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Construct Development for Resilient Leadership Model (Rel Model): A View from Malaysian SMEs

Ahmad Fadhly Arham^{1*}, Nor Sabrena Norizan², Ahmad Firdhaus Arham³,
Nuttawuth Muenjohn⁴

^{1,2}Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka, Malaysia

³School of Liberal Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴Faculty of Management, Law and Social Sciences, University of Bradford, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

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*Correspondence:

ahmad490@uitm.edu.my

Entrepreneurs need to be more resilient. As economic disruptions are inevitable, organizations need to have resilient leaders. Resilient organizations possess the capacity to sustain favorable transformations and successfully navigate numerous hurdles during periods of crisis or adversity. The purpose of this research is to develop a new measurement tool for resilient leadership within the context of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. Despite vast empirical evidence on the topic of leadership toward sustainable performance, validated assessments of resilient leadership are still underexplored. Therefore, the researchers initiated a quantitative research approach by gathering data from 100 SME leaders across various industries. The newly developed resilient leadership questionnaires were electronically distributed to the respondents. The data was analyzed using SPSS 26.0. The data analysis comprised descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and exploratory factor analysis. The results revealed and verified six-dimensions of resilient leadership, which include adaptability, emotional intelligence, visionary, spiritual intelligence, growth mindset, and internal ecosystem. The measurement scale developed, and the factor structure produced can be used to assess and develop more resilient leaders that could help to sustain business performance among SMEs. The inclusion of a spiritual element into the model adds value and provides a holistic view of a resilient leadership model that is not only applicable to the context of SMEs in Malaysia but also across borders.

In the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0, the emergence of new economies is an inevitable phenomenon. In today's world, with the pervasive influence of digital technology on economic disruptions, it is imperative for organizations to promptly and effectively adjust and adapt in order to ensure the long-term viability and continuity of their businesses. Resilience is an imperative quality that organizations must possess (Daud et al., 2021; Suryaningtyas et al., 2019). Resilient organizations possess the capacity to sustain favorable transformations and successfully navigate numerous hurdles during periods of crisis or adversity. Resilience is of essential importance for businesses since those who are unable to cultivate this quality will experience a decline in their lifestyles, ultimately leading to their destruction. Hence, the organization's capacity to effectively address diverse disruptions is contingent upon its specific aims and the extent of its preparedness to manage crises.

In order to effectively predict and mitigate crises, a leader must engage in strategic resilience. This entails the ability to proactively identify potential crises and take appropriate measures to prevent their occurrence. Furthermore, a leader must exhibit a consistent willingness to adapt and implement changes, irrespective of the presence or absence of a crisis. The contingency theory of leadership states that there is no universally effective leadership style for managing an organization (Zhang et al., 2024). Instead, leaders should adapt their approach based on the specific situational conditions in order to achieve the best possible development of the organization (Abbas & Ali, 2023; Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022; Monehin & Diers-Lawson, 2022).

Resilient leadership is a newly recognized style of leadership that emphasizes adaptability and dynamic recovery in a hazardous environment (Fang et al., 2020; Lombardi et al., 2021). The successful implementation of organizational resilience necessitates the presence of an effective leader who possesses the ability to navigate through crises and is geared towards achieving exceptional performance while prioritizing adaptability. Leaders who possess resilient traits are commonly thought to be able to assist organizations in maintaining strong, rejuvenating, and flexible adaptability during hard times. This, in turn, promotes employee resilience and life satisfaction, as well as organizational resilience and innovation (Fang et al., 2020; Prayag et al., 2024). Based on Zhang et al. (2024), current research on resilient leadership has failed to capture the dynamic and diverse nature of resilience from a process perspective. Despite efforts to empirically study resilient leadership, the researchers found a dearth of current research that focuses on the leadership perspective. It is found that most of the existing research is mostly focused on organizational resilience (Singh et al., 2023) and employee resilience (Zhang et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the significance of leadership resilience in facilitating the adaptation and recovery of organizations has been examined with limited depth.

Based on Giustiniano et al. (2020) and Li (2019), the present study on resilient leadership is in its early stages, and there is a lack of extensive research on the dimensional structure of resilient leadership when it comes to crises. This research provides a new perspective and research direction for SMEs and enriches the research scope and theoretical framework of resilient leadership. Thus, this study focuses on resilient leadership among leaders in the SME sector. More specifically, the research's objective is to develop and validate a resilient leadership scale that will enable leaders across the organization to remain relevant. Increasing the body of knowledge concerning resilient leadership is crucial and essential to gaining knowledge, specifically in the Malaysian context.

Thus, this article contributes to the literature in several ways. First, in response to earlier studies by Arham et al. (2023) and Arham and Norizan (2023) to develop measures of resilient leadership, the current article addresses the development of a new measurement construct of resilient leadership within the context of SMEs in Malaysia. Given that almost all existing leadership theories originate and develop in Western countries, this new measure of resilient leadership contributes to the enrichment of leadership studies in Malaysia. Secondly, limited research has been given on the dimensional construct of resilient leadership from the perspectives of SME leaders. Existing research on resilient leadership within the context of Malaysia is emphasized among teachers in schools or universities and public servant managers. (Mohd Kasim et al., 2022). The focus on SMEs provides a context-specific perspective on leadership, highlighting the unique challenges and characteristics of these organizations, which can further contribute to the development of tailored leadership theories and practices. Practically, the development of resilient leadership measures can help SMEs in Malaysia enhance their competitiveness by promoting effective and adaptive leadership practices. Finally, even though researchers have examined the various aspects of resilient leadership from different viewpoints (Fang et al., 2020; Giustiniano et al., 2020; Li, 2019), none of the current measures and scales have considered the spiritual aspect of resilient leaders. Therefore, the inclusion of spiritual intelligence in the dimension of resilient leadership brings a new perspective to the whole dimension of resilient leadership.

Literature Review

This section presents the literature review of the study. It outlines six aspects that are essential for the development of a scale for assessing resilient leadership within SMEs, which are adaptability, emotional intelligence, visionary, spiritual intelligence, growth mindset, and internal ecosystem.

Resilient Leadership

The emerging paradigm in the field of leadership revolves around the concept of resilient leadership. According to Dartey-Baah (2015), resilient leadership refers to the combination of transformational and transactional leadership, which is also referred to as "Transfomrsactional leadership." Li (2019) defines resilient leadership as the ability of leaders to recover quickly from failures, disagreements, and challenges and to pursue stated goals continuously. Implementing organizational resilience necessitates a certain type of leadership, namely transformational leadership. This form of leadership facilitates swift modifications to the entire organizational structure and enables the organization to adapt effectively to external environmental changes. Conversely, consistent alignment of daily activities with evolving circumstances can uphold the maintenance of transactional leadership and achieve optimal performance. Based on the earlier findings by Arham et al. (2023), there are six essential qualities that leaders must possess in order to be resilient which include adaptability, emotional intelligence, visionary, spiritual intelligence, growth mindset, and internal ecosystem.

