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The role of leadership in developing resilience in the public sector

Rethinking Leadership in Public Administration: Challenges and Prospects for the Post-Soviet Countries

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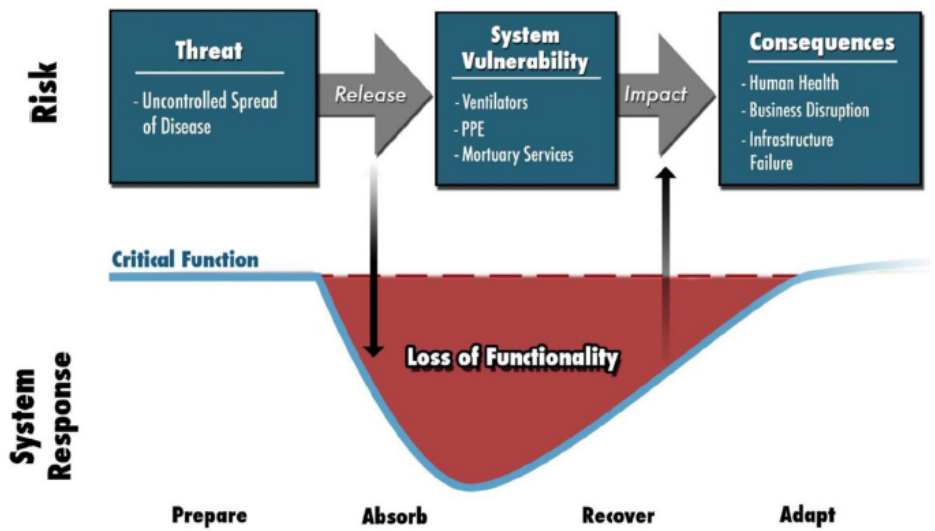
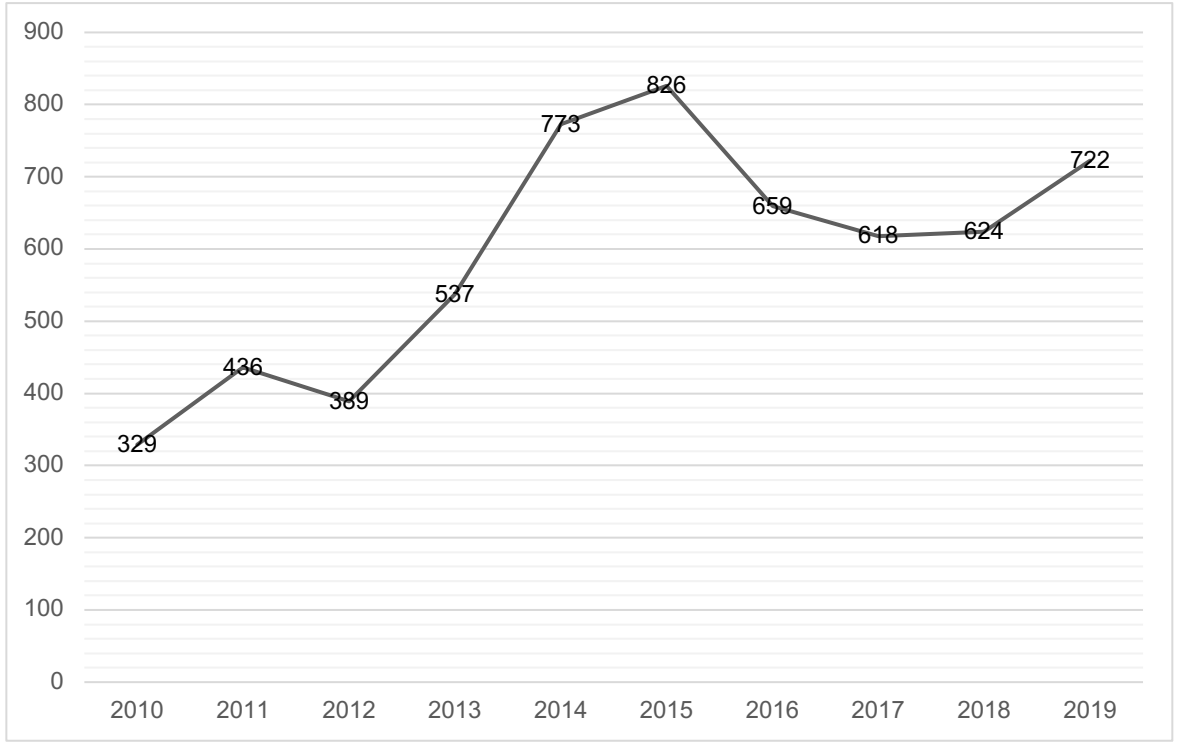
Definition of resilience

