

Article

Hindrance Job Demands as Factors Undermining Employee Resilience

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Abstract

Given a turbulent work environment, employee resilience, defined as the capacity to bounce back, adapt, and even flourish at work in the face of challenging situations, has been receiving increasing attention. Previous studies have demonstrated the personal and organizational benefits of employee resilience and have underscored the need for further research on how to foster it. Nonetheless, in the organizational context, certain job demands may hinder its development. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources theory and the challenge–hindrance framework, the paper aims to reveal the hindrance job demands that undermine employee resilience. For this, qualitative data were collected from 21 employees in Lithuania. The results revealed that social (toxic relationships with managers, difficulties in managing team dynamics, interpersonal conflicts with colleagues), organizational (role-related demands, generational clashes, workload, and scheduling), and emotional (dealing with clients) demands play an important role in undermining resilience. Moreover, ethical demands (dishonesty when dealing with clients and idea stealing) were also indicated. The results draw attention to the need to conduct training programs, including leadership training, to foster a supportive organizational culture and to rethink job design while aiming for organizational sustainability and employee well-being.

Keywords: employee resilience; Job Demands–Resource (JD-R) model; challenge–hindrance framework; hindrance job demands; organizational demands; social demands; emotional demands; psychical demands; ethical demands

1. Introduction

The constantly changing work environment, including new ways of working, has become the norm for many businesses [1,2]. External pressure and volatile, multifaceted, and dynamic challenges, such as generational differences or digital transformations, faced by organizations in turn become challenges to be ultimately dealt with by employees [3,4]. Not always and not all of them succeed in addressing various changes: some employees cope, adapt, and even thrive in response to challenging situations, while others do not [5]. This can be explained by the concept of employee resilience.

Employee resilience refers to the ability to “bounce back” and adapt in the face of stressful situations, setbacks or failure [6–9]. In other words, it implies learning, network-leveraging, and proactive behaviors [10] for coping and adaptation despite difficulties and encountering loss [5]. A growing body of studies provides evidence that employee resilience can lead to positive personal and organizational outcomes [11,12], including higher work engagement [13] and employee performance [14,15]. As such, individual and



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organizational levels are linked. First, employee resilience is seen as an antecedent of long-term organizational resilience [16]. Moreover, employee resilience and sustainability are often portrayed as mutually reinforcing pillars of long-term organizational success [15,17]. Finally, long-term organizational success is hardly possible without workforce sustainability, which cannot be achieved without resilience [18]. Seeing the recognized value of employee resilience, the open question is what organizations could do to cultivate a pool of resilient employees.

Employee resilience is a behavioral capability [19], which results from organizational factors such as leadership [15], human resource management (HRM) practices [20], and sustainable HRM practices [21], along with individual factors, including proactive personality [22] or gender [23]. Thus, in order to demonstrate resilience, supporting job-related attributes [24,25] are required.

According to the Job Demands–Resource (JD-R) theory [26,27], job resources refer to particular work aspects that stimulate personal growth and development, whereas job demands refer to work aspects that require effort and accordingly are associated with psychological and psychical costs experienced by employees [28]. Nonetheless, earlier studies demonstrated the dual effect (hindrance and challenge) of job demands [29,30], meaning that they may both foster and damage employee resilience.

While previous research has focused on job resources [31], research on job demands that hinder employee resilience is lacking [32,33]. Acknowledging the significant value of job resources, or even challenging demands, in enhancing resilience [31], the other side, namely hindrance job demands and their negative impact, cannot be neglected. This is particularly important in recognizing that the relevance of job demands with the potential to affect resilience negatively is growing as organizations face increasingly ambiguous and complex environments [30]. Based on this, and addressing a call in the literature [32,33], the paper seeks to close this gap and analyze hindrance job demands in relation to employee resilience, relying on the JD-R model and the challenge–hindrance framework.

The aim of the paper is to reveal only the hindrance job demands that undermine employee resilience. For this, qualitative data were collected from 21 employees in Lithuania with the intention of identifying the pool of hindrance job demands in the current work environment.

The paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, the paper responds to the call in the literature to broaden research on job demands as antecedents of employee resilience. According to Zivnuska et al. [34] (p. 1345), “jobs that offer substantial levels of complexity might overwhelm incumbents, leading to overstimulation and dysfunctional outcomes”. Given the dearth of literature on the relationship between job demands and employee resilience [35], the present paper seeks to address this gap and enrich the existing body of research. More specifically, the paper aims to contribute by complementing the JD-R model with concrete examples of job demands. Second, the paper intentionally focuses only on hindrance job demands. The argumentation behind this lies in the consequences of these demands. As stated by Schilbach et al. [32], coping with hindrance demands would not strengthen personal capacities but rather have the opposite effect, meaning lower employee resilience. Thus, for human resource (HR) managers it is essential to be aware of hindrance demands and accordingly deal with them to the maximum extent possible. Third, seeing that the paper is based on qualitative data, the literature on the relationship between job demands and employee resilience is supplemented by results explaining how and why resilience is hindered by job demands. Although data saturation was achieved during the qualitative study, the results nonetheless need to be treated with caution given the exploratory nature of the data. The study is pilot in nature.

The paper is organized as follows. The theoretical part describes employee resilience and introduces the JD-R model, mainly focusing on hindrance job demands. Then, the methodology is presented, followed by the results. After presenting the results, the discussion part is provided. The final section offers conclusions, including practical implications, limitations, and future research suggestions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Employee Resilience

Earlier definitions of resilience emphasized the ability to cope or bounce back in the face of crises [36]. Following Luthans [6] (p. 702), employee resilience implies “the positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility”. The modern view has extended this definition to include growth and development when faced with day-to-day challenges [33,37]. As such, employee resilience involves more than just responding to crises; it encompasses the capacity to withstand and proactively adapt to challenges with the aim of preventing future challenges [38], and it can be improved [5]. According to Kuntz [24] (p. 460), employee resilience indicates the capacity “to utilize resources to continually adapt and flourish at work, even when faced with challenging circumstances”. Employee resilience involves a behavioral structure for coping with stress and pressure [4]. Specifically, employee resilience comprises three sets of behaviors, namely adaptation, network-leveraging, and learning [10]. The first set, adaptation, includes engagement in positive, constructive ways, seeking new opportunities that lead to improvement, and modifying thoughts and corresponding behaviors in the face of new and changing circumstances [39]. The second set—network-leveraging—implies the ability to develop networks, to collaborate and share information, and, finally, to look for and provide support [39]. Lastly, learning as the third set includes behaviors such as seeking and responding effectively to feedback and continuously reviewing performance [19].

