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Gillian Lutz, Flip Schutte

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Enhancing resilience in public sector business continuity: lessons from the Western Cape Government, South Africa

Gillian Lutz* and Flip Schutte

STADIO Higher Education,
Johannesburg Krugersdorp Campus,
R28 Service Road, Krugersdorp, 1739, South Africa
Email: gillian.lutz@westerncape.gov.za
Email: flips@stadio.ac.za
*Corresponding author

Abstract: Resilience has become a critical capability for public sector organisations navigating increasingly complex and frequent disruptions. This study examines how the Western Cape Government (WCG) in South Africa conceptualised and operationalised resilience through its business continuity practices during successive crises, including COVID-19, the Day Zero water crisis, and ongoing electricity shortages. Using a qualitative case study approach that involves semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the research identifies key resilience-building mechanisms, including adaptive leadership, flexible continuity planning, cross-departmental collaboration, and institutional learning. The findings reveal that while business continuity planning provided essential operational scaffolding, true resilience emerged from the organisation's ability to adapt, learn, and respond dynamically to evolving threats. By integrating theoretical frameworks such as Linnenluecke's triadic model, ISO 22316, and the VUCA/BANI paradigms, the study provides a context-sensitive analysis of public sector resilience in a resource-constrained and politically complex environment. It contributes to the growing discourse on resilience by demonstrating how structured continuity planning must be complemented by strategic agility and psychological readiness to ensure effective governance in the Global South.

Keywords: adaptive leadership; business continuity; crisis management; governance in the Global South; institutional learning; public sector; resilience; Western Cape Government; WCG; South Africa.

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Biographical notes: Gillian Lutz is the Director of Security Advisory Services within the Programme: Security Risk Management at the Western Cape Government, South Africa. She is an experienced public sector leader specialising in safety, security, and risk management, with a proven track record in developing transversal strategies that strengthen resilience across government. In her current role, she provides strategic guidance on occupational health and safety, security, business continuity, and staff safety. She holds a Masters of Business Administration and a Doctor of Management, with research focused on the governance and practice of business continuity

management in the South African context. Her work bridges theory and practice to advance organisational resilience and foster collaborative approaches to safety and security.

Flip Schutte is the Dean of Research and Head of the Institute of Postgraduate Studies at STADIO Higher Education in South Africa. He specialises in the pedagogy of doctoral education and supervision.

1 Introduction

The increasing frequency, scale, and complexity of global disruptions have underscored the imperative for public sector institutions to build not just continuity capacity but systemic resilience. While resilience has become a prominent concept in both academic and policy discourse, its application in the public sector – particularly in resource-constrained and highly unequal settings – remains uneven and under-theorised. Much of the existing literature conceptualises resilience as a universal capability, often divorced from the institutional, socio-political, and infrastructural realities of governance in the Global South.

This paper addresses that gap by examining how resilience is both conceptualised and operationalised within a provincial government in South Africa – the Western Cape Government (WCG). Drawing on qualitative interviews and document analysis, the study explores how departments within the WCG responded to a series of systemic shocks, including drought, load-shedding, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These disruptions served as both stress tests and catalysts, revealing the interplay between formal business continuity plans (BCPs), adaptive organisational culture, and strategic governance.

The paper contributes theoretically by critically engaging with prevailing frameworks – including Linnenluecke’s triadic model of resilience and ISO 22316 – while empirically extending them to the context of a sub-national government in a developing country. It distinguishes between planned and adaptive resilience, demonstrating how these dynamics unfold under real-world constraints. Practically, the paper offers lessons for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to embed resilience into everyday governance rather than treating it as a reactive function. In doing so, it adds to the limited but growing body of literature on public sector resilience in the Global South. It provides an evidence-based perspective on how institutional agility can be fostered in complex governance environments.

2 Literature review

2.1 *Theoretical frameworks on resilience*

The concept of resilience has evolved substantially from its origins in the physical sciences to become a multidimensional framework relevant to ecological, psychological, and organisational domains. Initially defined as the capacity of systems to absorb disturbances while maintaining essential functions, resilience thinking now encompasses the persistence, adaptability, and transformative potential of systems in response to

change (Folke, 2016). Importantly, resilience has moved beyond traditional risk and uncertainty models to embrace the complexity of unforeseen and emergent challenges, particularly in dynamic and interdependent systems such as organisations.

Barasa et al. (2018) further elaborated on this evolution, mapping resilience from its physical science roots – where it referred to a system’s ability to return to equilibrium – through its ecological application, focused on absorbing shocks while retaining functionality, to its current use in the social sciences. In organisational contexts, resilience entails not only withstanding disruption but also adapting and transforming in response to ongoing volatility. Their differentiation between *planned resilience*, based on pre-existing risk and continuity strategies, and *adaptive resilience*, which emerges post-crisis through learning and innovation, offers a foundational lens for assessing how organisations respond to disruption. This distinction is particularly relevant for public institutions that must strike a balance between preparedness and flexibility.

This evolution in thinking is echoed by Bhamra et al. (2011), who positioned resilience as a dynamic capability linked to both organisational structures and individual capacities. Beyond recovery, resilience entails the ability to align resources, adapt to changing environments, and strategically respond to risk. However, they noted significant gaps in the empirical study of organisational resilience, particularly regarding how resilience integrates with risk management in practice. Burnard and Bhamra (2019) later expanded on this by distinguishing between *passive* resilience – absorbing immediate impact – and *active* resilience – anticipating and preparing for disruption. These dual capacities are crucial for organisations facing complex, layered challenges, particularly in public sectors marked by resource constraints and bureaucratic inertia.

Liu et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of structural, managerial, and operational resilience, underscoring the significance of interdependencies across various systems, including infrastructure, suppliers, and stakeholders. They argued that resilience cannot be achieved in isolation but must be fostered through collective ownership, strong leadership, and adaptive culture. Critically, they pointed to leadership, inclusive decision-making, and cultural cohesion as key enablers of successful crisis navigation – a perspective aligned with the relational and systemic understanding of resilience advanced by Folke (2016).

Hiba (2021) further asserted that resilience is not only essential for organisational survival but is also a strategic enabler of long-term sustainability in environments defined by uncertainty. This is consistent with Linnenluecke’s (2017) influential review, which identified five primary research streams in resilience literature: organisational response to external threats, high-reliability practices, individual psychological resilience, business model adaptability, and supply chain resilience. These streams reflect the diverse lenses through which resilience is understood, but also expose the fragmentation in the field. Notably, resilience is often assessed retrospectively, limiting its value as a predictive organisational capability.

To address this, Linnenluecke (2017) proposed a three-stage model – *persistence*, *adaptation*, and *transformation* – as a unifying theoretical approach. This model is particularly useful for analysing the responses of public sector organisations such as those within the WCG. However, this study’s findings suggest that these stages do not always unfold linearly or comprehensively. For instance, some WCG departments demonstrated adaptation without progressing to transformation, constrained by rigid structures, unequal digital access, or siloed communication. This underscores the need to contextualise and

potentially refine Linnenluecke's model for public sector settings in developing contexts, where systemic and resource constraints may inhibit transformative change.