Adaptability

Adaptive leaders promote adaptability within their teams, cultivating a culture that prioritizes ongoing learning and innovation (Fang et al., 2020). Furthermore, resilient leaders enhance the

overall agility and responsiveness of their organizations by embracing change instead of opposing it. The adaptability aspect of resilient leadership enables leaders to guide their followers through uncertain situations and strategically position the organization for long-term success in a dynamic business environment. Arham et al. (2023), in their study, contended that leaders must possess adaptability attributes to manage their organization and personnel effectively in a dynamic and volatile environment. Adaptability is the ability to quickly and willingly change and modify one's approach in order to respond effectively to ever-changing business conditions. Resilient leaders demonstrate agility and promptly address both anticipated and unforeseen challenges that impact the company's operating environment.

Emotional Intelligence

The researchers defined emotional intelligence as the cognitive ability to recognize and understand both one's own emotions and the emotions of others. It is believed that acquiring this feature will enable leaders to understand and exert control over the emotions of their team members. This component encompasses the adept handling of emotions in demanding situations, cultivating a serene and productive environment within the business. Leaders who possess emotional intelligence demonstrate exceptional abilities in fostering healthy relationships, fostering collaboration and enthusiasm, and cultivating a supportive workplace culture (George, 2000). Resilient leaders enhance the general well-being and unity of their teams by acknowledging and addressing their own and others' emotional needs. This strengthens the organization's capacity to endure difficulties and prosper in the midst of adversity. Earlier Awwad and Ali (2012) in their study concluded that the emotional intelligence of managers has a favorable impact on the overall atmosphere within an organization. This, in turn, leads to an improvement in the creativity of employees and the entrepreneurial orientation of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Visionary

Leaders who are resilient and have a visionary mindset are capable of effectively expressing and conveying a compelling vision for the future, even in the midst of challenging circumstances. It encompasses a visionary outlook that goes beyond present obstacles, motivating teams with a clear sense of purpose and guidance. Also, it serves as a guiding force, enabling leaders to take proactive action to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their people and inspire resilience in them, even in challenging and uncertain situations (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2021). Visionary leaders have the ability to foresee prospective difficulties and inspire confidence by giving a well-defined roadmap for the future. This is in line with Renjen (2020) that vision is the proactive component of resilience as it is based on the ability to anticipate events in advance. Resilient leaders possess a strategic perspective and are capable of foreseeing forthcoming obstacles and prospects. Thus, the researchers believe that this kind of leader possesses a distinct sense of purpose and is proficient in effectively communicating with personnel in order to achieve their stated vision.

Spiritual Intelligence

This dimension includes attributes such as introspection, moral judgment, and a perception of interdependence with others. In a study by Okeke et al. (2021), they found that the productivity

of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Southeast Nigeria is influenced by spiritual intelligence. To enhance trust and recognition for their innovative efforts, owners should give priority to ethical conduct and behavior. Thus, this research asserts that leaders who tap into their spiritual intelligence may offer a steady and stabilizing impact during chaotic periods, cultivating a sense of direction and unity among their teams. By incorporating spiritual intelligence into the many aspects of resilient leadership, companies can develop leaders who possess the ability to effectively handle crises while also motivating a shared sense of purpose that goes beyond present difficulties (Reave, 2005). The researchers believe that the presence of emotional intelligence in resilient leaders enables them to establish a strong connection with higher authority, allowing them to effectively acknowledge and integrate both spiritual and secular parts of life.

Growth Mindset

A growth mindset is said to be beneficial for resilient leaders as it enables them to prioritize the idea that success can be achieved through diligent effort, commitment, positive thinking, and persistence. Leaders with a growth-positive mindset foster a culture of continuous improvement within their teams, encouraging innovation, creativity, and a willingness to experiment (Özduran & Tanova, 2017). By viewing failures as valuable learning experiences, resilient leaders instill resilience and perseverance in their organizational culture. The researchers contend that this mindset not only helps leaders navigate uncertainties effectively but also promotes a resilient and adaptive organizational environment that is well-positioned to thrive in the face of change and adversity. The presence of growth mindsets in entrepreneurship is strongly associated with conscientiousness and openness (Billingsley et al., 2021) and is essential for a sustainable business context, as it improves performance in entrepreneurial leadership through vision, innovation, creativity, risk-taking, and proactivity (Vlasceanu & Tigu, 2020).

Internal Ecosystem

In addition, resilient leaders proactively foster teamwork by promoting cooperation, utilizing a wide range of skills, and cultivating a sense of mutual support among team members (Lombardi et al., 2021). It acknowledges that the internal ecosystem's power comes from the interdependence of individuals and their capacity to cooperate in pursuit of common objectives. To summarize, resilient leaders strengthen the company by placing importance on transparent communication and fostering good teamwork. This creates a solid foundation that protects the organization from disruptions, promotes the ability to adapt, and improves overall organizational resilience. Finally, the authors assert that possessing the qualities of the internal ecosystem is crucial for resilient leaders. The term internal ecosystem denotes the interdependence and interplay of many processes within an organization. Leaders may enhance resilience in organizations during crises by cultivating new interpersonal relationships, encouraging positive emotional bonds, and facilitating group interpretation and understanding (Teo et al., 2017). Resilient leaders can establish and maintain a network of people and groups within the organization that generates value. The authors believe that this network enables them to make well-informed decisions and formulate effective plans for the organization.

Recent Research on Resilient Leadership and SMEs

To date, the theory of resilient leadership has been developed and explored in different aspects and areas of discussion by many previous researchers. For instance, Hadjielias et al. (2022) examined business resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic by collecting data from small business owner-managers located in Cyprus, a European Union island country. The study focused on three dimensions, which are leadership resilience, personal resilience, and business resilience. Therefore, they found several important aspects of leadership resilience, including personalized communication, alertness, and stewardship. Besides that, a study was conducted to observe the role of resilient female leadership in promoting business excellence in SMEs in Colombia and Latin America (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2021). It confirmed the positive relationship between sustainability and resilient leadership among females in the Wayuu handicrafts market. The resilient leadership discussed in that study was expressed through distinctive traits like the ability to be effective, efficient, disciplined, and professionally ethical.

Other than that, Prayag et al. (2024) identified the effect of leadership behaviors on the resilience of tourism firms and employees in Sri Lanka during the early stage of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. The results emphasized that resilient leadership behaviors during the initial phases of the pandemic improved the ability of both employees and businesses to withstand and recover from challenges. In addition, it had been found that the contextual and behavioral dimensions of employee resilience mediated the effect of resilient leadership behaviors on organizational resilience. Also, Zhang et al. (2024) observed resilient leadership in hospitality and tourism enterprises in Fujian, China, and developed the resilient leadership scale (RLS) through three studies. In their study, resilient leadership consists of contingency planning, improvisation, adaptive instructing, contingency control, emergency care, adjustment recovery, and mutual growth. From there, the result concluded that resilient leadership and its dimensions significantly impact employee turnover intentions and employee resilience. Also, the findings had practical implications for leaders in the tourism industry in China, guiding how to manage severe crises effectively. Finally, Singh et al. (2023) studied resilient leadership and employee engagement among Information Technology (IT) professionals in India. According to the authors, resilient leadership is represented by effectiveness, empowerment, visionary, supportiveness, and responsiveness. They concluded that, during COVID-19, resilient leadership positively influenced employee engagement.

