

Compassion and altruism in organizations: a path for firm survival

Zina Barghouti, Jacob Guinot and Ricardo Chiva
*Department of Business Administration and Marketing, Jaume I University,
Castellón de la Plana, Spain*

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Abstract

Purpose – The authors draw on this approach to explore the consequences of compassion and altruism in the workplace for firm performance, using organizational resilience as a mediating variable.

Design/methodology/approach – In recent years, a paradigm shift has been proposed in the organizational sciences that includes a change from self-centeredness to interconnectedness. This emergent management paradigm considers that employees are not only motivated by self-interest but also by other-centered values, such as altruism and compassion for others. This alternative proposal suggests the need for a more humanistic perspective for management. To carry out the research, the authors applied a structural equation model to a sample of highly innovative companies from different sectors.

Findings – The results confirm that compassion at work leads to a climate based on altruism, which indirectly increases firm performance by means of organizational resilience. This study contributes to the organizational literature by revealing some benefits of promoting altruism and compassion in organizations.

Originality/value – This study therefore provides a detailed analysis of the consequences of altruism and compassion in organizations and reveals some organizational conditions that can drive firm performance. Moreover, this study is the first to suggest and empirically validate that a work climate based on altruism enhances organizational resilience. In turn, organizational resilience enables the firm to take appropriate actions to convert unexpected and adverse situations that potentially threaten its survival into sources of opportunity and growth.

Keywords Well-being, OCB, Altruism, Performance, Compassion, Resilience, Shift paradigm

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In the hostile, masculine, competitive and individualistic environment in which business operates, issues such as individual performance, aggressiveness or competitiveness have been considered essential for organizational success. Consequently, academic interest and business practices have neglected the exploration and development of other organizational values and behaviors with a greater focus on helping or caring for others (e.g. altruism, common good, collaboration, compassion, integration, among others) (Elizur and Koslowsky, 2001; Kanov, 2021). However, in the last few years a number of scholars have noted a paradigm shift in organizational sciences, management theory and practice involving a transition from self-centeredness to interconnectedness (e.g. Guinot *et al.*, 2016; Rynes *et al.*, 2012). This alternative management paradigm views employees as motivated not only by self-interest, but also by other-centered values such as altruism and compassion for others. These developments therefore suggest there is a need for a more humanistic perspective in

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management and highlight the importance of altruistic behaviors to promote organizational functioning.

According with this alternative paradigm, in recent years some academic research has begun to explore the relevance of altruism and compassion in organizational settings (e.g. [Emmerik et al., 2005](#); [Guinot et al., 2016](#); [Mallén et al., 2015](#)). Results in the area of research of compassion at work appear promising due to the positive effects of compassionate feelings on organizations and employees (e.g. [Dutton et al., 2014](#); [Guinot et al., 2020](#); [Lilius et al., 2008](#); [Worline and Dutton, 2017a, b](#)). For example, [Engstrom and Cedar \(2011\)](#) found that a compassionate leadership style was related to higher levels of organizational performance. Moreover, compassion at work has been positively related to collective capabilities such as innovations, organizational learning, productivity, and performance ([Guinot et al., 2020](#); [Worline and Dutton, 2017a, b](#)).

Compassion at work means empathizing with another's suffering and voluntarily acting to alleviate their pain ([Worline and Dutton, 2017a, b](#)). Put in other words, compassion is defined as sensitivity to the suffering of others coupled with the motivation to alleviate that pain ([Kanov, 2021](#)). Therefore, it can be understood as an affective state that could lead the individual to be involved in helping actions. For this reason, compassion may be posited as an antecedent of helping others or altruism. Altruism in organizations is included as an essential dimension of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB is defined as "an individual behavior that is discretionary and not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, which, in aggregate, promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization" ([Organ, 1988](#)).

Several studies (e.g. [Organ, 1988](#), p. 8; [Guinot et al., 2016](#)) reveal that altruism in organizations -that is, discretionary behaviors that have the effect of helping another specific person with a task or problem relevant to the organization- enhances organizational learning (e.g. 2016; [Emmerik et al., 2005](#)). Therefore, it appears that companies that create a work environment based on altruism promote learning, which is strongly linked to resilience. Organizational resilience entails the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and thrive ([Organ et al., 2006](#)). Similarly, [Vogus and Sutcliffe \(2007\)](#) defines organizational resilience as a dynamic adaptive capacity of the organization that grows and develops over time. The term has recently been applied in organizational science as a key concept that could help organizations survive in competitive, difficult or volatile environments (e.g. [Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011](#)). More specifically, organizational resilience has been shown to have a positive effect on firm performance, since it helps workers to meet customer needs, to take advantage of opportunities that might otherwise be missed, to act quickly and effectively in threat and crisis situations (e.g. [Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011](#); [Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#)).