While global frameworks emphasise planned versus adaptive resilience (Linnenluecke, 2017; ISO, 2017), South African research increasingly highlights how these concepts play out in regional government practice. A study of the WCG's business continuity planning by Lutz et al. (2021) revealed misalignment with ISO standards, despite formal continuity efforts. Provincial documents such as the Western Cape Recovery Plan [Western Cape Government (South Africa), 2021] describe coordinated responses based on hotspot targeting and data-driven decision-making. Additionally, the Provincial Treasury circular guided the activation of remote financial systems and continuity protocols during lockdown (Western Cape Government Provincial Treasury, 2020). In the health sector, learning from COVID-19 and the Day Zero drought demonstrated how institutional memory can inform multi-crisis resilience strategies (Quintana et al., 2023). These sources fill a key empirical gap in the literature regarding sub-national resilience building in South African public institutions.

Taken together, the reviewed frameworks demonstrate that resilience is both a theoretical construct and a practical imperative. It involves structural readiness, cultural alignment, individual capability, and inter-organisational cooperation. While this paper aligns with Linnenluecke's (2017) synthesis of resilience as fragmented but overlapping domains, it also advocates for a more integrated, context-sensitive approach that acknowledges the particular challenges of building resilience in the public sector. This includes a greater emphasis on predictive models, inclusive leadership, and adapting resilience strategies to the constraints and complexities of developing country contexts.

2.2 *Resilience in the public sector*

Resilience in the public sector has increasingly been recognised as a critical governance function, especially in contexts where the delivery of essential services must continue uninterrupted despite complex and unpredictable challenges. Tucker (2015) frames resilience as a core component of public sector risk management, emphasising the need for continuity of service during periods of disruption. However, the experience of the WCG during recent crises – including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Day Zero water crisis, and the ongoing electricity shortages – suggests that continuity alone is insufficient. Departments that navigated these disruptions most effectively did more than persist; they adapted to emerging demands and, in some cases, initiated transformative change. This indicates that resilience in the public sector should be reconceptualised not merely as operational continuity, but as a dynamic process of learning, innovation, and institutional renewal. This redefinition aligns with Linnenluecke's (2017) model of organisational resilience, which distinguishes between persistence, adaptation, and transformation, and with Barasa et al.'s (2018) concept of *adaptive resilience*. The WCG case illustrates that truly resilient departments embed flexibility into core processes, repurpose human resources, and collaborate across sectors. These traits extend beyond compliance-driven BCPs, highlighting the importance of institutional agility – the ability to revise strategy, redeploy resources, and learn in real-time.

The Business Continuity Institute (2016) similarly argues that public institutions require strategic flexibility to operate effectively in volatile conditions. In contrast to the private sector, where resilience often centres on profit retention and shareholder value, public sector resilience must balance cost-efficiency, public accountability, regulatory

oversight, and citizen trust. As the WCG's experience demonstrates, static or overly prescriptive continuity plans can quickly become obsolete in the face of novel crises. Departments that fostered cross-sector collaboration and adaptive thinking responded more effectively, reinforcing the idea that resilience is a dynamic and evolving capability, but one that is shaped by an iterative governance process that is complex and interdependent.

The International Standards Organisation (2017), in ISO 22316:2017, defines organisational resilience as the capacity to absorb and adapt in a changing environment to continue achieving objectives and ultimately prosper. This definition reinforces two key ideas: first, that resilience is shaped by a unique configuration of strategic and operational factors; and second, that no universal formula exists for building resilience. Instead, organisations must tailor their approaches to fit their specific risks, resources, and contextual realities. Within the WCG, this principle was evident: departments with similar mandates displayed vastly different resilience trajectories, largely influenced by leadership quality, technological readiness, and institutional culture. This reinforces ISO's assertion that context-sensitive, decentralised resilience strategies are essential for effective public governance.

The South Africa National Treasury (2007) outlines the South African Government's mandate to provide services through the public sector, a responsibility carried out by provincial bodies such as the WCG. However, this function is multidimensional, encompassing both external service deliveries to the public and internal support to other government entities. As such, resilience in the WCG must operate across these layers, ensuring both outward-facing accountability and inward-facing administrative continuity. In this sense, resilience becomes not just a management objective but a systemic public value, one that enables the state to fulfil its constitutional and developmental obligations even under duress.

The WCG's Recovery Plan (2021) exemplifies efforts to institutionalise resilience through service innovation, digital transformation, and adaptive governance structures. These initiatives reflect a broader shift in public administration towards resilience as a long-term strategic capability, rather than a reactive measure. They also reveal the tension between formal resilience planning and informal adaptive capacity – a theme supported by Liu et al. (2021) and Burnard and Bhamra (2019), who argue that resilience emerges not only from predefined procedures but from the dynamic interplay of leadership, culture, and operational improvisation.

In summary, resilience in the public sector transcends the maintenance of services during crises. It entails an evolving capability to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and learn from disruption – thereby enabling institutions to strengthen their governance capacity over time. As demonstrated by the WCG case, public sector resilience must be understood as both a strategic imperative and a cultural mindset, deeply embedded across all levels of the organisation and responsive to the systemic challenges unique to governance in developing country contexts.

2.3 Contextualising the South African and WCG

The South African public sector operates within a deeply unequal and fiscally constrained environment, marked by historical legacies of exclusion, high service delivery demands, and ongoing socio-political volatility. Within this context, the WCG has had to navigate persistent disruptions – ranging from drought and electricity shortages to the COVID-19

pandemic – while attempting to institutionalise resilience across its systems and functions. This study interrogates the extent to which the WCG’s responses to these crises represent systematic resilience-building versus ad hoc, reactive adaptations.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) mandates the state to ensure equitable access to public services, a directive operationalised through legislation such as the Public Service Act 103 of 1994. The Department of Public Service and Administration is constitutionally tasked with establishing norms and standards for governance, including the public sector’s structure, functioning, and service delivery protocols. These legislative frameworks are foundational to building resilience in the public service – they establish the institutional scaffolding within which departments are expected to plan, adapt, and respond to disruption. However, as this study reveals, formal governance mechanisms alone are insufficient to guarantee organisational resilience unless supported by internal flexibility, leadership, and adaptive capacity.