Why Resilient Leadership Model for Malaysian SMEs

Developing a new measurement construct of resilient leadership specifically for Malaysian SMEs is essential for several reasons despite the existence of models developed by other researchers. First, this new model provides contextual relevance. Malaysia has a unique socio-cultural context and business environment that Western models of resilient leadership may not fully capture. Developing a context-specific model ensures that the construct is more relevant and applicable to the realities and challenges faced by Malaysian SMEs. The second is due to cultural sensitivity. Leadership styles and practices that work well in Western contexts may not necessarily be effective or appropriate in Malaysia due to differences in cultural values and norms. Culture is an important determinant of leadership effectiveness (Metz & Metz, 2020). A locally developed model can incorporate Malaysian cultural dimensions and provide a more nuanced understanding of resilient leadership in the country. Third, it is due to the focus of the

SMEs. SMEs have unique characteristics and challenges compared to larger organizations. By focusing on SMEs in Malaysia, the new measurement construct can address the specific needs and challenges of this sector, which may not be adequately captured by existing models that are more broadly focused. To conclude, Asian leadership theory is shaped by local factors and cultural influences. In contrast, Western leadership theory is developed from an organizational standpoint and emphasizes conforming to the setting (Santoso, 2019).

Theoretical Foundation of the Measurement

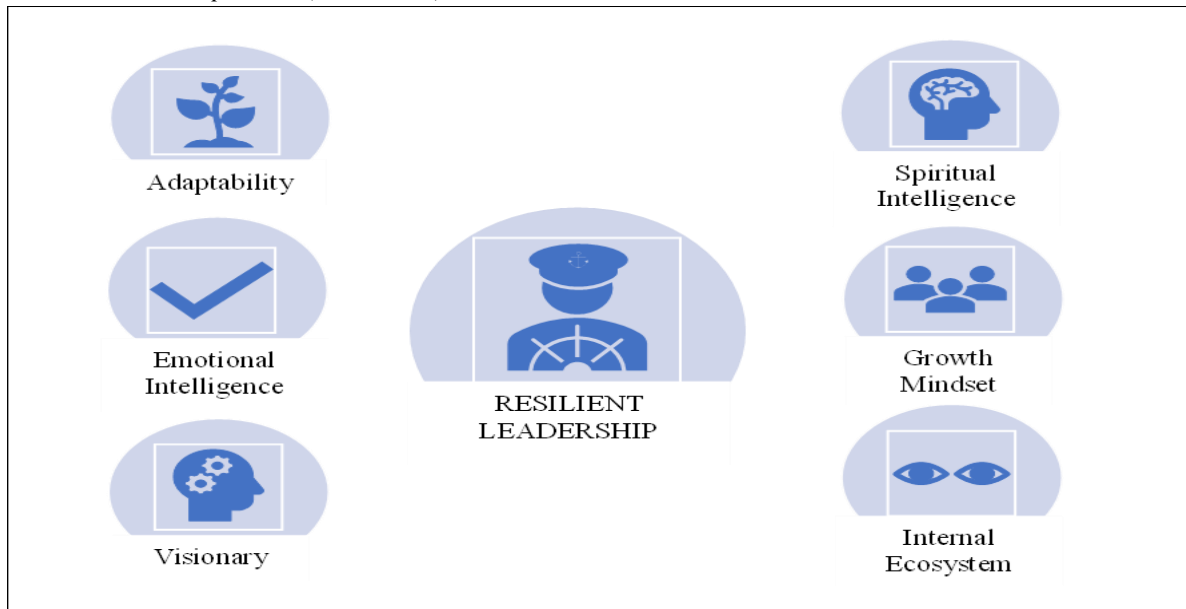
The development of resilient leadership is influenced by several related theories, namely Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), self-control theory, and trait theory. As proposed by Bandura (2001), social cognitive theory is a concept that incorporates the elements of behaviorism and cognitivism. According to Newman et al. (2018), social learning and the capacity to recognize, retrieve, and apply prior knowledge shape an individual's behavior. Interaction with others' behavior and previous learning experiences partially develops this. This learning experience will yield three components: behavioral, personal, and environmental factors. The elements of resilient leadership proposed in this model can be grouped into these three groups as follows: i) the elements of adaptability and a growth mindset represent the behavioral factors; ii) the elements of visionary, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intelligence represent personal factors; and iii) the environmental factor is represented by the internal ecosystem that exists within the organization.

Another influential theory towards the development of resilient leadership is the self-control theory, which refers to the ability to express and determine one's thinking, feelings, emotions, and actions that will avoid internal mental conflict when dealing with problems, crises, and obstacles (Bandura, 2001). The author also explained that when humans are in crisis or have problems, suitable behavior will be selected to avoid negative consequences. On a different spectrum, self-control theory asserts that a self-controlled person is able to manage the environment as desired and needed (Welsh et al., 2018). Therefore, we propose the resilient leadership model, a leadership behavior that considers the four elements (thinking, emotion, feeling, and action) that a leader employs to steer clear of uncertainties.

Finally, there is a connection between resilient leadership and trait-based leadership theory, as resilient leadership is a specific application or manifestation of certain traits within the broader trait-based leadership framework. Trait-based leadership theory posits that certain inherent qualities or traits contribute to effective leadership (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). Resilient leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes the ability of leaders to navigate challenges, bounce back from setbacks, and adapt in the face of adversity. While not always considered a traditional trait, resilient leadership incorporates and highlights specific traits such as emotional resilience, adaptability, growth mindset, and self-regulation. These traits are essential for leaders to handle challenges and lead their teams through uncertainty effectively.

Resilient Leadership Framework

The researchers have proposed a conceptual framework of resilient leadership, which is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Resilient Leadership Model (ReL Model)*

Method

Research Design

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach to assess the importance and extent of the impact that resilient leadership has on improving organizational performance. According to Olsen and St. George (2004), the quantitative approach involves data collection from selected individuals, which provides an overview of what is happening at a particular point in time. In addition, this research employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling was used in this research to help collect information from the specific targeted group. The sampling in this research is restricted to particular individuals who possess the requisite information as per the criteria outlined by the researchers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Thus, in this research, the respondents were chosen from a group of individuals who possess leadership roles, specifically the owners or individuals who hold positions of authority within the organization. In addition, the respondents were selected from individuals employed in SMEs in the manufacturing and services industry.