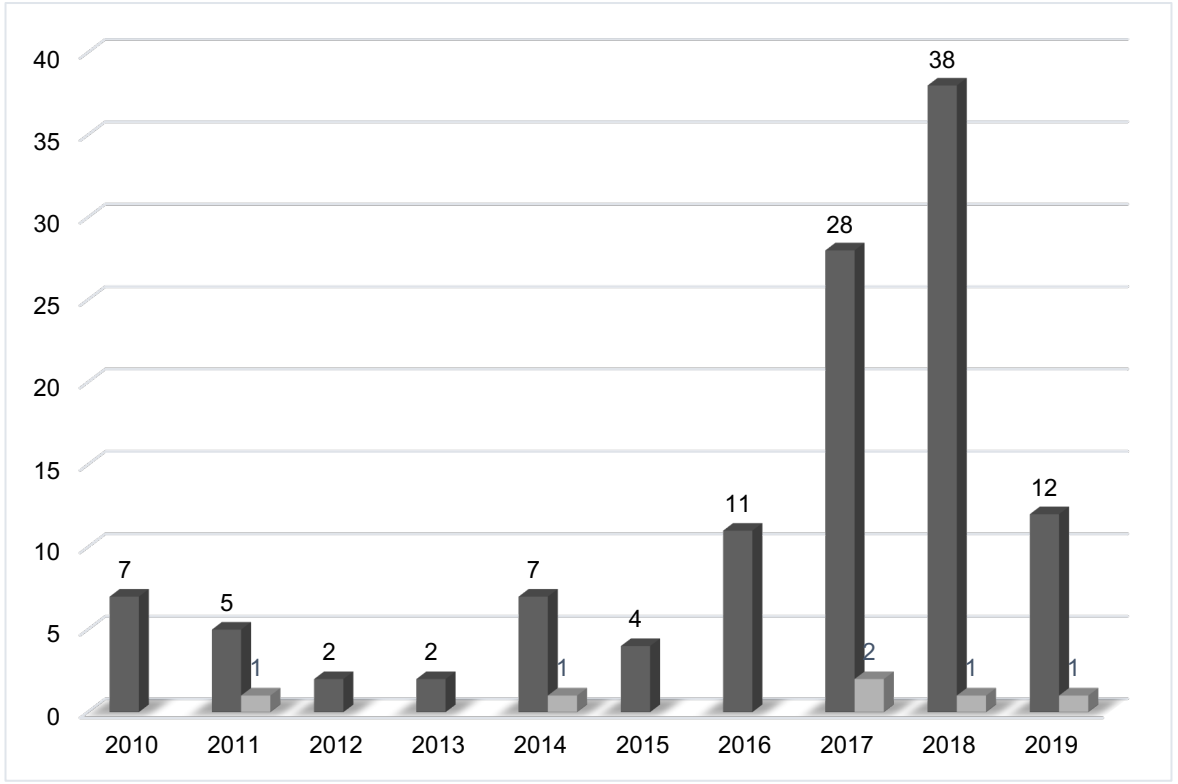
- Resilience as the capability of a system or an organisation to absorb shocks, recover from them and by learning or innovation transform itself for a better preparation for future crises (Linkov, Trump, 2019)
- Resilience is transformational: from “bouncing back“ (Waugh, Tierney, 2007) to “bouncing forward“ (Manyena et al., 2011) and adapting to new reality
- Two main approaches to managing systemic threats:
  - **Risk-based prevention and mitigation:** prepare for and absorb shocks when they happen
  - **Uncertainty-based approach** where resilience relies on built-in capabilities for adaptation and recovery when disruptions occur
- Social domain of resilience: building resilience through adaptive leadership, empowered professionals, collaborative culture, etc.



Trump et al., 2020

Emergency events and situations in Lithuania (2010-2019; before COVID-19)





Top risks globally (WEF, 2021) and nationally (based on official reports)

Top Risks
by likelihood

1. Extreme weather
2. Climate action failure
3. Human environmental damage
4. Infectious diseases
5. Biodiversity loss
6. Digital power concentration
7. Digital inequality
8. Interstate relations fracture
9. Cybersecurity failure
10. Livelihood crises

Top Risks
by impact

1. Infectious diseases
2. Climate action failure
3. Weapons of mass destruction
4. Biodiversity loss
5. Natural resource crises
6. Human environmental damage
7. Livelihood crises
8. Extreme weather
9. Debt crises
10. IT infrastructure breakdown

- Russia's military potential and activity
- Dangerous infectious diseases
- Cyber attacks