Looking at the contribution of resilient employees, they can significantly improve organizational resilience itself, leading to its sustainable development [16].

To sum up, the current paper interprets employee resilience as a behavioral capability. As such, employee resilience can be developed and will manifest provided that the organization provides resources and does not apply hindrance job demands [25].

2.2. Job Demands as Hindrance Job Attributes for Employee Resilience

The JD-R theory provides a useful lens for understanding employee resilience [3,8,33,38,40,41]. It proposes that all job-related attributes can be categorized as either demands or resources, while both demands and resources are part of the work environment in all its complexity [26]. Demerouti et al. [26] (p. 501) defined job demands as “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs”. In the meantime, job resources refer to “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development” [26] (p. 501). As the focus of this paper is on job demands only, further discussion is devoted to this construct.

Roughly speaking, job demands are the “bad things” at work that drain energy [42]. As the work environment is under constant change, the list of job demands is never-ending. For instance, Schaufeli and Taris [43] included 30 job demands in their list, such as computer problems, time pressure, and remuneration. Schaufeli [42] proposed three clusters of job demands, namely qualitative (examples: work–home conflict, emotional

demands, mental demands, psychical demands); quantitative (examples: work overload, pace of change, work overload), and organizational demands (examples: role conflicts, harassment, interpersonal conflicts). Finally, Li et al. [44] argued that, among others, quantitative demands are conventionally the most widely explored type of job demands, and recently the focus on emotional demands has been increasing. Quantitative demands refer to job-related physical pressure and include, for instance, work overload, high time pressure, or unfavorable work conditions like noise. Meanwhile, emotional demands often take on such forms as dealing with difficult situations or people, for instance, disruptive clients [44]. In summary, it is seen that the common practice is to divide demands into physical, social, organizational, cognitive and emotional categories [45,46].

Job demands refer to aspects of the work context that overburden employees' personal capacities [47]. Within the JD-R framework, it is posited that employees who are confronted with job demands will initially try to withstand them (for example, dedicating more time or energy). However, prolonged exposure and continuous coping gradually deplete people's personal resources, ultimately leading to a feeling of exhaustion [47].

Notwithstanding this, some authors claim that not all job demands are equal, and they may also play a motivational role, not only a role in the health impairment process [28,32,48].

LePine, Podsakoff, and LePine [29] distinguish between hindrance and challenge job demands. Challenge job demands are defined as those that cost effort but potentially promote personal growth and achievement [29]. They trigger a motivational process that results in higher performance and engagement [48], and accordingly employee resilience. Examples might include high levels of workload or time pressure. Meanwhile, hindrance job demands refer to those that have the potential to harm personal growth and trigger negative emotions [29]. Examples include role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity. Hindrance job demands are linked only to negative work outcomes, as they drain personal resources and prevent personal development [48]. As such, hindrance demands represent barriers to goal achievement and negatively relate to job engagement, satisfaction, and employee resilience [32]. However, research has shown that challenge demands may be experienced as hindrance demands (and vice versa) depending on the context [28].

As it was mentioned before, the literature lacks research on the relationship between job demands and employee resilience [33]. This is despite growing job demands and limited resources to reduce them. Further, some previous studies illustrating the research done and calling for additional analysis are mentioned. Thus, drawing on the JD-R model, the quantitative study of Plimmer et al. [33] assessed how job and organizational demands hinder employee resilience. The qualitative study of Maley et al. [38] investigated how specific job attributes could potentially strengthen or undermine employee resilience. Finally, Kunzelmann and Rigotti [30] investigated the effect of challenge demands on employee resilience. Nonetheless, in order to formulate practical implications for HR managers on particular strategies that do not hinder employee resilience, there is a need for qualitative research analyzing hindrance job demands in relation to employee resilience.

Drawing on the JD-R theory and the challenge–hindrance framework, the paper focuses only on hindrance demands with respect to employee resilience. As such, interview data collection and result interpretation rely on demands undermining employee resilience. Having the aim of the paper in mind and respecting the manuscript length, the paper does not analyze challenge demands or employee appraisal of the same demand as challenging or undermining resilience.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Context and Sample

The context of the study is Lithuania. According to regional and economic insights provided by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Future of Jobs Report 2025, Lithuania is described as a country with a rising cost of living, an aging and shrinking population, and broadening digital access. Seeing that skill gaps are perceived as a significant barrier to business transformation, 86% of firms in Lithuania plan to invest in reskilling and upskilling. Seven in ten companies intend to support employee health and well-being, while six in ten aim to improve talent progression and promotion processes in order to increase talent availability [49].

In the meantime, employees have lately been experiencing a huge number of work challenges related to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, migration from Ukraine and Belarus, and increasing cyber-attacks. Especially due to the geopolitical situation, employees feel unsecure in both domains: in professional life, they are not certain whether the business will close or grow and if they will retain their work positions; in private life, people feel anxiety and less hope for a stable future.

In line with the aim of this study, qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The research involved employees from different industries. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit the participants. The research focused on employees who were willing to share their experiences related to day-to-day challenges at work, the causes of these situations, and job demands that give rise to and contribute to adversity, conflict, uncertainty, or failure in the workplace. All participants in the study were reached via personal contacts of the co-authors or via LinkedIn and other social media channels.