The five-point Likert format (1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) was used to indicate the respondent's responses to the statements. The survey questionnaires were divided into three sections. The first section consists of eight questions pertaining to the demographic profile of the respondents. Questions such as age, types of industry, position, tenure, and sales turnover were asked in this section. The second section consists of questions related to the six independent variables of resilient leadership, and the measurement items for the variables were further discussed in the subsequent section of this research. As a result, 100 survey questionnaires were disseminated to a sample size of 100 individuals employed in higher-level positions, including CEOs, managers, and supervisors working within SMEs in Malaysia.

Scale Development

In scale development, this research has implemented several steps as proposed by Slavec and Drnovsek (2012). The previous study conducted by Arham et al. (2023) and Arham and Norizan

(2023) has completed the theoretical and construct development. This involved conducting interviews with successful owners of SMEs in Malaysia, coding the data, extracting relevant excerpts, and conducting analysis. During this phase, the definition of the content domain was derived from a literature analysis and semi-structured interviews conducted with successful Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) owners using a case study approach. In those articles, it has been established that several themes that made up the earlier constructs of resilient leadership were generated based on the combination of literature review analysis and interview data. For the content validity of the initial constructs of resilient leadership, six experts were approached to review, cross-check, and validate. Their feedback has led to the refinement of the final dimensions of resilient leadership into a six-dimensional construct as proposed in this research. These constructs included adaptability, emotional intelligence, visionary, spiritual intelligence, growth mindset, and internal ecosystem.

This research began with item pool generation and questionnaire development. Based on the themes generated and literature review analysis, seven items were initially proposed for each construct of resilient leadership. All items were originally developed in English. However, considering that English is not the first language in Malaysia, back translation was followed, and the questionnaire was translated into the Malay language. A few modifications were made to the final questionnaire. The use of back translation is important to allow for a greater understanding among the potential respondents in the data collection process. The six constructs and the seven themes generated for each construct are depicted in [Figure 2](#).

The next step was the conduct of a pilot study. Thirty respondents represented by the owners and leaders of the SMEs were taken as samples for the pilot study, including those involved in the interview process earlier. Their participation and feedback were important to ensure the cohesiveness of the items developed for each dimension of resilient leadership being proposed. The results of the pilot study indicated that each dimension possessed a high level of consistency and reliability. After final modifications were made to the final questionnaire, this research embarked on the sampling and data collection as proposed by Slavec and Drnovsek (2012). A non-probability sampling was chosen, and 100 respondents were gathered via an online survey.

The final stage of scale development should involve statistical analysis. Reliability and dimensionality assessments were performed to ensure the adequacy and reliability of the final dimensions representing resilient leadership. The results of the analysis will be further explained.

Data Collection

Based on Coakes (2013), a minimum of five subjects per variable is sufficient, but, taking on the suggestion of Hair et al. (2018), a sample size of 100 is acceptable for performing exploratory factor analysis. Thus, the researchers distributed 100 questionnaires to the selected participants. The participants in the study are leaders of the business establishments, represented by either the owners or managers in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing and services sector. The survey questionnaires were disseminated online to corroborate and substantiate the factor structure of resilient leadership for Malaysian SMEs.

Measurement Items

The questionnaires assessed the six main factors associated with the domain/themes derived from the quantitative study. Figure 2 presents the theoretical framework for the resilient leadership measurement items.

The first domain of the resilient leadership model is adaptability, which consists of seven measurement items: (1) responsiveness (i.e., I quickly respond to the uncertainties in business environments), (2) anticipatory (i.e., I always prefer a proactive approach) (3) customer orientation (i.e., I quickly change my strategies to respond to customer demands), (4) agile (i.e., I react to change accordingly), (5) market orientation (i.e., I quickly change my strategies to respond to changing market conditions), (6) flexibility (i.e., I have the capacity to modify my behavior to fit changing circumstances), (7) digital responsiveness (i.e., I quickly change my strategies to respond to technological advancement).

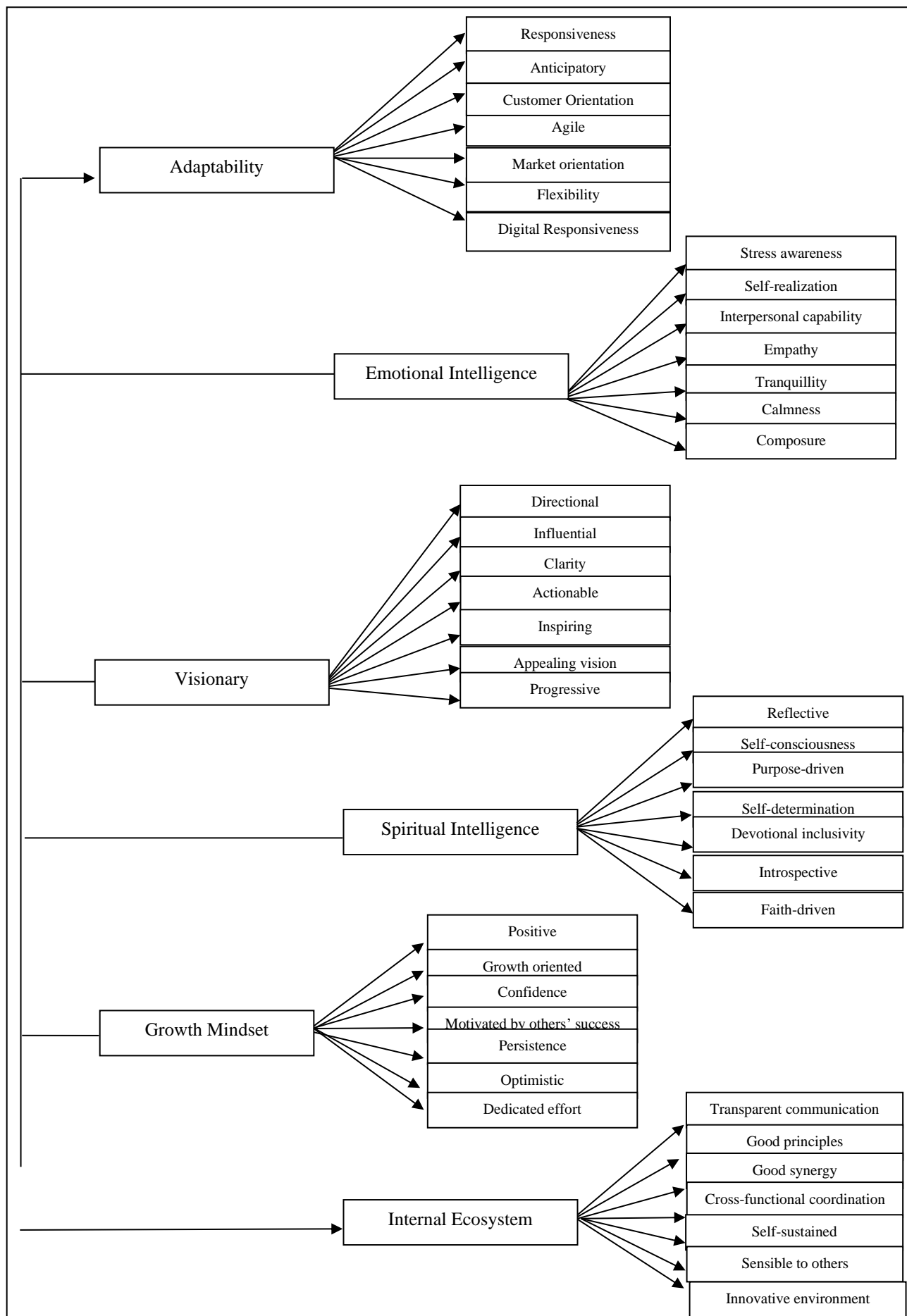
The second domain of the resilient leadership model is emotional intelligence, which consists of seven measurement items: (1) stress awareness (i.e., I can manage my own stress), (2) self-realization (i.e., I know my own emotions as I experience them), (3) interpersonal capability (i.e., I am able to understand and respond accordingly to the emotions of others), (4) empathy (i.e., I am able to recognize the desire of others around me), (5) tranquility (i.e., In the midst of unexpected situations, I remain calm), (6) calmness (i.e., I can handle conflicts in my life in a composed manner), (7) composure (i.e., I know how to deal with uncomfortable situation).

