one interviewee explains, *'I need to know about all the monies coming in and out of the business. This allows me to plan properly'* (INT: 45). This recognition of the importance of running what interviewee (6) called a 'lean' business therefore enables the entrepreneur to develop resources which could be invested back into the business through training, mentoring and personal development. As one interviewee succinctly outlined, *'Last year I recruited a young apprentice. This was the best investment for him and for my business'* (INT: 41). Similarly, one interviewee stated, *'I'm improving my financial competency but doing an online training course with the Open University. It's already paid for itself'* (INT: 55).

Whilst migrant entrepreneurs invested considerable resources into themselves and their businesses, they also sought critical information, which was subsequently processed and acted upon. For instance, the sensing and interpreting of information was critical, as it enabled migrant entrepreneurs to understand the real-time needs of their business and face existing and forthcoming issues. As one interviewee elucidated, *‘I’ve been advised to subscribe to updates from various regulatory bodies. At first, I couldn’t see the reason for this. Now, this is an inherent part of our business. It provides real-time checks for where we are and what we need to do’* (INT: 25). In a similar vein, interviewees spoke about the importance of reflection or pause and so-called *‘thinking time’* (INT: 9), as a critical part of their business process. Interviewees spoke about their business journeys, the mistakes they had previously made and how they had sought to learn from them. Several interviewees explained how they formally allocated time for reflection on a monthly basis. The *‘doing’* (Stoyanov, 2018) in essence was intertwined with time for reflection. As one interviewee stated, *‘For several years, I ignored the information in front of me. One day, I took some time off work and went walking. When I returned to my office, the problem was shining in my face. I changed our communications with existing customers. The results were immediate’* (INT: 9). Such resource and capability development fused at the individual and the organizational level represented another layer in the work undertaken by migrant entrepreneurs to develop resilience capacities.

Alongside

the three overarching processes of accumulation of resilience capacity that migrant entrepreneurs adopted on daily basis, our data also revealed *temporal* dimensions of individual and organizational level resilience capacities that firms activated through intended processes, actions and reflections (see **Figure 1**). Whilst we could delineate

the three processes of *legitimacy building*, *network building* and *resource and capability development*, their enactment was cyclical and temporal in nature. In this fashion, the analysis of our data provided useful evidence, which enabled us to elucidate the real-time, prospective and retrospective elements of the everyday individual and organizational level resilience capacity building and also the critical role of preventative forms of self-regulatory behaviour.

## **Discussion**

The existing literature within business and management studies predominantly has examined resilience as a way in which organizations (Denyer, 2017; Herbane, 2013) and individuals (Branzei & Abdelnour, 2010; Dewald & Bowen, 2010) have developed responses to extraordinary events, akin to stressful situations (Cooper, Flint-Taylor, & Pearn, 2013), extreme events (Bullough & Renko, 2013) and/or crises (Doern, 2016; Herbane, 2019). This literature has underscored the critical importance of the capabilities within an organization to react and ‘bounce back’ from adversity (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). Resilience at the individual level has underlined the importance of ‘resource pools’ (Cooper, Flint-Taylor, & Pearn, 2013) involving cognitive competencies and skill-sets, which individuals can use when faced with specific situations. The regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998) aided us to theorise how firm level resilience capacity-building evolves over time from the preventative self-regulation in which individuals transform their resources, motivations into strategies driven by a desire to survive in their specific contexts.

Existing focus on resilience at the organisational and individual levels has been predominantly on large firms, apart from a few notable studies (Herbane, 2013; 2019). Similarly, within the sub-stream of entrepreneurship, studies on resilience (Bullough et al., 2014; Doern, 2016; Herbane, 2019; Martinelli et al., 2018) have



followed the narrative of ‘resource pool’ characteristics, examining the resilient characteristics and competencies of individual entrepreneurial actors. There has been a lack of appreciation of the inherent inter-linkage between individual and organizational settings and the critical role of context (Welter, 2019) in shaping individual and organizational responses. There is a need for more scholarly attention to understanding resilience not solely in extreme contexts, but in more everyday settings. As such, by specifically focusing on preventative self-regulation, we adopted a ‘micro-foundational’ approach as offering the theoretical potential to offer new insights into the field of resilience. We examine the everyday actions of migrant entrepreneurs navigating the multiple liabilities (Soundararajan et al., 2018) they face including the liabilities of not only being small and new, but also being foreign and being ‘othered’ (Pio & Essers, 2014). Our findings reveal the more fine-grained, micro-level actions that go beyond the aforementioned ‘resource pool’ perspective, showcasing how rather than migrant entrepreneurs simply relying on the pool of ethnic resources that they possess, instead we witness the ‘active’ nature of resilience capacity-building with for example migrant entrepreneurs engaging in agentic behavior such as developing social networks beyond the co-ethnic enclave. In doing so, the findings showcase how individual migrant entrepreneurs mobilise resources and convert them into firm level resource capacities. Our findings suggest that individual and firm level forms of resilience capacity do not manifest themselves solely within remarkable, extreme and crisis moments. Instead, we demonstrate how the ‘doing’ (Johnson et al., 2007; Stoyanov, 2018) of resilience capacity emerges from within mundane, everyday business contexts. In showcasing the fusing of organizational and individual forms of resilience capacity, we highlight three overarching actions involving *legitimacy building*, *network building* and