The sample size was guided by data saturation, which is not about the numbers per se but about the depth of the data [50]. Data saturation refers to data collection ceasing when three conditions are met: when the existing sample provides rich and thick data, no new categories or themes emerge from the data, and there is sufficient detail to replicate the study [50]. Literature argues that data saturation can be achieved even with a small sample, such as 9–17 interviews [51]. Drawing upon recommendations in the literature [51], several principles were applied to justify the claim that data saturation had been achieved in our research. First, the initial analysis sample, referring to the sample size with which the first round of analysis would be completed, was selected. Following the literature [51], 17 interviews were selected. The second principle is called the stopping criterion, and it refers to the idea that researchers should specify a priori how many more interviews would be conducted, without new shared themes or ideas emerging, before concluding that data saturation has been achieved. After seventeen interviews, four further interviews were conducted with no new themes emerging, and thus this situation was defined as the point of data saturation (21 interviews in total).

The sample consisted of 14 female and 7 male employees (21 in total). All of them were employed under employment contracts. A variety of sectors were represented, such as services, manufacturing, education, logistic, and healthcare. Seven out of the twenty-one respondents held managerial positions. The age of participants varied from 22 to 55 years. Meanwhile, tenure ranged from 2.5 to 34 years, with an average of 16.5 years.

3.2. Procedure

Before starting, approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Research Ethics Commission of Kaunas University of Technology was received (18 January 2024, No. M6-2024-01).

All those volunteering to participate in the research were provided with detailed information about the research. At the beginning of the interview, it was also explained that participants could skip questions they did not wish to answer or stop the interview entirely if they did not wish to proceed.

The interviews were semi-structured and exploratory nature. The interview protocol was prepared in advance, and the following three areas of focus were covered: day-to-day challenges at work (asking to share their thoughts about these challenges); job demands that give rise to and contribute to adversity, conflict, uncertainty, or failure in their situation (asking for concrete examples of job-related attributes); and how these job demands impacted their resilience (asking to elaborate on their capability to cope with and adapt to challenges at work). Some examples of questions include: “What kind of day-to-day challenges do you encounter at work? Could you provide some examples?”; “As you mentioned challenges related to (specify), could you describe the situation in detail?”; “Does this particular day-to-day challenge at work impact/relate to your resilience, and how?”. The semi-structured format of the questions enabled the interviewer to ask follow-up questions where relevant to the topic.

Interviews were organized at the convenience of informants taking part in the research in terms of both place and time and were conducted in the Lithuanian language. All co-authors of the current paper contributed to conducting the interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Before analysis, all data identifying the participants, other people or the employing organizations were removed and replaced with descriptive labels. Data collection took place from January 2024 to March 2024. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 min.

3.3. Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed using a theoretical thematic approach [52]. This approach enables researchers to remain aware of pre-existing themes relating to job demands in the literature whilst being open to new themes identified from the data.

Initially, a draft coding framework was prepared based on the literature. It encompassed four clusters of hindrance job demands:

- (a) Emotional demands. They involve the effort needed to manage emotions and interact with others.
- (b) Physical demands. They are related to physical exertion and the musculoskeletal system.
- (c) Social demands. They cover interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and customers.
- (d) Organizational demands. They stem from the structure and environment of the organization. Organizational demands are about the amount of work and time pressure and also include role-related job attributes.

It is worth mentioning that some situations shared by the participants might encompass several job demands. However, during data analysis, the authors of the paper, based on the moments highlighted by the participants in these situations, assigned the job-related attributes to a particular job demand category.

As was mentioned before, analysis of the interview data was carried out in line with the six phases of qualitative thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke [52]. Triangulation was applied to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. To reduce any potential bias arising from the researchers' experience or judgments, four researchers independently analyzed the data to identify the emerging themes, examine convergence across interview transcripts, and compare common themes until consensus was reached.

Following procedure [52], in the first phase of analysis, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data while reading and re-reading the transcripts several times. All

21 interview transcripts were read and re-read by all four researchers separately. During the second phase, initial codes were generated. Each researcher generated the codes independently. The third phase involved collating the codes into potential themes, having pre-existing clusters in mind. The next phase allowed reviewing the themes. During the fifth phase, the themes were defined and named. Later, all researchers met to discuss their independent findings, compare their analyses, and reach a consensus on themes and subthemes. Finally, the subthemes and themes were described and elucidated using representative quotes.

4. Results

As mentioned before, initially a draft coding framework covering four clusters of hindrance job demands was used. However, after data analysis some changes were made: as no physical demands were found, this cluster was excluded from the study; meanwhile, a cluster of ethical demands was introduced.

4.1. Social Demands

Based on the data, the social demands covered six themes, namely: difficulties in managing team dynamics, toxic relationships with managers, rumors at work, workplace bullying, interpersonal conflicts with coworkers, and social marginalization.

In connection with *difficulties in managing team dynamics*, most participants holding a managerial position touched on the broader context of team management, arguing that dealing with subordinates was not an easy responsibility. One of the hindrance job demands referred to team members' *mood swings and the expression of emotions at work*:

"There are some people who probably imagine that they are superior to others and <...> straightforwardly make life difficult for other colleagues. The atmosphere at work turns gloomy. <...> One should keep one's bad mood to themselves rather than spilling it over to the team." (I8)

Another attribute related to employee teams shared by participants raised the question of *responsibility for motivating employees*. On the one hand, unmotivated employees can harm team performance and morale. On the other hand, perceiving motivation as a responsibility borne solely by managers, rather than a shared responsibility of both managers and employees, undermines resilience. Since all work duties must be completed, insufficient employee motivation results in an increased workload for the manager. Consequently, a relationship between these two job demands was identified:

"Not all employees are motivated and it used to be very difficult to convince a person who is 40 years old that they have to work because they get paid and have a job to do, when they merely do not want to work. Ultimately, if someone fails to complete some assignment, you still must do it yourself, seeing that it is your responsibility." (I9)