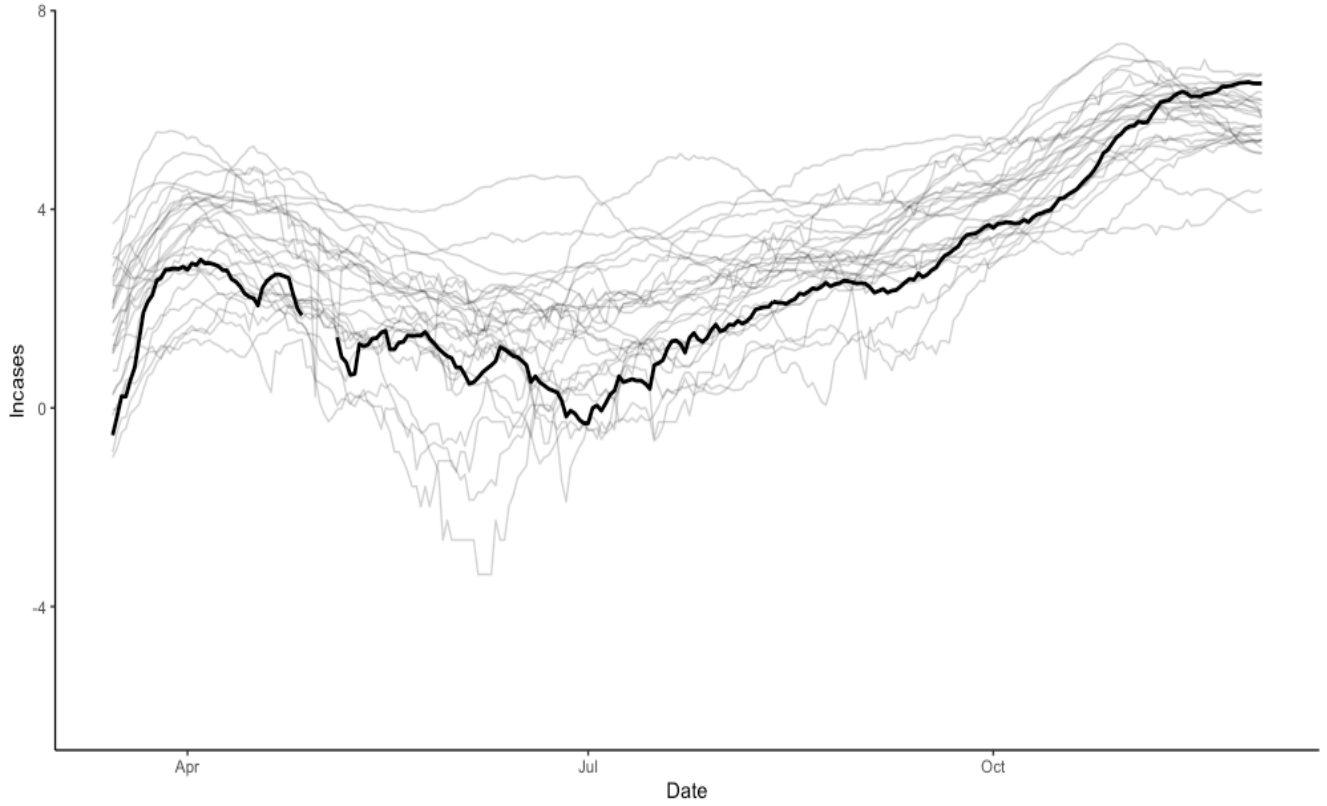
Droughts and floods

- Astravets nuclear power plant
- Economic crises
- Environmental disasters
- Social crises