*resource and capability development*, which migrant entrepreneurs employ in an attempt to sustain their business operations. We reveal the necessary mechanisms of streamlining business operations, developing resources, sensing and interpreting cues from the environment and finally learning and reflecting from experiences, thereby underscoring the inherent fusing of organizational and individual levels. Regarding network building, we offer a more holistic viewpoint of the active seeking access to and continued engagement with multiple networks and extend understanding of the role of relationships to resilience, especially within SME contexts (Herbane, 2019). These networks involve productive exchanges beyond the traditional ‘co-ethnic’ community ties involving also ties with co-migrants with shared language and migrant journey experiences as well as more expansive networks with ‘mainstream’ host societal actors and transnational actors. Our interviewees spoke in unison of the relevance of constantly keeping active their connections across a variety of networks and thereby engaging in preventative work. Indeed, taking the micro-foundational approach is essential in surfacing such mundane, everyday actions enacted by migrant entrepreneurs.

Whilst traditional migrant entrepreneurship literature has highlighted how migrant entrepreneurs have developed legitimacy from ‘within’ the co-ethnic community (Portes & Jensen, 1992), the ‘breakout’ literature (Lassalle & Scott, 2018) suggests legitimacy building and networking building strategies may be productive for migrant firms, as they unlock migrant entrepreneurs’ agency. Our study reveals that not only that these strategies are disparate but in fact that they are being combined for the purpose of legitimacy building and in doing so, demonstrate the utility of the interplay between manifestations of organizational and individual resource capacities. Finally, in shedding light on the temporal nature of resilience

capacity we offer a conceptual contribution to understanding how resilience emerges from within the temporal cycle of tactics leading to actions leading to reflection (see Figure 2). In essence, resilience is entwined with the real-time, prospective and retrospective cycles. Whilst this finding was surprising, nonetheless, there is a clear need for future scholarly attention to focus on the temporal dimensions of resilience, taking into account its processual nature.

## **Conclusions**

Whilst much of the extant research on resilience has been macro-orientated, this has meant that micro-analyses of how firms and individuals cope with existing and perceived future business challenges, up to now have remained under-explored. Using regulatory focus theory and a micro-foundational approach, this article elucidates the multi-faceted fusing of organizational and individual resilience capacities.

This article makes the following contributions. Firstly, we have been able to showcase empirical linkages between individual and firm level resilience capacity specifically in the context of migrant entrepreneurs and their firms, in how they learn to overcome a set of liabilities they face. Specifically, we extend the existing conceptualization of entrepreneur resilience by focusing upon the nature of relationships (Herbane, 2019), and their usefulness in developing resilience capacities, particularly within the small business context. In this specific context of migrant entrepreneurship, we transcend the traditional view that migrant entrepreneurs rely solely on co-ethnic community ties by demonstrating the critical importance of co-migrant, mainstream and transnational connections in enabling resilient responses to challenging business situations. We also show the more nuanced, micro-level activities pertaining to the resource and capability development

tactic employed by migrant entrepreneurs, a perspective commonly adopted within the extant literature on resilience.

Secondly, we contribute to the literature on migrant entrepreneurship, where migrant entrepreneurs are depicted as individuals challenged with numerous liabilities beyond the typical liabilities of running small and new businesses devoid of agency due to their disadvantaged positionality. Our study underscores the role of accumulated agency, which aids migrant entrepreneurs to overcome existing structural challenges and in doing so, build resilience capacities. Thirdly, our empirical study demonstrates how resilience takes place not only in extreme, adverse contexts. In fact, the ‘doing’ of resilience is omnipresent, occurring in mundane, everyday business operations, and it is these activities that form the basis of resilience capacity of migrant entrepreneurs and their firms. Despite the fact that such activities are often unnoticed and unremarkable, yet, they are critical for the resilient operating of the business.

Our study clearly has practical implications for business practitioners. It is imperative for owner-managers of firms, large and small, to recognize the importance of everyday actions, employed across the organizational setting and beyond and their impact upon the ability of the organization to develop resilience. Particularly for small firms, our study shows that frugality and streamlining of operations represent a baseline from which strategic planning can emanate. Moreover, such findings require agile responses from businesses, taking into account the temporal nature of building resilient firms. The importance of retrospection, foresight and real-time actions cannot be undervalued for firms. Whilst our study was focused on migrant entrepreneurs and thus a specific set of actions emerged, it would be useful to develop future academic work adopting similar methodologies to generate empirical data from different

organizational settings including the large firm setting. In this way, we can further our understanding of the interrelationships between individual and firm level resilience and encapsulate the mechanisms of how resilience capacities are created and enacted.

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