The research found significant variation in how service delivery expectations were met during crises. Departments with experience in business continuity planning – such as through Day Zero preparedness drills – were generally better equipped to maintain service standards during the pandemic. Conversely, departments with rigid hierarchies or inadequate IT infrastructure struggled to meet even the most basic expectations. Several participants observed that while service delivery goals were clearly articulated, their practical realisation depended on embedding resilience principles – such as learning, flexibility, and staff empowerment – into everyday departmental operations. One department successfully redeployed staff to support emergency food distribution during lockdowns, demonstrating operational agility, whereas others were constrained by narrow interpretations of mandate, reinforcing the need for resilience to be integrated into both the design and execution of service delivery frameworks. This echoes ISO 22316:2017’s (International Standards Organization, 2017) assertion that resilience is highly context-dependent and requires tailored, iterative implementation rather than universal prescriptions.

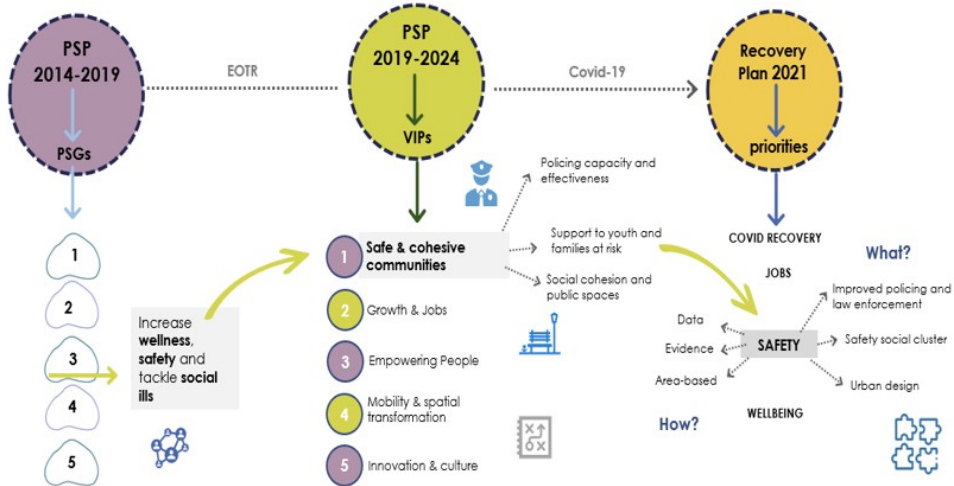
As a provincial sphere of government, the WCG has a dual role: formulating and implementing policies that reflect both national priorities and regional socio-economic needs. This dual responsibility means the WCG must remain responsive to both top-down legislative direction and bottom-up service delivery pressures. The governance structure, therefore, requires robust internal coordination, institutional coherence, and interdepartmental collaboration – all critical elements of systemic resilience. Departments are tasked with translating legislative intentions into service outcomes, often amid limited resources and complex stakeholder environments.

The COVID-19 pandemic sharply exposed these structural pressures. As noted by Sekyere et al. (2020), the global public health emergency triggered rapid lockdowns, disrupted economies, and forced public administrations to make swift, high-stakes decisions. In South Africa, the declaration of a national state of disaster and the rollout of emergency response measures imposed new responsibilities on all levels of government. The pandemic’s effects extended beyond health systems, impacting social services, infrastructure, and governance practices – thereby elevating resilience from a theoretical aspiration to a survival imperative.

The WCG responded with its Recovery Plan [Western Cape Government (South Africa), 2021], which reflected a shift towards data-driven, adaptive governance. The plan prioritised four themes – COVID recovery, jobs, safety, and wellbeing – each designed to address systemic vulnerabilities exposed by the crisis. Notably, the Plan

marked a move from rigid service protocols to more agile, integrated operational models. The Plan's emphasis on area-based service delivery, real-time data use, and cross-sector collaboration suggests an emergent culture of resilience that aligns with the adaptive and transformative stages of Linnenluecke's (2017) model. Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of the WCG's approach to safety, showing how external shocks can influence institutional priorities and design.

Figure 1 Evolution of the WCG approach to safety (see online version for colours)



Source: Western Cape Government (South Africa) (2021)

However, it is critical to note that while service delivery models evolved, the core mandates of departments remained constant. This distinction is significant: the WCG did not change what it was required to do, but it changed how it delivered those functions. This reinforces the importance of operational agility, not just strategic alignment, in fostering resilience. The pandemic thus served as both a stress test and a catalyst, exposing institutional fragilities while opening space for innovation and learning.

In summary, the WCG's response to crises reflects the broader challenges and opportunities of building resilience within South Africa's public service. The presence of enabling legislation and policy commitments, (e.g., service charters and strategic plans) offers a formal foundation. Yet, real resilience lies in the capacity to operationalise these commitments adaptively – through inclusive leadership, decentralised decision-making, and flexible resource mobilisation. This requires shifting from compliance-based governance to a culture of resilience, where preparedness, learning, and systemic coordination are embedded into everyday public service delivery.

2.4 Understanding the external environment

Public sector organisations increasingly operate within environments defined by rapid change, growing interdependence, and systemic fragility. Vishwakarma and Pandey (2024) characterise this landscape as a VUCA world – volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous – where traditional public management approaches often fall short. More recently, the BANI framework – brittleness, anxiety, nonlinearity, and

incomprehensibility – has emerged as a complementary lens, reflecting not only the structural turbulence but also the emotional and psychological strain that modern institutions must navigate. Together, these frameworks illustrate the dual pressures on public organisations: to remain responsive to external shocks while maintaining internal cohesion and performance.

For the WCG, these dynamics are not abstract. A succession of crises – including the COVID-19 pandemic, sustained electricity load-shedding, and the Day Zero drought – has underscored the need for organisational resilience as a core governance capability. These events highlighted deep-rooted challenges, including over-reliance on outdated infrastructure, unequal access to digital tools, and limited adaptive capacity across departments. As this study shows, navigating such conditions requires more than continuity planning; it demands a paradigm shift toward adaptive, systems-thinking leadership grounded in both structural flexibility and emotional intelligence.

According to Jane (2023), VUCA conditions demand a recognition of system interdependence and a strategic orientation that emphasises agility, foresight, and coordination. VUCA thinking empowers public institutions to anticipate shocks and respond dynamically, particularly in contexts where policy and service demands are rapidly evolving. In contrast, the BANI framework shifts attention inward, highlighting the psychological toll of disruption and the fragility of systems under stress. Where VUCA explains the external velocity of change, BANI surfaces the internal cracks – overburdened personnel, fragile operating procedures, and decision paralysis.

Crucially, this dual lens adds depth to the understanding of resilience in public governance. While VUCA provides a rationale for strategic agility and scenario-based planning, BANI highlights the importance of addressing the emotional labour and mental well-being of public servants tasked with managing crises. As Jane (2023) argues, integrating both frameworks supports leadership decision-making by engaging with both the systemic and human dimensions of organisational resilience. This is particularly critical in contexts like the Western Cape, where governance systems must simultaneously contend with historical inequalities, bureaucratic rigidity, and infrastructure deficits.