In the cluster of social demands, the second theme referred to **toxic relationships with managers**. Throughout the interviews, the role of line managers was the dominating topic, revealing their active contribution to hindering employee resilience. Firstly, *lack of social support* was mentioned. Many participants complained of being unheard and unsupported by their managers, especially when dealing with clients. Instead of trying to collect information from all involved parties and have a broad picture of the situation, managers tended to choose the simplest way, namely to offer client support at the expense of the employee:

"The reaction of my supervisor was very, how to say this better, strong. She said that it was not according to the standard, that this was [an inappropriate] way to communicate with a customer. <...> Such treatment was unsatisfactory in our organization. <...>

However, I felt very unpleasantly. I felt that I had not been understood, that she saw that one side [of things] only rather than realizing why this was happening. The situation was probably not the easiest one for myself. I felt this very deeply: what kind of specialist was I going to be, whether I was going to be any good. May be there was something I was failing at.” (I1)

Secondly, *restrictions on future career opportunities were highlighted*. From the perspective of sustainable careers [53], responsibility lies with both organizations and employees themselves. Therefore, it is essential to seek career development while simultaneously receiving support. During interviews, Millennials and Generation Z participants expressed not only concern about limited career opportunities but also reported receiving explicit confirmation that no career advancement was possible (even in cases of employee turnover).

Thirdly, *a breach of trust* was mentioned. As trust implies the “glue for relationships”, a breach might cause *detrimental consequences for employees’ capacity to bounce back*.

“Here, the involvement of managers and their keeping their promises were probably very lacking, seeing that it was us who had been cleaning up the mess rather than them. We were the so-called ‘front line’, who < . . . > went to smooth down the ruffled feathers of customers.” (I1)

Fourth, *a lack of recognition from managers* was also discussed by many participants. Feeling unrecognized not only lowered self-esteem but also created the effect of invisibility and, in two cases, led to resignation. Moreover, some participants made the connection with fairness, drawing attention to different justice dimensions, such as distributive justice.

“I felt that the supervisor was not appreciating my efforts. This made me very distressed. All the time while I had worked there I constantly noticed that other colleagues used to achieve less than me but that was all fine and good, whereas you did more than necessary but that made no difference and nobody even noticed you”. (I13)

In the cluster of social demands, the third theme referred to ***rumors at work***. Most of the participants noted that *rumors at work* were present in their organizations, *initiated by either colleagues or managers*. Both cases serve as antecedents of lower employee resilience. Referring to rumors spread by managers, the dissemination of unverified information to a newly hired employee was perceived as particularly detrimental. Moreover, some of the informants shared stories where *ex-employees were still subjects of rumors*. Despite being no longer employed and previously praised as role models, these people were still being criticized, with claims that they had done everything wrongly and their actions were being questioned. Consequently, current employees indicated that they experienced feelings of sadness and frustration simultaneously, as they recognized that upon their departure the remaining staff members would likely gossip about them.

The fourth theme was ***workplace bullying***, and this issue was raised by several participants. According to the literature, “workplace bullying is a form of systematic mistreatment that occurs repeatedly and regularly over time, whereby the target has difficulty defending themselves due to the power imbalance between the parties involved” [54] (p. 544). As reported by participants, bullying occurred because they were perceived as unfavorable by managers. This unfavorable perception was related either to membership in a trade union or to the potential defense of their own or others’ violated rights.

As the fifth theme, ***interpersonal conflicts with coworkers*** were introduced. Such interpersonal conflicts might not be *expressed through words or actions, and thus they might be implied*. One of the participants revealed feeling that something had happened, and that something was not being shared, and that one was being left “beyond the margins”:

“Sometimes, all kinds of weird misunderstandings occur between colleagues too. Someone got an impression of something, someone felt insulted. I am not certain. . . Then you start

thinking that you were being looked at differently or maybe it was just a figment of your imagination, but there are times when you feel not ignored, but weird all the same—being looked at not in the right way”. (I14)

Finally, the last type of social demands refers to **social marginalization**. Only one participant disclosed a case of damaged relations and loss of respect. *Demotion from a leadership position to a specialist position* diminished their self-esteem and closed the gates for positive adaptation in light of adversity:

“Very quickly I realized that as soon as I no longer had the manager’s status, I was being looked at by colleagues through entirely different eyes. Then, my proposals and certain actions kind of became entirely unimportant and I no longer felt an equal colleague to them, despite my experience and all the achievements accumulated. Nonetheless, I was no longer being paid any regard”. (I3)

4.2. Organizational Demands

Based on data, organizational demands cover six themes, namely: pressure-driven feedback, workload and scheduling, role-related demands, low autonomy, generational clashes, and job insecurity.

Referring to **pressure-driven feedback**, *inconsistent performance appraisal due to hierarchical pressure* was reported. One participant expressed her confusion about power within the organization: the impact higher-level managers had on middle-level managers and the consequences this might have for those at lower hierarchical levels. Despite the fact that she demonstrated the same behavior every week and delivered the same results, she had been appraised differently, leading to lower resilience.

The second theme reflected **workload and scheduling**. All of the participants spoke about *time pressure* in one context or another. In these cases, the chain of events typically proceeded as follows: stress and rushing, contacting the manager and requesting a deadline extension, followed by rushing and stress again. Going further, the majority of participants mentioned *high workload* as a hindrance job demand in relation to their resilience. It was caused by various reasons, such as constant changes, lack of employees, or tight deadlines. Finally, *overtime* was put on the table:

“That is one of the unpleasant things—overtime and unexpected call-outs, when they call you on weekends and you have to go and help someone do something or repair something at any cost.” (I15)

The third theme that prevailed among the qualitative research participants dealt with **role-related demands**. First, the majority of participants mentioned *performance pressure from line managers or other functional managers*. Pressure was being exerted to select and recruit employees, to obtain work permits for third-country nationals, to cover for a colleague who was on sick leave due to burnout caused by excessive workload.