The third domain of the resilient model is visionary leaders, which encompasses seven measurement items: (1) directional (i.e., I provide a clear picture of the future to my organization), (2) influential (i.e., I instill a sense of direction throughout the team), (3) clarity (i.e., I know what I want to achieve in the future), (4) actionable (i.e., I am able to translate my ideas into action), (5) inspiring (i.e., I am able to inspire others to follow my direction), (6) appealing vision (i.e., I articulate appealing visions for the organization), (7) progressive (i.e., I am capable to provide advancement for my organization).

The fourth domain of the resilient model is spiritual intelligence, which comprises seven items. (1) reflective (i.e., I spend time contemplating the reason for my existence), (2) self-consciousness (i.e., I am able to find meaning in life that helps me to adapt to stressful situations), (3) purpose-driven (i.e., I am able to define a purpose of my life) (4) self-determination (i.e., I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences) (5) devotional inclusivity (i.e., I integrate spiritual and existential aspects of life into my overall worldview in the decision-making process), (6) introspective (i.e., I am aware of my own emotions and those of others), (7) faith-driven (i.e., I believe the stronger that I connect myself with the higher power, the easier my life is going to get).

The fifth domain of the resilient model is the growth mindset, which consists of seven measurement items: (1) positive (i.e., I am a positive individual), (2) growth-oriented (i.e., I always see challenges and failures as opportunities to grow and learn), (3) confidence (i.e., I do not see failures as setbacks), (4) motivated by others' success (i.e., I am inspired by the success of others), (5) Persistence (i.e., I believe I can learn anything that I put my mind into), (6) optimistic (i.e., I am optimistic about the future), (7) Dedicated effort (i.e., I can improve my skill overtime should I put some work into it).

The sixth domain of the resilient model is the internal ecosystem, which consists of seven measurement items: (1) transparent communication (i.e., There is a strong communication within my organization), (2) good principles (i.e., I create value for my organization), (3) good synergy (i.e., There is a good teamwork between departments within my organization), (4) cross-functional coordination (i.e., I create a good networking between functions within my organization), (5) Self-sustained (i.e., My organization can operate well without my presence), (6) Sensible to others (i.e., I understand the pressures team members face and help them to cope with sudden and difficult pressures and changes), (7) innovative environment (i.e., I create an ecosystem that allows winning ideas to consistently emerge). The complete measurement items for resilient leadership proposed by this study are attached in [Table A1](#) (Appendix).

Figure 2*Theoretical Framework for Measurement Items*

Data Analysis

The data of this study were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. SPSS 26.0 was used for data entry and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) analysis. The respondent's demographic profile was assessed using descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. The EFA was performed to confirm the resilience of the leadership scale. The decision to perform EFA was based on the intent to determine how the items cohere with the latent factor of resilient leadership without adding any constraints. Similar to Hurley et al. (1997), EFA needs to be performed in scale development, measurement, and starting off a line of research.

Results

Sampling Characteristics

A total of 100 questionnaires were received from the specifically targeted respondents. The questionnaire gathered demographic data to ascertain the age, organizational positions, and sales turnover of the respondents. The majority of respondents, representing 37 percent, fall within the age range of 41 to 50 years. This is followed by those above 51 years old, accounting for 29 percent, and individuals aged 31 to 40 years old, representing 25 percent. Additionally, respondents aged 25 to 30 years old represent 7 percent of the total, while those below 25 years old constitute 2 percent. In addition, most of the respondents were female, 88 percent, and male, 12 percent. With regards to their organizational position, 89 percent of them are the owners, while 11 percent occupy top management positions.

Regarding the organization's sales turnover, the majority of responses (67 percent) indicate sales below RM50,000. This is followed by 22 percent of responses indicating sales between RM50,000 and RM200,000, 4 percent indicating sales between RM200,000 and RM1 million, and 1 percent indicating sales above RM25 million. Sales between RM1 million and RM5 million account for 4 percent of responses, while sales between RM10 million and RM25 million account for 2 percent.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to its degree of freedom from random errors, with one of the primary concerns being the scale's internal consistency (Aziz et al., 2020). In this research, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of measuring items. As recommended by Nunnally (1978), the reliability analysis values were determined using a cut-off value of .70. Item consistency for the 42-item was strong and showed a strong reliability of .97, indicating excellent reliability. The seven items of adaptability show a result of .90, seven items of emotional intelligence with .91, seven items of visionary with .91, seven items of spiritual intelligence with .87, seven items of growth mindset with .90, and seven items of internal ecosystem with .91.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Factor analysis is a statistical method employed to reduce a large number of variables to a smaller set of underlying factors that summarizes the essential information included in the variables. In this research, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests were used to assess the sample adequacy for factor analysis. To verify the data set is suitable for factor analysis, the KMO and Bartlett's test should result in a value of above .60; $p < .05$. The 42 items

of the resilient leadership were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) using SPSS version 26.0. [Table 1](#) shows that the KMO value was .90, exceeding the threshold value of .60 suggested by Kaiser (1974). In addition, Bartlett's test reached statistical significance $< .000$, suggesting that the data were suitable for EFA.

Table 1

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.90
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2874.27
	df	528
	Sig.	.000

[Table 2](#) show that the principal component analysis revealed the presence of six components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 48.80%, 6.57%, 5.38%, 5.24%, 4.50%, and 3.37% of the variance, respectively. Besides that, it was found that six components recorded eigenvalues above 1 (16.10, 2.16, 1.77, 1.72, 1.48, and 1.11). These six components explain a total of 73.86 percent of the variance.