The value of these frameworks lies not only in their explanatory power but in their practical application. While much of the existing literature discusses VUCA and BANI conceptually, this study operationalises them through the lens of empirical cases from the WCG. For instance, the uncertainty and rapidly changing policy environment during COVID-19 aligns with VUCA's challenge to linear planning and highlights the need for adaptive coordination mechanisms. In contrast, the brittleness of electrical infrastructure during load-shedding illustrates a BANI-type fragility, where cascading failures across interdependent systems revealed systemic weaknesses and the need for redundancy and flexibility.

By mapping real-world disruptions onto these frameworks, this study contributes to their contextualisation in the Global South. It highlights that resilience in developing country public sectors must contend not only with disruption itself but also with resource asymmetries, digital divides, and historically entrenched inequalities. In such settings, the relevance of VUCA and BANI lies in their ability to frame resilience as a multidimensional, ongoing process, requiring structural, strategic, and psychological readiness across all levels of governance.

2.5 Business continuity management (BCM)

BCM has emerged as a foundational component of organisational resilience, offering structured approaches to ensure service delivery during disruptions. However, its traditional emphasis on predictability and control has been increasingly challenged by the complexity and volatility of contemporary crises. Groenendaal and Helsloot (2020) describe BCM as a practical framework that helps organisations withstand quantifiable risks – such as IT failures or physical inaccessibility – by ensuring continuity within predefined time frames and capacities. However, they caution that BCM's reliance on predictable risk models limits its utility in addressing rare, nonlinear disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In such cases, BCM may preserve operational stability but fall short of fostering the adaptability and learning required to navigate emergent, system-wide crises. Thus, while BCM does not equate to resilience, it can contribute to it when integrated with dynamic capabilities that support innovation and institutional learning.

Smith (2012) draws a critical distinction between business continuity planning – a time-bound, often document-driven process – and BCM as a holistic, evolving capability. This distinction is particularly crucial in the public sector, where rigid adherence to predefined plans can hinder adaptive responses to unexpected crises. Smith argues that in increasingly unpredictable environments; the emphasis must shift from procedural compliance to adaptive capacity. BCM should not be reduced to a set of checklists but must be embedded as a cross-cutting, strategic function within governance systems, enabling institutions to assess risk dynamically, respond proportionately, and maintain service delivery amidst uncertainty.

This perspective is echoed by Graham and Kaye (2006), who frame BCM as a comprehensive process that intersects with organisational governance, quality assurance, and risk management. They stress that BCM must be context-specific, grounded in a nuanced understanding of internal and external risks, and woven into daily operations rather than treated as a crisis-only protocol. When implemented in this way, BCM supports not just continuity, but also resilience and institutional renewal – key capabilities for public institutions like the WCG, which operate under conditions of persistent fiscal constraint and political accountability.

Engeman and Henderson (2011) reinforce this idea, emphasising that BCM must be managed at the strategic level. Their work highlights that BCM can foster resilience when it aligns with governance structures, institutional objectives, and long-term planning processes. It should be proactive, not reactive – integrating threat identification, scenario planning, and the embedding of continuity principles into organisational routines. For the WCG, which must navigate disruptions such as load-shedding, water shortages, and public health emergencies, strategic alignment is critical to ensure that continuity mechanisms are not isolated from broader resilience-building efforts.

Nevertheless, the conceptual clarity of BCM remains inconsistent, especially across global contexts. Sawalha and Anchor (2023) note that term such as business continuity, crisis management, disaster recovery, and contingency planning are often used interchangeably, leading to confusion and implementation gaps. They further argue that empirical research on BCM remains limited, particularly in public sector institutions in the Global South. This makes case-based studies, such as this examination of the WCG, crucial for understanding how BCM is adapted to real-world institutional settings and complex governance environments. The WCG's experience reveals that where BCM was

integrated with organisational strategy and aligned to risk-informed planning, departments were better positioned to respond to COVID-19-related disruptions. However, in cases where BCM was treated as a compliance exercise or siloed within IT or facilities management functions, its impact was minimal.

Bajgorić and Moon (2009) bring attention to the technical dimensions of BCM, especially in highly digitised environments. They argue that BCM must ensure system integration, infrastructure redundancy, and minimal downtime – features that are increasingly vital in public sector institutions like the WCG, where digital services are central to core operations. Technical resilience, in this view, becomes a prerequisite for broader institutional continuity. This is particularly relevant given the WCG’s growing reliance on IT platforms for communication, service delivery, and interdepartmental coordination during crisis periods.

Heng and Wong (2015) extend the discussion by highlighting how perceptions of BCM vary significantly across organisational sizes and sectors. While their focus is on Small Medium Enterprises in Asia, their insights on management buy-in, clarity of purpose, and proportional implementation are applicable to complex public sector environments as well. They note that BCM is often misunderstood as either emergency response or IT disaster recovery – leading to fragmented or superficial adoption. Importantly, they stress that international standards, (e.g., ISO 22301) should not be seen as prescriptive checklists, but as flexible, risk-based frameworks that can be tailored to local institutional needs. For the WCG, this implies that BCM must be scaled and adapted to reflect departmental mandates, resource capacities, and technological maturity – while remaining aligned to core principles of resilience.

In summary, BCM plays a vital role in supporting planned resilience (Barasa et al., 2018) within the public sector. However, as this study demonstrates, its true value lies in how well it is integrated into broader organisational systems and adapted for local governance realities. In the case of the WCG, departments that embedded BCM within strategic planning and invested in both human and technical continuity were better equipped to maintain services during periods of disruption. Conversely, where BCM remained disconnected from governance and resource allocation processes, it failed to prevent institutional fragmentation. Moving forward, public sector resilience will depend not just on the existence of continuity plans, but on the ability to use BCM as a living framework – one that connects foresight, operations, leadership, and learning into a cohesive organisational response.

2.6 Resilience vs. business continuity

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a global reckoning with the adequacy of organisational preparedness frameworks. The BCI (2018) emphasised that while BCM played a critical role in ensuring the continuation of essential services during a crisis, it alone was insufficient to achieve full organisational resilience. The pandemic exposed the limits of predefined response plans and underscored the need for broader, adaptive capabilities. While BCM is foundational, resilience involves a more dynamic and systemic process of learning, adjusting, and evolving in response to both expected and unexpected disruptions.

According to Hillman and Guenther (2021), business continuity refers to the specific actions taken to restore or sustain operations during and after a crisis. In contrast, resilience encompasses an organisation’s inherent capacity to absorb shocks, adapt to

change, and tolerate disruption over time. This distinction is especially salient in public sector institutions like the WCG, where continuity is necessary but not sufficient: resilience must include long-term transformation and governance reform to sustain public value and trust under prolonged stress.

The BCI (2016, 2018) describes BCM as an evolving discipline – initially rooted in IT disaster recovery and emergency response, but now encompassing strategic and operational domains. BCM frameworks include planning, risk identification, mitigation, response, and recovery. When well-integrated, BCM enables organisations to identify critical functions and prepare continuity strategies that align with broader institutional objectives. In this way, BCM supports planned resilience (Barasa et al., 2018) but must be complemented by adaptive capacity and cultural flexibility to achieve full resilience.