“Essentially, the economic situation did not allow attracting employees from the domestic market, so I was investing maximum effort to bring them from outside. However, some kind of pressure was being exerted that what I was doing was not enough, that I was the only one responsible for attracting and retaining these employees, despite the fact that essentially, supervisors who worked directly with their subordinates were supposed to assume their share of responsibility. So, it was simply the pressure.” (I3)

Second, *role overload*, which occurs when there are too many tasks or responsibilities for the time available, was emphasized. Incidentally, in such situations, employees tended to set unrealistic goals and failed to deliver, creating extra workload for others.

Third, some employees holding managerial positions reported experiencing *role conflict* arising from the need to balance responsibilities as functional managers with the task of managing team members.

“So, there was this thing. You are a functional manager but then you get a message from HR that you also have to be highly involved—they want you to be a people’s leader too, to demonstrate leadership, there are some inclusion indicators, etc. < . . . > You do not even have enough time to fully perform the functional manager’s duties, let alone the functions of personnel [manager]”. (I17)

The fourth theme in organizational demand cluster referred to **low autonomy**, which limited flexibility and increased stress, especially under high workload.

“Let us, for example, take the situation where we need to ensure zero defects—I know my people, their competences, and who needs supervision. < . . . > I see those things < . . . >, but managers nevertheless require that I should do it differently”. (I17)

The interview data allowed the analysis of *generational clashes* as the next theme. Having a diverse age sample resulted in divergent findings regarding their relationships at work. Thus, *age-related bias and a demeaning attitude toward younger employees* were apparent in Generation Z responses:

“Differences between generations are very prominent. I still represented the younger generation and I have to face people much older than me, let us say, there is a 20–30 year difference between us. They have a somewhat derogatory attitude to young employees and young person’s opinion and competence are not considered equal to those of that older person, because they have accumulated more experience. However, information may be obsolete or the knowledge may no longer be relevant. So, one of the delicate points is that you have to keep convincing them or simply give us seeing that there is no way to change their mind about another way of doing things being more effective and allowing to attain better results”. (I15)

Meanwhile, older employees mentioned that *Generation Z attitudes toward work* acted as a hindrance job demand for them, creating challenges that had to be coped with:

“The young people nowadays, they work and perceive work differently. In the meantime, we are the kind of people who would rather stay longer and finish the task properly than leave the moment the clock strikes or when the mood changes or whatever. < . . . > We care about work slightly more than the young people of nowadays”. (I16)

The final theme referred to *job insecurity*, which arose due to economic crises when there were no production orders or was caused by constant reorganizations. In general, quantitative job insecurity was mentioned, reflecting the perceived threat of losing one’s job.

“Insecurity due to constant reforms, one on top of another. One has not been completed yet and here you have another one starting tomorrow; one barely ended when the third starts. This instability and constant tension are present every day.” (I19)

4.3. Emotional Demands

Emotional demands were represented by three themes, including employee dismissals to be done by the research participants, dealing with customers, and emotional labor in service roles.

As regards **employee dismissals**, dismissals *due to lack of person–job fit* represented the prevailing topic in the responses of participants holding managerial roles. Managers viewed them as very emotionally demanding, arguing that decision-making was usually very complex and that dismissal interviews required comprehensive preparation. However,

economic dismissals were also discussed, especially during periods of economic or health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In respect of *dealing with customers*, several subthemes were revealed. First, *conflicts as a result of employee turnover*. Dealing with customers is usually challenging, and adversity is a common thing. The stories of the participants working in services were not an exception, as they reported a high frequency and intensity of conflicts with clients. It was mentioned that conflicts might arise at the beginning of a career when an employee lacked general knowledge of how to deal with clients or had limited knowledge about the company's customer service standards and the specifics of serving specific clients. Usually, these things are based on mutual agreements or established traditions.

Second, some of the respondents reported that customers undermined employees by portraying them as incompetent and even demeaned them (*employee discredit*):

"He keeps harassing us all the time that we do not know how to work, that we are incompetent, incapable of selecting suitable people for the company. I am not sure if it is appropriate to use such words; this demeans and belittles." (I4)

Concerning *emotional labor in a service role*, one subtheme was identified, namely *unforeseeable emotions of children*. The interview data supported the notion from the existing literature that employee resilience is domain- and context-based [55]. This was particularly evident in the context of the education sector. The participants viewed their job responsibilities in dealing with children as highly emotionally demanding, resulting in physiological and psychological costs, which in turn makes it more difficult to stay resilient at work:

"Children's emotions that cannot be anticipated cause the greatest stress. Although it does not happen frequently, nonetheless, it happens. Let us say, in my work, I deal with children with carious disorders, autistic children too, and this is what affects me most and unsettles me the most; it affects me in different ways: emotionally, even physiologically (uneven breathing, heart rhythm, my lips feel numb). The cause is all kinds of hysterics and fits. I find it very difficult to cope with. This is the hardest for me." (I14)

4.4. Ethical Demands

The data allowed the introduction of a new cluster of hindrance job demands, namely *ethical demands*, referring to two subthemes: dishonesty with clients and coworkers, and idea stealing.

Given the intense debates on corporate social responsibility, it was disappointing to find that pressure on employees to sell products or services that may not fully meet clients' needs still remains a common business practice. Moreover, one of the participants shared a story of *idea stealing*, which resulted in mistrust toward the manager:

"Being a young specialist, you go to your supervisor to present certain ideas and thoughts and then they present these thoughts to a higher-level manager as their own. You go on being that little no one that no one pays any regard to, whereas your supervisor keeps accumulating plusses and bonuses." (I10)

The key findings and the factors undermining resilience are provided in Table 1.

As seen from Table 1, it can be concluded from the interviews that hindrance job demands had a negative impact on the resilience of respondents. In the next section, the research findings are discussed.

Table 1. Hindrance job demands in relation to employee resilience—core empirical findings.