Table 2

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	16.10	48.80	48.80	16.10	48.80	48.80	4.88	14.80	14.80
2	2.16	6.57	55.37	2.16	6.57	55.37	4.66	14.12	28.92
3	1.77	5.38	60.75	1.77	5.38	60.75	4.22	12.79	41.71
4	1.72	5.24	65.99	1.72	5.24	65.99	3.82	11.59	53.30
5	1.48	4.50	70.50	1.48	4.50	70.50	3.48	10.56	63.87
6	1.11	3.36	73.86	1.11	3.36	73.86	3.29	9.98	73.86
7	0.84	2.57	76.44						
8	0.74	2.24	78.68						
9	0.69	2.10	80.79						
10	0.63	1.91	82.71						
11	0.59	1.78	84.49						
12	0.51	1.56	86.06						
13	0.46	1.41	87.47						
14	0.42	1.28	88.76						
15	0.40	1.22	89.99						
16	0.37	1.12	91.11						
17	0.35	1.07	92.19						
18	0.31	0.94	93.13						
19	0.30	0.90	94.04						
20	0.25	0.78	94.82						
21	0.22	0.67	95.50						
22	0.18	0.56	96.07						
23	0.17	0.53	96.60						
24	0.16	0.49	97.10						
25	0.15	0.47	97.57						
26	0.14	0.42	98.00						
27	0.13	0.41	98.41						
28	0.11	0.35	98.76						
29	0.10	0.31	99.08						
30	0.09	0.29	99.38						
31	0.08	0.26	99.65						
32	0.06	0.18	99.84						

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Figure 3 illustrates the scree plot of this study. The scree plot graphically displays the eigenvalues for each factor and suggests that there is one predominant factor. This result is the same as the findings displayed in Table 2 (total variance explained).

Figure 3

Scree Plot

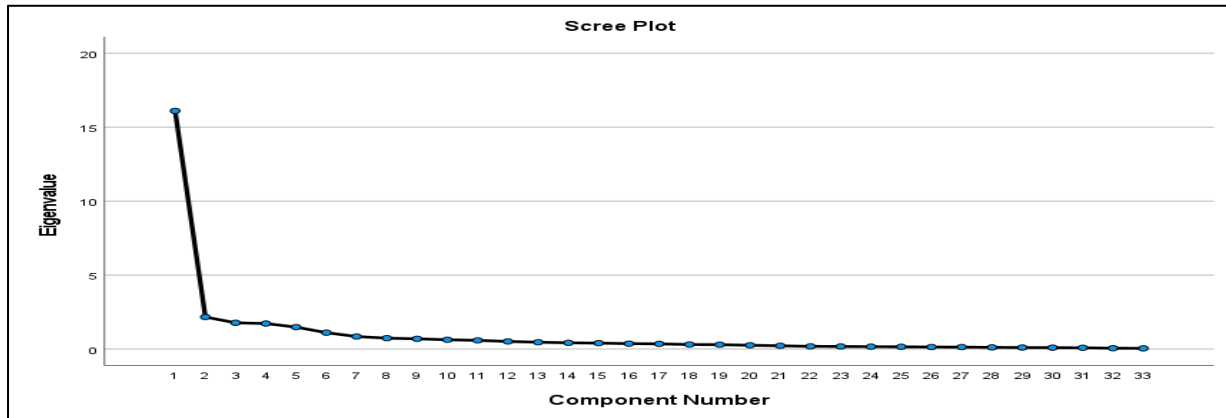
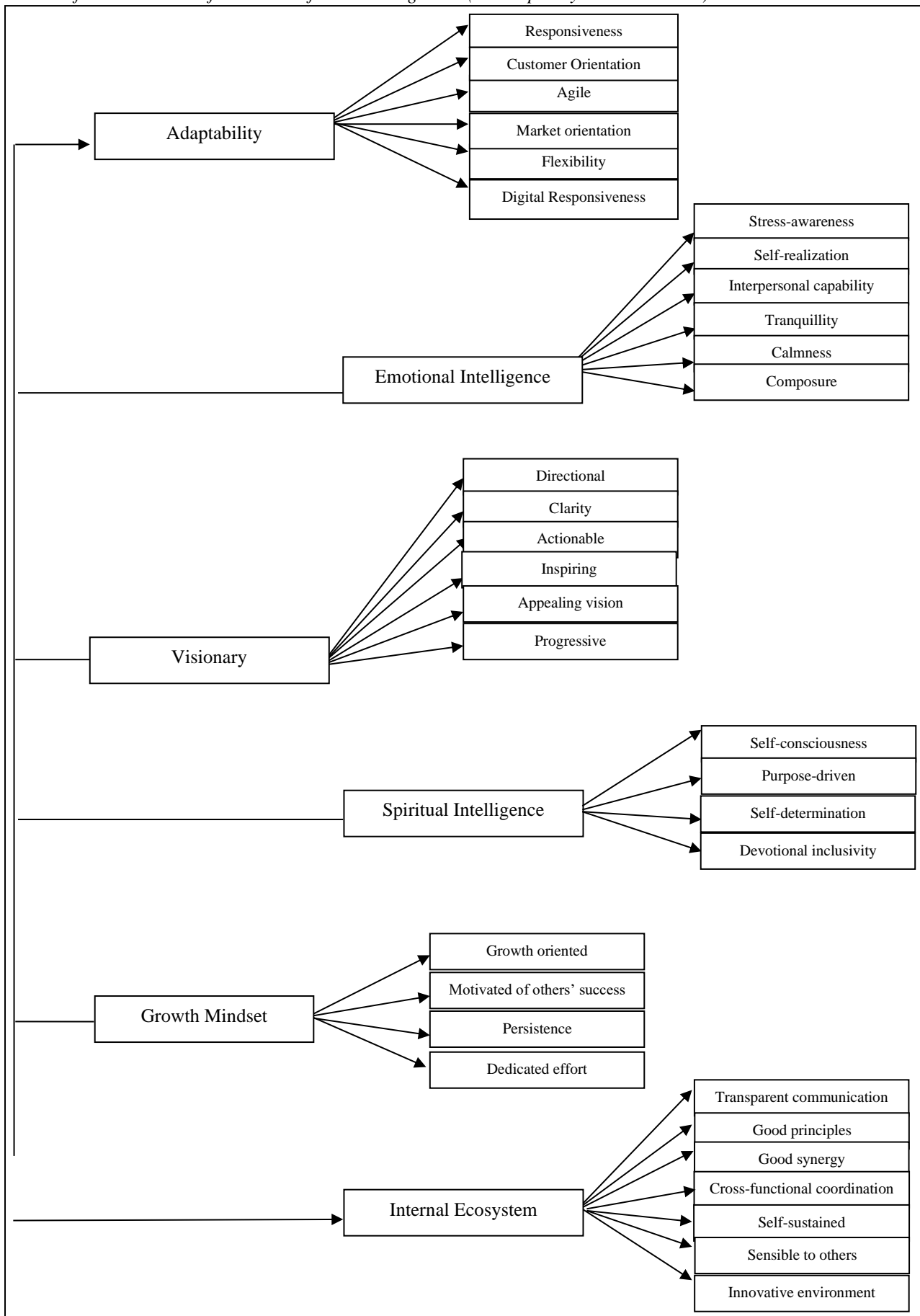


Table 3 shows that out of 42 items, 9 items (A2, E4, V2, S1, S6, S7, GM1, GM3, GM6) were deleted sequentially after the initial analysis. Therefore, the final items of resilient leadership in this study are 33 items without any cross-loading items. The Cronbach's alpha of the 33 items of the resilient model was .96. The final factor structure for measuring items is presented in Figure 4 of this research.