This layered understanding aligns with Engeman and Henderson (2011), who argue that BCM must be embedded within core organisational structures and managed at a strategic level. It is not simply a technical safeguard, but a mechanism for sustaining operations, enabling coordination, and fostering trust during crises. The WCG's experience illustrates this point. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some departments successfully activated their BCPs, while others struggled due to hierarchical rigidity, weak IT systems, or limited decision-making autonomy. These variations reveal that BCM's effectiveness is contingent on its integration with institutional culture, leadership, and resources.

The conceptual relationship between continuity and resilience has long been debated. Walker et al. (2004) noted the definitional ambiguity surrounding resilience, pointing out that it has been variably framed as a strategic capability, an operational function, or a system-level attribute. This lack of clarity complicates practical implementation, particularly in high-stakes, multi-layered public systems. To resolve this, the Institute of Risk Management South Africa (2021) offers a structured, systems-based definition of resilience as 'the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change, so as to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedback'. This ecological interpretation reinforces the idea that resilience is not about resistance to change, but about adaptation without losing purpose or identity – a critical insight for service-driven organisations like the WCG.

This distinction was evident in how the WCG approached service delivery during the pandemic. While continuity plans helped sustain operations, true resilience was reflected in departments that repurposed staff, shifted to digital platforms, and adapted mandates in response to real-time needs. These practices demonstrate a move from persistence to adaptation and, in some cases, transformation, as outlined in Linnenluecke's (2017) triadic model of resilience.

Additionally, the integration of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity (VUCA) and brittleness, anxiety, nonlinearity, incomprehensibility (BANI) frameworks provides deeper insight into both the external shocks and internal vulnerabilities faced by the WCG. These lenses help differentiate between the types of disruptions, (e.g., infrastructural fragility during load-shedding vs. psychological strain during COVID-19) and underscore the need for dual preparedness: structural continuity and human adaptability. To consolidate these insights, Table 1 (Author, 2025) summarises the conceptual frameworks discussed and their practical relevance to the WCG case.

Taken together, the literature confirms that business continuity and organisational resilience are interdependent but distinct. Continuity provides the operational scaffolding necessary to maintain services under pressure, while resilience encompasses the broader

institutional capacity to learn, adapt, and evolve. For public sector organisations, such as the WCG, integrating BCM into strategic governance, adaptive service models, and resilient leadership structures is essential. Only through this integration can governments navigate systemic shocks while safeguarding both their mission and public trust.

Table 1 Summary of key resilience concepts and relevance to the WCG case study

<i>Concept/framework</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Key attributes</i>	<i>Application in WCG case</i>
Organisational resilience	Ability to absorb, adapt, and transform in response to disruption (ISO 22316, 2017)	Absorptive capacity, adaptability, transformation	WCG adapted services, repurposed staff, and adopted remote operations
Business continuity management	A holistic process to ensure critical operations continue during a disruption	Planning, response, recovery	BCPs activated; IT, communication, and hierarchy exposed as weak points
Linnenluecke's triadic model	Categorises resilience into persistence, adaptation, and transformation	Strategic, operational, and cultural adaptation	WCG progressed from persistence to adaptation and partial transformation
VUCA and BANI frameworks	VUCA: external uncertainty; BANI: internal fragility and stress	Volatility, anxiety, nonlinearity, incomprehensibility	Used to analyse external disruptions and internal vulnerabilities across crises

Source: Author (2025)

2.7 Conclusions

This literature review has traced the evolution of resilience from its origins in the physical sciences to its current relevance in organisational, psychological, and governance contexts. Across these domains, resilience is increasingly recognised not as a static state or singular capability, but as a dynamic process of persistence, adaptation, and transformation in response to disruption. In public sector institutions, where service continuity and public accountability are paramount, this conceptual shift is particularly salient.

Frameworks such as ISO 22316, Linnenluecke's triadic model, and the VUCA and BANI paradigms offer complementary lenses for understanding the multidimensional nature of resilience. These models emphasise the interplay between strategic foresight, structural preparedness, and adaptive learning, highlighting that true resilience extends beyond planned continuity to encompass innovation, institutional agility, and cultural responsiveness. Furthermore, distinctions between business continuity and resilience underscore that while continuity planning supports operational stability, it must be embedded within a broader organisational architecture of flexibility, leadership, and systemic learning to deliver long-term resilience outcomes.

Despite the growing body of scholarship, empirical applications – particularly in governance contexts of the Global South – remain underdeveloped. This review has highlighted a gap in understanding how resilience frameworks are interpreted, adapted, and operationalised within complex, resource-constrained public institutions. It is within this gap that the present study is situated.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research approach

The research approach for the study was qualitative as it allowed for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon based on the participants' viewpoints. The participants in this study came from various departments of the WCG. The intention was to elicit a perspective and understanding of the continuity of services within a government department.

3.2 Sampling

Participation was limited to six departments due to a combination of operational demands and internal research approval processes. Some required extended internal clearance, which could not be finalised within the study's data collection timeframe. The final sample thus reflects departments with both the capacity and approval to participate at the time.

Considering the different sampling techniques, purposive sampling was deemed the most appropriate. This method enabled the selection of subjects that were purposefully chosen to inform the understanding of the research problem. The WCG comprised 13 departments, each with specific functions to perform, primarily focused on providing services to the citizens of the Western Cape province and other internal departments. When the research study commenced, the WCG included the Departments of Agriculture, Community Safety, Cultural Affairs and Sport, Economic Development and Tourism, Education, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, Health, Human Settlements, Local Government, Premier, Social Development, Transport and Public Works, and Treasury. At least two representatives per department were considered necessary to deem the process reliable and valid; however, the head of a department had the authority to decide whether it was necessary to have two representatives participate. The study design recommended a minimum of two representatives per department to strengthen reliability through intra-departmental triangulation and to enhance validity by capturing a broader range of perspectives. In practice, a total of eight officials participated, with the final number per department determined at the discretion of the respective head of department. In instances where fewer than two representatives were nominated, the selected participant was required to possess substantial institutional knowledge and relevant experience to ensure the credibility of the data collected. This variation in participant numbers is acknowledged as a methodological limitation and was addressed through triangulation with additional data sources. Additionally, the Western Cape Provincial Disaster Management Centre was approached to share learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters.

3.3 Data collection

For this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and content analysis of documentation. The semi-structured interviews incorporated open-ended questions designed to encourage detailed responses and facilitate in-depth discussions. While representatives from the participating departments were asked a standard set of questions, the Disaster Management Centre received a different set of questions focusing specifically on how the WCG managed the COVID-19 crisis and other disasters. In

addition, relevant documents were analysed to identify recurring themes and patterns. All interviews were electronically recorded, and handwritten notes were taken, which were later transcribed into a written narrative for analysis. The documents related to business continuity provided by departments were tabulated in Table 2 (Author, 2025).