Theme	Subtheme	Factors Undermining Resilience
Social demands		
Difficulties in managing team dynamics	Mood swings and expressing feelings at work	Strained workplace relationships, reduced social support that is essential for being resilient
	Responsibility to motivate employees	Difficult as all work duties must be completed
Toxic relationships with managers	Lack of social support	Self-doubt and worry about professional competence, questioning whether something has been done in the wrong way
	Restrictions for future career	Lack of empathy; feeling that you have to shape your career according to someone else's wishes
	Breach of trust Lack of recognition from manager	Unpleasant and really disappointing situation Feeling like an invisible person
Rumors at work	Rumors at work initiated by colleagues or managers	Sense of discomfort
	Ex-employees are still subjects of rumors	Feelings of sadness and frustration simultaneously, realizing the possibility to become subjects of rumors
Workplace bullying	Bullying due to being "unfavorable"	Health issues, hospitalization
Interpersonal conflicts with coworkers	Tangible or intangible conflicts	Reduced social support, an essential positive antecedent of employee resilience
Social marginalization	Demotion from manager to specialist	Feeling of complete disregard
Organizational demands		
Pressure-driven feedback	Inconsistent performance appraisal due to hierarchical pressure	Awkwardness due to close relationship with the line manager
Workload and scheduling	Time pressure	Rushing and stress
	High workload Overtime	Rushing and stress Work life conflict
Role-related demands	Role overload Role conflict	Tiredness
	Performance pressure	Confusion regarding priorities at work Overwhelming and unsustainable pressure; in one case the pressure led to resignation
Low job autonomy		Limited flexibility
Job insecurity	Quantitative job insecurity	Instability and persistent tension
Generational clashes	Age-related bias and a demeaning attitude toward younger employees	Feeling of being undervalued
	Generation Z attitudes toward work	Nervousness
Emotional demands		
Employee dismissals conducted by participants	Employee dismissal due to the lack of person–job fit	An internal conflict about whether the decision made was the right one
	Economic dismissals	An internal conflict about whether the decision made was the right one
Dealing with customers	Conflicts as results of employee turnover	Disorientation resulting from insufficient experience
	Discredit of employees	Managing clients' moods requires significant efforts
Emotional labor in service role	Unforeseeable emotions of children	Fear, health issues
Ethical demands		
Ethical dilemmas	Dishonesty with clients and coworkers	Internal conflict about how to behave
	Idea stealing	Being not respected, not valued and losing trust

5. Discussion

Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources theory and the challenge–hindrance framework, the paper aimed to reveal the hindrance job demands that undermine employee resilience.

The discussion part is structured in such a way that, at the beginning, some general aspects are discussed, followed by each cluster of demands and sustainability-related aspects.

This paper addresses an important question about the types of job demands that hinder employee resilience. The findings are consistent with the idea that uncertain, complex and ambiguous work demands represent hindrance demands that impair resilience [33]. Ignoring these demands means additional challenges for both workforce sustainability and sustainable organizational development.

By examining employee resilience in an organizational context and in conjunction with hindrance job demands, the paper fills an important research gap identified by a number of authors [32,33]. The paper supports the idea of hindrance demands as obstacles to personal growth and resilience. Moreover, the findings allow the identification of particular demands and thus expand the range of demands within the JD–R model.

As mentioned before, the research sample consisted of employees working in different sectors, and this allowed to support the notion of industry-specific differences regarding resilience. In line with the findings, demands undermining employee resilience in the education and service sectors seem to be more related to children and customers as stakeholders rather than to organizational structure, functions or colleagues. The teaching profession is characterized by complexity, as teachers convey knowledge, manage their students' emotions, shape future generations' social skills and critical thinking, and deal with administrative routines. On top of that, they have to balance their professional and personal lives [56]. Accordingly, demands raised by students are of high relevance and need to be addressed to ensure resilience as a professional competence for teachers [57]. The service sector reveals a similar story where employees must constantly engage and remain productive in order to be competitive in response to changing consumer preferences [58,59]. Summing up, these findings support earlier research arguing that there is no single recipe for enhancing employee resilience; rather, each case should be addressed as unique.

Going further, the current paper contributes to the existing body of literature by providing the view on employee resilience in Lithuania. Drawing on the JD–R theory, earlier studies analyzed resilience in Germany [32], China [31], Australia [38], and New Zealand [33]. As economic, demographic and social circumstances might differ across countries, the findings from a country often referred to as a “Baltic tiger” extend the knowledge base.

Starting with *social demands*, based on the interviews, they seemingly account for the largest part of hindrance job demands. Relationships with managers and between coworkers are complex and highly relevant in terms of resilience. Positive relationships imply social support, which is among the basic human and social needs of an individual for esteem, affection, approval, identity, and a sense of belonging [13]. The benefits and added value of social support lie in its potential to facilitate coping and assist in responding to stress [13]. Employees with a strong social support network at work are more successful at stress management, as their coworkers' support can create a better work dynamic, bonds between workers, and the flourishing of each other's resources [60]. Bardoel et al. [20] proposed employee resilience-enhancing human resource management practices, and the development of social support at work was among them. It was argued that managers who understand resilience at work could help employees adapt and survive workplace changes. Similarly, Cooke et al. [31] concluded, based on an empirical study in the banking sector, that supportive leadership and coworker support were positively associated with

employee resilience. As such, interpersonal conflicts with coworkers or toxic relationships with managers, being on the opposite side of social support, served as harmful for resilience.

Social demands as hindrance job demands might have far-reaching organizational implications. This is extremely true given that Generation Z is expected to represent nearly one-third of the global workforce by 2030 [61]. Among other valued aspects, having a good relationship with managers is one of the key factors for Generation Z employees [62]. As such, a lack of social support or a breach of trust might not only undermine their capacity to cope with challenging situations and work but also increase voluntary turnover. In turn, the latter might create difficulties for retaining organizational knowledge, strengthening team dynamics, and preserving a supportive organizational culture [18].