Table 3

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
E1	.81					
E3	.74					
E7	.73					
E5	.70					
E2	.67					
E6	.65					
IE5		.78				
IE2		.71				
IE4		.69				
IE6		.68				
IE7		.64				
IE1		.63				
IE3		.46				
A3			.75			
A5			.74			
A4			.73			
A6			.71			
A1			.68			
A7			.67			
GM4				.85		
GM5				.74		
GM7				.74		
GM2				.58		
S3					.84	
S4					.79	
S2					.71	
S5					.65	
V6						.68
V4						.59
V1						.57
V5						.56
V3						.56
V7						.53

Figure 4*Final factor structure of ReL Model for measuring items (Developed by the researchers)*

Discussion

This study aims to establish a validated quantitative instrument intended to measure resilient leadership among leaders of SMEs in Malaysia. The study's results indicated a six-factor structure of resilient leadership. These six factors of resilient leadership were previously developed by Arham et al. (2023), and items to measure each factor were developed in this study consisting of 42 items, seven items for each factor. After the EFA analysis, all six factors remained, but the items were condensed to 33 items. The final domain of resilient leadership is proposed to be represented by (1) adaptability (six items), (2) emotional intelligence (six items), (3) visionary (six items), (4) spiritual intelligence (four items), (5) growth mindset (four items) and (6) internal ecosystem (remained all seven items).

The construct validity of the resilient leadership scale was evaluated by performing an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). EFA reduces the complexities of the variable to greater simplicity (Henson & Roberts, 2006). The findings confirmed the validity of the remaining 33 items as reliable, resilient leadership measurement tools. It is suggested that this questionnaire could be used as is or with adequate modifications in other business settings and environments. The EFA results showed that the proposed six-factor structure explained the total variance within the recommended range for multidimensional measurements (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, this six-factor structure of adaptability, emotional stability, visionary, spiritual intelligence, growth mindset, and internal ecosystem provides an adequate representation of resilient leadership.

Parallel to what has been reported by Zhang et al. (2024) and Singh et al. (2023), resilient leadership is a multidimensional construct. Few constructs in their studies that focus on the development of resilient leadership in hospitality and tourism enterprises in crisis match the final constructs being proposed in this study. Even though the constructs were termed differently and the context of the studies was different from one another, the discussion posed by these authors was in line with the arguments presented in this research. Resilient leaders are encouraged to be responsive and pay attention to the environment and its changes, which reflects the adaptability construct in this research. In addition, the visionary construct of resilient leadership contributes to the long-term success of an organization (Cojocaru, 2022) by having a long-term view of the direction of the organization, adapting to the environment, and working synergistically.

Resilient leaders should create an open, inclusive, and supportive internal environment that reflects the internal ecosystem in this research. Resilient leaders should consistently be involved in emotional support with themselves and teams that reflect the emotional intelligence construct. In addition, this research includes two additional constructs that might be more relevant in the context of sustainable performance among leaders of SMEs. These include the constructs of a growth mindset and spiritual intelligence.

The findings of this research supported the inclusion of an adaptability construct for resilient leaders within the context of SMEs. Leaders should be more adaptable to operating in a dynamic business environment. The concept of adaptability in leadership pertains to a leader's capacity to successfully modify and react to shifts in the business milieu, market circumstances, and organizational intricacies. The concept entails the ability to adapt, possess a receptive mindset, and demonstrate resilience when confronted with situations characterized by unpredictability and lack of clarity. In the face of a progressively intricate global landscape, it is imperative for

leaders to prioritize the examination of dynamic, distributed, and contextual elements in order to effectively position their organizations for enhanced adaptability (Schulze & Pinkow, 2020).

The study conducted by Radhwan et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of leaders' emotional intelligence in effectively managing critical situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that leaders' emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement, enthusiasm, and energy in the workplace. The findings also indicate that the emotional intelligence of leaders plays a key role in enhancing the psychological resourcefulness of employees, resulting in increased efficacy and resilience. This, in turn, leads to higher levels of engagement.

Being visionary is an important element of resilient leadership. As per Samad et al. (2022), this characteristic leads to effective leadership during times of crisis. In addition, forward-thinking leaders who are able to adapt and inspire can facilitate essential transformations that promote organizational growth. They have confidence in their employees without excessively controlling them and are receptive to their ideas and recommendations. Due to these exceptional attributes, a forward-thinking leader has the ability to guide all kinds of teams, including functional, cross-functional, self-managed, and virtual teams (Jaqua & Jaqua, 2021).

The absence of a growth mentality can have significant implications for leaders who are resistant to altering their leadership style, particularly when individuals aim to thrive in this intricate milieu. Hence, it is imperative for leaders to cultivate a development mindset in order to get substantial support from their employees, customers, and stakeholders. According to Derler et al. (2018), there are notable advantages associated with the implementation of growth mindset cultures in the workplace. For example, employees exhibit a 47 percent increase in trust in their organization. They are 34 percent more inclined to have a sense of ownership and dedication toward the long-term prospects of their company. Additionally, there is a 65 percent increase in the level of agreement among workers regarding their company's support for risk-taking.

The possession of spiritual intelligence is of utmost importance for leaders, as it enables them to foster a sense of harmony, worth, and spirituality inside the organizational setting (Mehta et al., 2019). In the context of the intricate and crucial business landscape, it is imperative for leaders to pursue a state of inner tranquility actively. This pursuit enables them to cultivate a profound understanding of their own identity, the purpose of their job, and ultimately, to garner the support of their followers by aligning with their values.

Finally, a business ecosystem is a network of organizations that includes suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, and government agencies. Thus, the leader of the organization creates an internal organizational ecosystem, reflecting the interdependence between departments, communication, and support systems. Each team member experiences less work-related stress through the process of teamwork, which enables them to accomplish the company's assigned tasks effectively. Additionally, teamwork provides an opportunity for members to engage in mutual commitment and collaboration. Additionally, teamwork fosters the development of relationships among its members since they often feel valued and appreciated for their productive contributions toward job completion (Mangi et al., 2015). For the teamwork between and within departments to work effectively and efficiently, resilient leaders need to have a good communication network. Among other things, effective communication reduces uncertainty and resistance to change. Research on communication has

demonstrated a favorable association between communication and several organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment, performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and work satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Theoretical Implication

First, this research develops a ReL Model (resilient leadership model) by suggesting a measurement tool for future empirical research within the context of the leadership domain. Unlike other measurement tools (Zhang et al., 2024; Azmi, 2020), the developed measurement tool that was drawn from a learning perspective indicates that leadership is an ongoing process that incorporates the elements of behavioral, personal, and environmental factors. It is a more comprehensive tool that suits any leaders at different managerial levels and can be suited to the ever-changing economic situations of SMEs.