The annual reports for the years 2020/2021 and 2022/2023, as well as the Annual Performance Plans (APP) 2023/2024 of the participating departments, were examined.

Table 2 Business continuity documents provided by departments

<i>Department</i>	<i>Business continuity documents provided</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1	BCP 2023/2024	Approved
2	BCP 2022/2023	The document provided was not approved, in draft form
3	BCP 2022/2023	Approved
4	None	Did not provide
5	Preparedness, Response and Relief Plan 2023	Report
6	Evaluation: Response to COVID-19 pandemic plan, April 2022	Report

Source: Author (2025)

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Transcripts were read multiple times for familiarisation, followed by open coding to identify initial concepts. Codes were then grouped into themes, which were refined through iterative comparison across interviews and documents. Emerging themes were reviewed for consistency and alignment with the research questions and theoretical framework. To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation was employed between interview data and policy documents. Themes were cross-checked to minimise bias and ensure consistency with the study’s interpretive lens.

The document analysis process involved skimming, reading, and interpreting the data. This repetitive method combined elements of content analysis with those of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis recognised patterns within the data, leading to the emergence of themes that became the categories for analysis. The information was organised into categories aligned with the research questions during content analysis. This involved organising the information concerning the research questions. The documentation examined related to any plans and/or processes that had been documented or narrated to explain how to restore service delivery in the event of a disruption. All emerging themes were aligned with the research questions. If the document analysis was supplementary to another research method, predefined or predetermined codes may have been used. The codes applied to the transcribed interview data may also have been applied to the content of documents. While documents could provide valuable data, they needed to be critically evaluated and approached cautiously. It was essential to recognise that documents might not always offer precise, accurate, or complete accounts of events and to establish the document’s relevance and contribution to the research.

3.5 Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity of this case study were ensured through several processes. Triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources, including interviews with government officials, analysis of government documents and policies, and observations of departmental operations during the pandemic. Detailed records of all data collection and analysis processes were maintained, including interview transcripts, coding, and analytic memos. The findings were contextualised within the broader context of South African governance and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study provided a comprehensive description of the WCG as an organisation, the challenges faced during the pandemic, and the details of the BCPs implemented. A clear connection was demonstrated between the research questions, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, and verbal informed consent was obtained before each interview. Participants were assured of anonymity, and all data were anonymised. The Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance, and formal permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Director-General of the Department of the Premier, WCG.

Figure 2 Approach to conduct the research (see online version for colours)

Theory	• Inductive
Research Methodology	• Epistemology
Research Paradigm	• Interpretive / Constructivist
Theoretical Perspective	• Interpretivism
Methodology	• Grounded Theory
Method	• Case Study
Sampling	• Unit of Analysis • Purposive Sampling
Data Sources	• Semi-Structured Interviews • Content (Document) Analysis
Data Analysis	• Thematic

Source: Author (2025)

3.6 Conclusions

To summarise, this study adopted an inductive approach underpinned by an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, with interpretivism guiding the theoretical perspective. Grounded theory served as the overarching methodology, enabling the generation of insights rooted in the lived experiences of public officials. A qualitative case study design was used to explore organisational resilience within the WCG, with

purposive sampling identifying participants directly involved in business continuity practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, allowing for both depth and triangulation. Thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework, was employed to identify patterns and construct meaning aligned with the research questions and theoretical lens. This approach was particularly suited to capturing context-specific understandings of resilience in a Global South governance setting, where resource constraints, inequality, and institutional complexity shape crisis responses. Figure 2 (Author, 2025) summarises the research design from paradigm through to analysis.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the key findings derived from semi-structured interviews and a review of business continuity documentation provided by participating departments. The interviews offer rich, firsthand insights into how public sector officials navigated crises and how departments developed, activated, and adapted their resilience strategies. Core themes emerging from the data include preparedness, adaptability, risk management, institutional learning, and the capacity for coordinated crisis response. In line with the study’s interpretive approach and to enhance the empirical depth of the analysis, anonymised participant extracts are integrated throughout this chapter. These quotations reflect the lived experiences of officials and serve to substantiate and illustrate each thematic category, while ensuring full compliance with ethical research standards.

4.1 Preparedness and business continuity planning

Most departments had BCPs before COVID-19, but their specificity and operational utility varied. Some had generalised frameworks; others developed crisis-specific annexure. Departments that had previously tested their plans, (e.g., during the Day Zero water crisis) were notably better prepared. Table 3 presents the participant extracts on the existence and use of BCPs before COVID-19.

These reflections align with ISO 22316’s emphasis on context-specific planning and Linnenluecke’s ‘persistence’ phase, where organisations aim to maintain essential operations during disruption. The COVID-19 experience catalysed a shift from static compliance tools to living, adaptable documents.

Table 3 Participant extracts on the existence and use of BCPs before COVID-19

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Quote</i>
Participant 2	“The Department did have a BCP... In some areas it allowed the continuation of services”.
Participant 3	“Our approved business continuity plan incorporates basically any incident that could happen... we tested our BCP... where we need to make amendments”.
Participant 5	“We were able to... adjust and build onto a plane while flying the airplane”.

4.2 Adaptability and crisis response

Adaptability was a hallmark of departmental resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic and Day Zero required vastly different responses: remote work and digital solutions for the former; infrastructure and supply measures for the latter. Departments had to innovate within existing constraints. Table 4 presents the participants' reflections on adapting operational approaches to different crises.

Crisis-specific adaptation demonstrates the transition to Linnenluecke's 'adaptation' phase and highlights the need for agility in the VUCA framework due to complexity. Hierarchical IT policies hindered access to mobile tools, exposing a BANI dimension of brittleness.

Table 4 Participant reflections on adapting operational approaches to different crises

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Quote</i>
Participant 1	"We worked at home... getting reimbursed for Wi-Fi... staff appreciated not using their own re-sources".
Participant 4	"We prioritised about 8 projects... our priority projects considering COVID-19".
Participant 3	Participant 3: "In the beginning of lockdown people were leaving the building with their big desktops..."

4.3 Challenges to resilience

Departments encountered a variety of complex challenges. Firstly, the IT infrastructure was lacking, with insufficient laptops available and support services being overwhelmed. Additionally, there was significant psychological strain among staff, especially those on the front lines, who faced fear and burnout. Communication issues also arose, marked by inadequate coordination between departments and damage to infrastructure. Furthermore, the reliance on backup generators left them vulnerable to national blackouts, exacerbating the situation. Table 5 represents the participant extracts on adapting operational approaches to different crises (Day Zero and COVID-19). Table 5 represents the participants' insights on organisational challenges during crisis response.