Referring to **organizational demands**, the current study draws attention to role-related demands that are harmful to employee resilience, especially in case of role conflict. Role conflicts can arise both from within a job role and from the combination of roles [63]. The situation where a person has to work both as a functional manager and also manage people is particularly complex, as they have to perform different functions at the same time, which requires different skills. Based on literature, when employees work in uncharted territory and are given minimal support [64], the level of stress increases, making it hard for them to recover. As such, the findings of the current research fit well with the mainstream literature arguing for organizational support for training on how to combine the two roles, especially when one role refers to people management.

As regards job autonomy, it is described as the level of freedom, independence, and ability to self-plan and determine how to perform tasks [65]. When people's need for autonomy is satisfied, they are more likely to experience a sense of integrity and self-initiated motivation [66]. Previous studies found that the fulfilment of the need for autonomy could effectively promote academic and employee resilience [66].

Finally, following the literature, performance pressure is defined as urgent demands placed on an individual to respond in a certain way, more specifically to achieve high performance levels [67]. An earlier study found that performance pressure, when appraised as a threat, may be detrimental to employee engagement and performance [67]. Performance pressure leads to psychological stress, which stimulates employees to actively mobilize and use various resources, including personal ones, to deal with it [68]. Moreover, Cooke et al. [31] pointed out that performance pressure was a key boundary condition for work resources to improve employee resilience. As such, the findings of the current study correspond to those of earlier studies, supporting the notion that performance pressure, as a unique and dynamic work stressor [67], might hinder the ability to cope and bounce back from difficult situations.

As mentioned before, organizations have been experiencing a generational shift in their workforce. Each generation's historical context is characterized by a specific range of opportunities and experiences, which in turn shape future attitudes and behaviors [69] that might even contradict those of other generations. Such generational clashes may cause implications for organizations in general, especially in terms of employee turnover and retention. Avoiding stereotypes and focusing on individual differences is one of the strategies to address generational differences at work. For instance, Generation Z, in contrast to older generations, prioritizes things such as career development, learning/training opportunities, and positive working relationships [70]. Promoting these things saves time and costs for attracting and onboarding new employees, helps avoid additional workload for colleagues, and finally satisfies the needs of Generation Z and helps maintain their psychological functioning under stressful conditions.

As regards **emotional demands**, the interview findings support the notion that dealing with clients is usually challenging. For decades, businesses lived by the golden rule: "The

customer is always right" [71]. In a society where "the customer is king", service employees are ascribed lower status, are at greater risk of experiencing workplace aggression from customers, and often feel powerless, as customers' expectations are implausible [72]. However, recently the dark side of 'the customer is always right' has become more than visible: the relentless push to please clients often leads to burnout and low morale [73].

Turning to the current study, throughout the interviews most of the participants reported customer mistreatment. Such behavior resulted in emotional demands, as handling complaints and conflicts could lead to stress and required time and effort to manage client expectations and restore the good feelings of personnel. The emotional strain of direct (often face-to-face) engagement with clients [74] might lead to lower resilience.

As regards ethical aspects, the JD-R model does not explicitly mention them [42,45]. One of the main contributions of this study is to complement the existing JD-R model by suggesting that more attention should be dedicated to ethical issues at work. The literature on ethical climate seems to be the conceptual foundation for such a suggestion. Ethical climate is described through the perceptions of coworkers of "what constitutes the right behavior" [75]. Victor and Cullen [76], the introducers of the concept, defined ethical climate in an organizational setting as "the shared perceptions of what is ethically correct behavior and how ethical issues should be handled" (p. 52). Thus, ethical climate reflects organizational practices, procedures, and policies with moral consequences [76]. As such, job demands as antecedents or outcomes of these policies and practices have a well-established ethical reflection.

Referring to concrete findings on **ethical demands**, the current study found issues with regard to two stakeholders, namely customers and current employees. The literature identifies a variety of unethical behavior forms in respect of clients, such as dishonesty, exaggerating product benefits, or selling inappropriate products that do not match customer needs [77]. Similar demands were mentioned during interviews, once again raising the question of "what constitutes the right behavior". Consequently, it should be taken into consideration that all these demands impact the quality of the customer–company relationship, either by creating tension between them, lowering customer loyalty, or in other ways [77]. In turn, this affects employees, creating tension and stress that do not help in dealing with unfavorable situations. Moreover, as new employees (salespeople) learn about "right" or "wrong" behaviors primarily through observation [59], unethical behavior might start dominating, thus jeopardizing organizational sustainability.

As regards ethical aspects between employees themselves, idea stealing was mentioned during interviews as an extremely important demand lowering employee resilience. The growing knowledge economy requires creative ideas, which can be boosted by sharing them among colleagues [78]. However, idea theft is a commonplace phenomenon. In the case under consideration, it was an interpersonal idea theft, "which occurs when an individual intentionally pursues or takes credit for an idea that is perceived to be owned by another individual" [77] (p. 3). Such idea stealing might have far-reaching consequences even for the social climate at work and workforce sustainability [18].

Finally, turning to current employees as stakeholders, the literature argues for an ethical and trustworthy organizational culture that prevents ethical crises, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, and employee misconduct [14]. An earlier study demonstrated that ethical leaders improved employee resilience, leading to positive individual outcomes such as lower burnout [79]. This serves as an antecedent for organizational vitality and sustainability.

Summing up, as mentioned in the theoretical part, due to constant changes in the work environment, the list of job demands is never-ending. In the context of economic, cultural, and political transformations occurring alongside shifts in individual mindsets, topics

previously regarded as inappropriate for discussion have increasingly become central to public debate. Based on the findings of the current study, this also appears to apply to issues related to ethics. Treating ethical demands as a separate part of the JD-R model draws broader attention to “what constitutes the right behavior” and aligns with the concept of sustainable HRM [80], which aims to control unintended side effects and negative feedback that employees might experience as a result of policies and practices implemented by organizations. Additionally, looking from the challenge–hindrance framework perspective and drawing on ethical HRM literature, it would be difficult to believe that ethical demands might foster employee resilience rather than damage it.