Secondly, the six-factor ReL-Model model in this research is designed for leaders within the context of leaders of SMEs. Previous studies of resilient leadership (Dartey-Baah, 2015; Singh et al., 2023) were lacking in the perspectives of entrepreneurial leadership. In addition, the inclusion of the elements of spiritual intelligence and growth mindset enhances the theoretical development of resilient leadership.

Finally, resilient leadership measures align with trait-based leadership theories (Cohn et al., 2009; Ledesma, 2014), which suggest that certain inherent qualities contribute to effective leadership. The final identification and measurement of specific resilient leadership traits, such as adaptability, emotional intelligence, visionary, spiritual intelligence, growth mindset, and internal ecosystem, contribute to the ongoing development of trait-based leadership models.

Practical Implication

The establishment of a resilient leadership framework holds significant practical consequences that resonate throughout various aspects of an organization. First and foremost, this approach facilitates the precise identification and development of individuals who possess the necessary skills to navigate challenging circumstances and manage teams amidst unpredictability effectively. The strategic alignment discussed here serves multiple purposes, including facilitating succession planning and fostering a corporate culture that places importance on resilience. This alignment also ensures that leadership traits are in line with the aims of the firm.

Additionally, the model facilitates the enhancement of leadership development programs through the provision of a precise structure for customized training. The primary objective is to shift attention towards developing skills that enable leaders to effectively recover from failures, effectively handle stress, and cultivate resilience within their teams. The implementation of this customized strategy guarantees that leaders possess not only a high level of competence in conventional leadership abilities but also the necessary tools to excel in the ever-changing and uncertain terrain of the contemporary corporate world.

Finally, the resilient leadership model has a broad influence on team relationships and the process of cooperation. Through the evaluation and cultivation of team resilience, companies could cultivate teams that exhibit optimal performance in the presence of difficulties, thereby cultivating an environment that encourages cooperation, innovative resolution of problems, and efficient exchange of information. The prioritization of collective resilience has a significant role in fostering a favorable work atmosphere, which in turn promotes the psychological welfare

and job contentment of team members. Ultimately, this contributes to the retention of employees and the overall success of the business. The practical implications of a resilient leadership model encompass various aspects, including the focused development of leaders and the cultivation of a robust organizational culture, which promotes resilience across all levels of the organization.

Limitations And Future Direction

This research is not without limitations. First, generalizations from this research are limited due to the limited sample size involved, and the results were limited to only the manufacturing and services industry of SMEs in Malaysia. Second, the cross-sectional design adopted should be carefully considered for application in different contexts.

In the future, it is suggested that researchers can cross-validate this measurement model in different study settings, especially amongst those that are directly involved in resilience-driven economic environments. It is also suggested that future studies incorporate a larger sample size. Perhaps future studies could also benefit by incorporating the elements of different stages of business life cycles. As organizations are going through different types of pressures and challenges at different stages of the business, thus different antecedents of resilient leadership might be more pertinent at different stages of the crisis.

Conclusion

A competent and effective leader is important to drive the success of the organization. But, in today's rapidly changing environment, the organization needs resilient leadership. This research reinforces the need for leaders to be more resilient in navigating uncertainties in the business environment. The findings highlight the various components of resilient leadership that are crucial to be developed and should form part of the overall people development strategy. By cultivating resilience in their leaders, organizations can enhance their performance, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability.

Declarations

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Not applicable.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

This study has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee from the Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia (REC/08/2023 (ST/MR/208)).

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Appendix

Table A1

Measurement Items for Resilient Leadership (Developed by this Research)

Code	Theme	Description Item
ADAPTABILITY		
A1	Responsiveness	I quickly respond to the uncertainties in business environments.
A2	Anticipatory	I always prefer a proactive approach.
A3	Customer orientation	I quickly change my strategies to respond to customer demands.
A4	Agile	I react to change accordingly.
A5	Market orientation	I quickly change my strategies to respond to changing market conditions.
A6	Flexibility	I have the capacity to modify my behavior to fit changing circumstances.
A7	Digital responsiveness	I quickly change my strategies to respond to technological advancement.
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE		
E1.	Stress awareness	I can manage my own stress.
E2.	Self-realization	I know my own emotions as I experience them.
E3.	Interpersonal capability	I am able to understand and respond accordingly to the emotions of others.
E4.	Empathy	I am able to recognize the desires of others around me.
E5.	Tranquility	In the midst of unexpected situations, I remain calm.
E6.	Calmness	I can handle conflicts in my life in a composed manner.
E7.	Composure	I know how to deal with uncomfortable situation.
VISIONARY		
V1.	Directional	I provide a clear picture of the future to my organization.
V2.	Influential	I instil a sense of direction throughout the team.
V3.	Clarity	I know what I want to achieve in the future.
V4.	Actionable	I am able to translate my ideas into action.
V5.	Inspiring	I am able to inspire others to follow my direction.
V6.	Appealing vision	I articulate appealing visions for the organization.
V7.	Progressive	I am capable to provide advancement for my organization.
SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE		
S1.	Reflective	I spend time contemplating the reason for my existence.
S2.	Self-consciousness	I am able to find meaning in life that helps me to adapt to stressful situations.
S3.	Purpose-driven	I am able to define a purpose for my life.
S4.	Self-determination	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.
S5.	Devotional inclusivity	I integrate spiritual and existential aspects of life into my overall worldview in decision-making process.
S6.	Introspective	I am aware of my own emotions and those of others.
S7.	Faith-driven	I believe the stronger that I connect myself with the higher power, the easier my life is going to get.
GROWTH MINDSET		
G1.	Positive	I am a positive individual.
G2.	Growth-oriented	I always see challenges and failures as opportunities to grow and learn.
G3.	Confidence	I do not see failures as setbacks.
G4.	Motivated by others' success	I am inspired by the success of others.
G5.	Persistence	I believe I can learn anything that I put my mind into.
G6.	Optimistic	I am optimistic about the future.
G7.	Dedicated effort	I can improve my skill overtime should I put some work into it.
INTERNAL ECOSYSTEM		
IE1.	Transparent communication	There is a strong communication within my organization.
IE2.	Good principles	I create value for my organization.
IE3.	Good synergy	There is a good teamwork between departments within my organization.
IE4.	Cross-functional coordination	I create a good networking between functions within my organization.
IE5.	Self-sustained	My organization can operate well without my presence.
IE6.	Sensible to others	I understand the pressures team members face and help them to cope with sudden and difficult pressures and changes.
IE7.	Innovative environment	I create an ecosystem that allows winning ideas to consistently emerge.