These challenges reveal how resilience must extend beyond planning to encompass human-centred and systemic readiness. ISO 22316's holistic resilience culture and BANI's fragility dimensions are particularly relevant.

Table 5 Participant Insights on organisational challenges during crisis response

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Quote</i>
Participant 1	"The staff members were very limited in terms of support... we can't reach all staff members".
Participant 3	"Even though every department would have a BCP, it's not going to solve the electricity problem".
Participant 5	"One of the biggest challenges was fear... care staff had to go to work".

4.4 *Institutional learning and continuous improvement*

Learning from previous crises, such as Day Zero, improved COVID-19 response. Departments that routinely tested BCPs refined their strategies effectively. Cross-departmental collaboration emerged as a resilience multiplier. Table 6 presents the participant reflections on institutional learning and collaboration.

Resilience-building must be a continuous, integrated process. This represents the ‘transformation’ stage of Linnenluecke’s model and echoes ISO 22316’s principles of leadership and coordination.

Table 6 Participant reflections on institutional learning and collaboration

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Quote</i>
Participant 3	“The business impact analysis... what is core to our continuity... the risk assessment is internal”.
Participant 5	“Resilience should not only be in a crisis... apply it as part of your normal work”.
Participant 6	“Coordination among departments like emergency ser-vices, agriculture, roads...”

Table 7 Key participant insights on embedding strategic and human-centred resilience

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Quote</i>
Participant 1	“Resilience must be embedded in governance systems, with adaptive learning loops and performance metrics...”
Participant 3	“Technological readiness and infrastructure capacity were critical enablers or barriers...”
Participant 5	“Staff psychological well-being, empowerment, and adaptive leadership played significant roles...”

4.5 *Key resilience insights from the interviews*

Preparedness is crucial, but real resilience lies in flexibility, contextual response, and human-centred planning. Crises such as COVID-19, Day Zero, and energy disruptions demanded varied solutions. Technological readiness and infrastructure capacity were critical enablers or barriers to success. Equally, staff psychological well-being, empowerment, and adaptive leadership played significant roles in organisational resilience. Post-crisis learning, when institutionalised, emerged as the strongest predictor of future readiness. Resilience must be embedded in governance systems, with adaptive learning loops and performance metrics that reflect flexibility, staff empowerment, and operational robustness. Table 7 represents the key participant insights on embedding strategic and human-centred resilience.

4.6 *Gaps between policy and practice: insights from document review*

The document review revealed a mismatch between formal BCPs and practical resilience strategies described in interviews:

- *Outdated or narrow BCPs*: many focused solely on IT recovery.
- *Limited scope*: few addressed remote work, mental health, or infrastructure constraints.
- *Variable definitions*: resilience was inconsistently defined or omitted in planning documents.

This disconnect underscores the need for standardised resilience frameworks across departments. Informal, adaptive practices outpaced formal policy instruments, revealing the limitations of document-based readiness in dynamic crisis contexts.

Effective public sector resilience requires integrated planning, agile adaptation, inclusive infrastructure, psychological safety, and institutional learning. The findings validate the Linnenluecke model and ISO 22316, while highlighting the critical role of leadership in translating plans into practice.

5 Discussion and analysis

This section interprets the empirical findings through the study's conceptual frameworks, offering a critical analysis of how the WCG operationalised resilience under systemic stress. Rather than restating data, it draws out insights on institutional dynamics, leadership, culture, and the embeddedness of resilience capacity across departments.

5.1 Resilience beyond continuity: institutional capacity vs. compliance

BCPs served as a baseline for operational preparedness; however, departments that exhibited true resilience did so by going beyond predefined procedures. This finding aligns with ISO 22316's emphasis on adaptability as a core resilience attribute. While BCPs provided structure, resilience was better reflected in departments that empowered middle managers, rapidly redeployed staff, and repurposed existing resources based on situational demands – demonstrating what Barasa et al. (2018) call *adaptive resilience*.

Conversely, departments that strictly adhered to unmodified BCPs struggled to respond effectively to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 crisis. This contrast illustrates that institutional resilience is not achieved through documentation alone, but through cultural and strategic flexibility embedded within the organisation.

5.2 Adaptive learning and uneven transformation

The resilience trajectory was far from uniform across the WCG. While most departments achieved persistence, (i.e., continuity of services), fewer advanced to *adaptation*, and even fewer reached *transformation*, as defined by Linnenluecke's (2017) triadic model. Adaptive practices – such as remote work implementation and cross-sectoral collaboration – were present, but systemic change remained elusive due to entrenched hierarchies, digital inequality, and limited decentralised authority.

Notably, departments that had prior exposure to rehearsed disruptions, such as Day Zero, exhibited greater agility, lending support to Liu et al.'s (2021) view that institutional memory is a critical enabler of resilience. However, disparities between self-reported preparedness and outdated BCPs revealed during document analysis expose

a troubling gap between *perceived* and *actual* resilience capacity. This disconnect reinforces the notion that resilience must be continually cultivated, not assumed based on formal artefacts.

5.3 Resilience as a response to complexity: VUCA and BANI in practice

Operationalising the VUCA and BANI frameworks offered a dual lens to assess external and internal dimensions of disruption. The volatility and uncertainty of COVID-19 required strategic foresight and scenario-based decision-making – hallmarks of the VUCA paradigm. Departments that engaged in decentralised coordination and agile resource management adapted more effectively.

The BANI lens highlighted internal system fragility – manifested in staff anxiety, brittle IT policies, and rigid access hierarchies. For example, restricting laptop access by managerial rank revealed a misalignment between policy logic and frontline needs. Departments that acknowledged emotional strain and responded with flexible support mechanisms – like subsidised data and mental health resources – displayed stronger institutional resilience. These cases underscore the importance of integrating emotional intelligence into operational governance.

5.4 Resilience as a public value: governance and equity imperatives

Unlike in the private sector, where resilience often focuses on profit protection or cost efficiency, public sector resilience must preserve *equity* and uphold service delivery mandates under crisis conditions. Departments serving vulnerable populations – such as in health and social services – faced dual pressures: ensuring continuity while safeguarding staff.

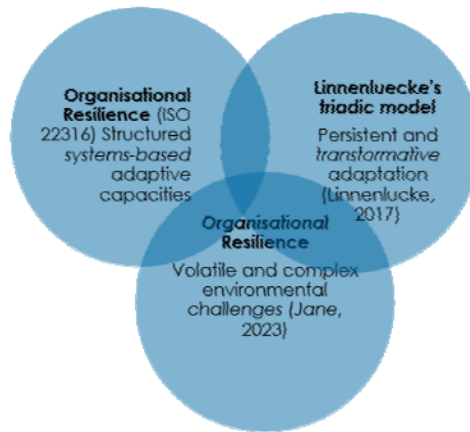
The study revealed that resilience in such departments depended not only on structural planning, but also on ethical leadership and equitable access to infrastructure. The absence of backup power and digital tools in some units demonstrated that resilience gaps mirror broader structural inequalities. Embedding resilience thus requires a shift in public administration – from rule-bound continuity planning toward equitable, responsive, and inclusive systems of governance.