Additionally, it is important to underline that the findings can be discussed in terms of sustainability-related aspects. The core notion of this paper argues that job-related attributes might create adversity at work and negatively impact employee resilience. Accordingly, lower resilience weakens human sustainability, which is about the long-term preservation of physical health, mental well-being, capability development, and finally thriving at work [80,81]. From a sustainable HRM perspective, if many employees demonstrate low resilience and the organization does not adapt job design or reduce other harmful demands, human resources may be depleted faster than they are restored [82]. Consequently, issues such as employee health, well-being, or labor force supply might become more than critical.

6. Conclusions

Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources theory and the challenge–hindrance framework, the paper aimed to reveal the hindrance job demands that undermine employee resilience. The results revealed that social (difficulties in managing team dynamics, toxic relationships with managers, rumors at work, workplace bullying, interpersonal conflicts with coworkers, social marginalization), organizational (pressure-driven feedback, workload and scheduling, role-related demands, low autonomy, generational clashes, and job insecurity), and emotional (employee dismissals conducted by participants, dealing with customers, emotional labor in a service role) demands played an important role in undermining resilience. Moreover, ethical demands (dishonesty with clients and idea stealing) were indicated.

These results may influence future research agendas, particularly dealing with the shaping of job design and the perception of ethical aspects, and accordingly the ways in which these factors impact employee resilience. From the perspective of the future of work concept, job design transformations and workplace ethical considerations have gained increasing prominence on the agendas of Chief Executive Officers and scholars alike. Future studies could focus not only on day-to-day challenges at work and demands that hinder resilience but also on coping strategies through which ethical and organizational demands may be overcome to enable adaptation, growth, and development when faced with difficulties.

Practical implications. The study confirms that some job demands act as hindrances, draining personal resources and undermining employee resilience, and this should be considered by organizations and their HR managers when dealing with people. Several ways are suggested below.

First, it is recommended to start with training sessions in organizations and accordingly raise awareness of employee resilience in general and particular job demands and resources that might impact it. Organizations are encouraged to cultivate a culture in which training is institutionally supported and systematically delivered, and learning is embedded within the organization’s structural and cultural foundations. Certainly, this requires a concerted effort but is worthwhile, as it might prevent or mitigate the effects of most hindrance job demands on employee resilience, including role-related demands, rumors at work or

workplace bullying. Interventions through gamification [4] might show some progress and serve as measurable outcomes.

Second, based on the current study data, it appears that managers lack leadership skills. Accordingly, targeted leadership training programs should be offered to managers to help them avoid causing hindering job demands, such as failing to provide social support or recognition to subordinates, limiting future career opportunities, breaching mutual trust, or being unable to effectively manage team dynamics.

Third, one of the core messages from the interviews is that line managers need support in their role of managing people. Recently, line managers have begun to play a more critical role in coordinating, appraising and motivating employees to work toward organizational goals [54]. However, they lack knowledge and support. In order to close the gap between intended and actual HRM practices [83], support from HR managers and organizations should increase. As a result, difficulties in managing team dynamics, pressure-driven feedback, low job autonomy, or workload and scheduling might be mitigated as hindrance job demands.

Fourth, when responding to challenges when working with clients, a code of conduct should be approved and maintained, as well as applied in practice. From this, training and regular open and fair discussions on achievements should ensue, including all stakeholders. Thus, the code of conduct could directly address such hindrance job demands as difficulties in dealing with clients, ethical dilemmas or emotional labor in the service role.

Fifth, especially when tackling ethical dilemmas, a culture of openness needs to be developed through leader commitment, clear communication, and regular check-ins. HR managers are invited to initiate discussions and contribute to establishing a clear policy on ethically correct behavior and the handling of ethical issues in organizations [75,78].

Sixth, considering the complexities present in the external environment and fast-paced changes in the workplace, a supportive work culture could play an important role in strengthening employee resilience. HR managers and line managers are encouraged to show empathy, recognize employees' achievements, and lead by example in the field of open communication. As a result, this could contribute to mitigating the effects of workplace bullying, generational clashes, and social marginalization.

Finally, although this recommendation is provided at the end of the list, it is the most complex, requiring the commitment of all stakeholders. HR managers are encouraged to initiate the review of HR policy and accordingly create a work ecosystem focused on avoiding or reducing the number of hindrance job demands and their effects on employee resilience. An example could be specific interventions within the performance management system that might result in a greater number and higher quality of feedback conversations, as well as explicit recognition of employees, such as announcing an Employee of the Month.

Limitations of the study. The paper has several limitations, which need to be considered for further studies. First, the paper analyzed only job demands, leaving job resources aside. Therefore, the aspects that stimulate growth and development and support employees in dealing with adversity at work were not revealed. Future studies might address this issue. Analyzing job demands and resources together in relation to employee resilience could provide additional insight into whether and how job resources serve as a buffer against job demands. Second, the focus of the current paper was only on hindrance job demands. Nonetheless, earlier empirical findings support the idea of a two-dimensional delineation of demands into challenges and hindrances: whether or not the same job-related attribute is appraised as undermining or strengthening resilience depends on the perception of a particular employee [38]. As such, further studies should direct their attention to deeper analysis of the two-dimensional aspect. The literature and practitioners could benefit from knowing under what conditions the same demand might be evaluated by

different employees differently or whether and how socio-demographic characteristics of individuals matter while evaluating. Third, the sample of the current study encompassed different industries making it difficult to provide context-based insights [51]. Therefore, industry-specific studies are needed. Fourth, as job-related attributes might differ for some professions, such as nurses or university teachers, further studies might be profession-based. Here, it is important to underline that each profession/sector is influenced by a number of macro-environmental factors, which may additionally influence job demands and relationships in relation to resilience. Finally, the limitations of the qualitative design in establishing causality or generalizability should be acknowledged. Moreover, the size of the data sample and the exploratory nature of the data should also be treated as limitations of the study. Future studies could apply a mixed-method approach using qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain a more complex view of job demands and resources in relation to employee resilience.

Summing up, the paper contributes to both theory and practice and calls for actions rearranging job-related attributes with the intention of supporting employee resilience for organizational and human sustainability.

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