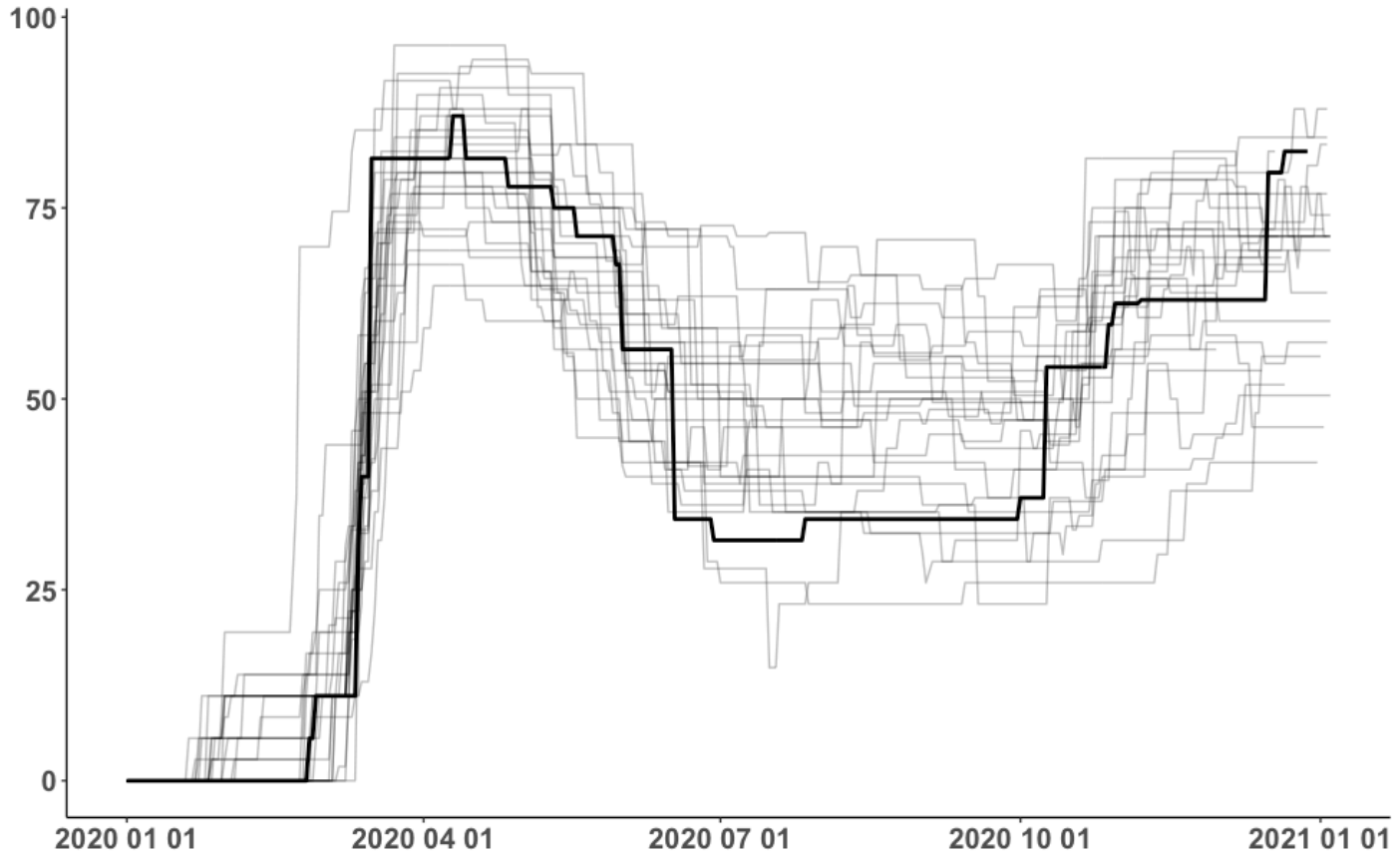
COVID-19 as a grey rhino

Number of COVID-19 cases in Lithuania (in the comparative EU context)

- On the one hand, the centralised coordination of the COVID-19 crisis during the first wave of the coronavirus proved to be quite successful due to swift decision-making and the mobilisation of available resources
- On the other hand, the country's administrative system was not able to effectively absorb the second wave of COVID-19 due to its limited flexibility to adjust operations to quickly changing conditions of the pandemic



Like a roller coaster: Lithuania's stringency of response to COVID-19 during 2020



Exercise of leadership during the COVID-19 crisis

- Fast reaction and decisive decisions in the country during to the first wave of COVID-19, but much weaker leadership during the second wave in the context of parliamentary elections
- Command and control style of leadership with a lack of open and empathetic communication
- Key role played by politicians or political appointees, but most of them were replaced after a full change of government at the end of 2020
- **Crisis management needs adaptive leadership but few managers have adequate competences**

Behaviour of professionals during the COVID-19 crisis

- Dedication of heath care and other professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Lack of initiative in the career civil service due to the organisational culture of a zero error tolerance
- Weak public and private partnerships and slow take-up of (digital) innovations
- **Crisis management needs empowered professionals but they often lack autonomy and right incentives**

Conclusions

- Development of resilience in the public sector through its key social aspects:
  - adaptive leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009)
  - empowerment of professionals and
  - collaborative governance (Waugh and Streib, 2006)
- Public management reforms are necessary to develop greater resilience in the public sector, but not on the basis of top-down/legislative initiatives
- Transformational way of building resilience on the ground or within a network of stakeholders (involving street bureaucrats and professionals) through the mechanisms of open innovations and partnerships

Challenges and recommendations

Challenges

1. Limited awareness of (uncertainty-based) resilience
2. Ineffective systems of crisis/emergency management
3. Lack of initiative and competences among senior civil servants
4. Slow take-up of digital innovations
5. Rigid management and control systems (the culture of a zero error tolerance)

Recommendations

1. *Integration of the resilience principle into strategic and policy documents (going beyond the health care system)*
2. *Establishment of an integrated centre of crisis management*
3. *Civil service reform, a higher civil service, more flexible management of human resources*
4. *Initiatives and projects of e-government within open innovation systems in cooperation with business organisations and NGOs*
5. *Better balance between accountability and flexibility in public financial management (including risk-based mechanisms of control)*

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Thank you for the attention!

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