5.5 Toward a cross-framework understanding

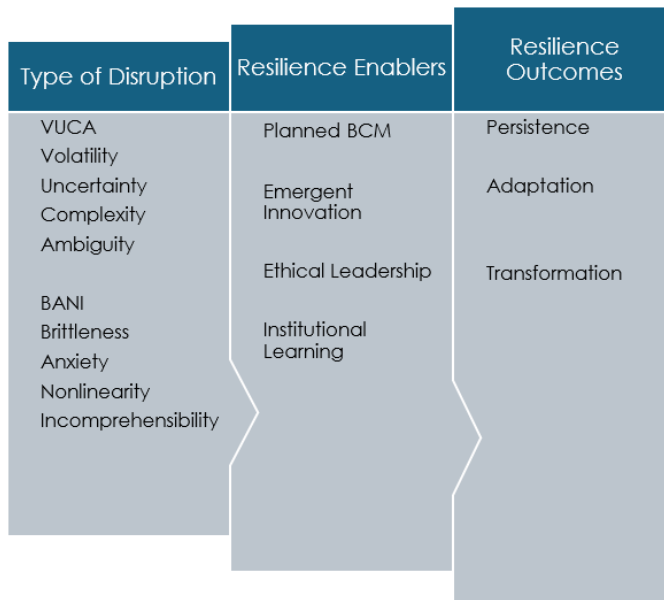
Figure 3 synthesises the study's conceptual frameworks. Rather than viewing resilience through a single theoretical lens, the WCG experience illustrates that resilience is a composite capability that integrates:

- strategic foresight (VUCA)
- structural flexibility (ISO 22316)
- psychological readiness and equity consciousness (BANI)
- institutional learning and adaptability (Linnenluecke).

This integrative perspective helps clarify how resilience is shaped not only by technical systems, but by the interplay of leadership values, organisational design, and emotional climates.

Figure 3 Cross-framework view of organisational resilience (see online version for colours)

Source: Author (2025)

Figure 4 Integrated resilience response model for public sector institutions (see online version for colours)

Source: Author (2025)

5.6 Toward an integrated resilience response model

Building on the analysis, this study proposes a conceptual model that links disruption types (VUCA/BANI) with planned and emergent enablers of resilience. As shown in Figure 4, operational resilience stems from both:

- *Planned enablers*: e.g., BCPs, strategic plans, and continuity frameworks.
- *Emergent enablers*: e.g., innovation, inclusive leadership, and institutional improvisation.

The interaction between disruption type and enabling mechanism determines the organisational outcome – whether persistence, adaptation, or transformation. This model provides a practical lens for assessing resilience maturity in public institutions and highlights the need for resilience strategies that are both structured and adaptable.

6 Conclusions

This study examined how organisational resilience is conceptualised and operationalised within the WCG, providing grounded insight into the realities of public sector resilience in a Global South context. While business continuity planning served as an essential foundation, the findings reveal that resilience extends far beyond procedural readiness. It is a dynamic organisational capability – rooted in learning, adaptation, and strategic transformation – that enables institutions to not only recover from disruption but evolve through it.

The WCG's experience illustrates that resilience is not uniform nor guaranteed by formal plans alone. Instead, it is shaped by contextual variables such as leadership style, institutional memory, decision-making autonomy, and equity in resource access. Departments that demonstrated stronger resilience engaged in decentralised coordination, empowered staff, adapted digital tools creatively, and prioritised collaboration across sectors. These actions reflected not just improvisation under pressure, but an emerging strategic culture of resilience embedded within governance.

The integration of VUCA and BANI frameworks added analytical clarity, illuminating the intersection of external volatility and internal organisational fragility. VUCA helped explain why strategic foresight and agility were critical; BANI foregrounded the psychological, emotional, and infrastructural stress points that undermined organisational resilience. Together, these lenses underscore the importance of cultivating both structural preparedness and emotional intelligence in public administration.

Three key contributions emerge from this study:

- 1 Conceptual advancement: it affirms the value of using integrated frameworks – ISO 22316, Linnenluecke's model, VUCA, and BANI – to understand resilience as a multifaceted capability, particularly in developing-country public sectors.
- 2 Strategic reframing: it challenges the narrow interpretation of BCP as sufficient, advocating instead for resilience to be approached as a governance function encompassing ethics, equity, and institutional learning.
- 3 Practical insight: it offers a context-sensitive, empirically derived model for embedding resilience into the architecture of public institutions – one that aligns continuity planning with adaptive and transformative enablers.

As public sector institutions face intensifying challenges – ranging from climate emergencies to digital exclusion – the imperative is not merely to cope, but to adapt and thrive. Resilience must no longer be treated as an emergency protocol but as a guiding

principle of public governance. The integrated resilience response model proposed here provides a practical framework for this shift, helping governments institutionalise resilience through leadership development, systems reform, and cross-sector learning.

To that end, policymakers are urged to embed resilience metrics into performance management, ensure psychological safety and staff empowerment, and prioritise iterative testing of continuity frameworks. Resilience is not a static outcome but a continuous practice – one that must be cultivated intentionally to safeguard public value in an increasingly uncertain world.

7 Limitations and future research

While this study provides valuable insights into organisational resilience within the WCG, it has several limitations. The research is confined to a single provincial government, and although participating departments varied in function, the findings may not be generalisable to other provinces or national contexts. Data were primarily drawn from interviews with mid-and senior-level officials. While these perspectives illuminate institutional planning and adaptation, they may not fully capture the experiences of frontline staff or service users. Moreover, as the study was conducted after the crisis period, it relies on retrospective accounts, which may be influenced by recall bias. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of resilience across all organisational levels, future research should include a broader range of perspectives, particularly those of frontline employees and the public, to better assess the impact of resilience on service delivery and public trust during crises. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to track how resilience strategies evolve beyond the immediate aftermath of disruption.

While the study incorporated document analysis to triangulate interview data, the quality and specificity of available documents varied across departments. Several BCPs and strategic plans were outdated, generic, or limited in scope, particularly with respect to resilience indicators and adaptive capacity. As a result, the depth of insight from documentary sources was constrained in some cases. Future research could benefit from a systematic content analysis of public sector planning documents across departments and provinces to better assess institutional readiness and resilience maturity.

Declarations

I hereby declare that all sources cited or referenced in this thesis have been fully acknowledged. I also acknowledge the use of OpenAI's GPT-4 model, developed by OpenAI, as a supportive tool to assist with narrative refinement and to aid in the organisation and interpretation of qualitative data. All final analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are my own. Additionally, Grammarly was used to support grammar and spelling checks, contributing to the clarity of the written content.

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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