Therefore, our goal in this study is to discover whether organizational resilience can explain the apparent positive effects of compassion and altruism on firm performance. Although some academic progress has been made on the topic of compassion and altruism in organizational settings, more research is clearly needed ([Kanov, 2021](#); [Guinot et al., 2020](#)). Our review of the literature reveals scant attention to these topics, despite proposals indicating their positive effects for organizational functioning ([Kanungo and Conger, 1993](#); [Lilius et al., 2011](#)). Accordingly, this study aims to take a step forward in the management literature by unveiling some consequences of compassion and altruism in organizations. In particular, the model proposed in this research attempts to offer a path -by means of organizational resilience- for increasing firm performance based on the power of compassion and altruism among organizational members. As well as, empirically validating the hypotheses proposed. To this aim, we conduct a quantitative analysis of a sample of Spanish firms with high innovativeness. Specifically, we use structural equation modeling on a sample of 300 cases from different sectors to test the relationships addressed in the study.

After this introduction, we present a brief theoretical review of the most relevant concepts referred to in the study, namely compassion, altruism, and resilience. We then propose our three research hypotheses and describe the methodology used. Finally, the results are reported, and the implications and limitations of the study are discussed, along with proposals for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Compassion

Compassion is not a new topic; the concept has been widely studied in the fields of religion, philosophy and sociology, but was only recently introduced into the organizational and management literature by Peter Frost in 1999. This author defined compassion as a feeling that arises when an individual perceives the suffering of another, and is motivated to alleviate that suffering. Likewise, [Kanov et al. \(2004\)](#), define compassion as a process in which one individual or group detects and feels the suffering of another, and this feeling allows them to act selflessly to alleviate the suffering. From their research, we can infer that compassion is a four-part process: (1) realizing that suffering is present in an organization, (2) making sense of the suffering in a way that contributes to the desire to alleviate it, (3) feeling a concern for the person or persons who are suffering, and (4) taking action to alleviate their suffering in some way ([Guinot et al., 2020](#); [Worline and Dutton, 2017a, b](#)). Similarly, compassion can be understood as the emotional reaction of a person to the suffering of another, with the goal of reducing that suffering without expecting anything in return ([Lilius et al., 2008](#)). Therefore, compassion is an emotionally based interpersonal process that involves acting voluntarily to alleviate another person's suffering ([Dutton et al., 2014](#)).

On the one hand, [Kanov et al. \(2004\)](#) suggest that compassion is characterized by three key sub-processes: noticing (perceiving that someone is suffering), feeling (feeling of empathy), and responding (action to reduce suffering). Compassion also requires processes for moving from individual to collective reaction ([Poorkavoos, 2016](#)). [Kanov et al. \(2004\)](#) refer to these processes as propagation, legitimation and coordination, which may help to unravel the dynamics of compassion in organizations. This study examines compassion at the organizational level, considered as the level at which organizational members act to alleviate the suffering of others ([Guinot et al., 2020](#)). In this sense, compassion at the organizational level is understood as a process in which organizational members collectively acknowledge present pain, share it, express their empathy, and act collectively ([Lilius et al., 2011](#)). This collective recognition of suffering leads to action to alleviate pain ([Lilius et al., 2011](#)).

On the other hand, compassion in the organization could facilitate processes that contribute to the creation of resources, the strengthening of shared beliefs and values, and the cultivation of key relational skills ([Guinot et al., 2020](#)). Consequently, the compassion of individuals could have positive effects on three pillars of the organization. First, it can help rekindle resources such as trust, altruism, interpersonal relationships, etc.; second, it can help strengthen shared values and beliefs; and third, it can help develop relationship skills.

According to [Frost \(1999\)](#) compassion is an essential phenomenon that contributes to enhancing human capabilities for an organization to foster its success ([Lilius et al., 2008](#)). For example, compassion is supposed to increase employees' attachment and commitment to their organization ([Lilius et al., 2008](#)). It also enables the sharing of positive emotions such as pride and gratitude ([Zulueta, 2016](#)). Furthermore, [Dutton et al. \(2014\)](#) consider that compassion has effects on all members of an organization. On the one hand, compassion positively affects the person who exercises it due to the satisfaction of helping others ([West and Chowla, 2017](#)). On the other hand, compassion benefits the company for two reasons: first, it directly improves the relationship between the person who exercises it and the person who perceives it ([Frost, 1999](#)). Second, compassion indirectly affects the witnesses of such

acts. That is, unaffected people feel proud of how their organization's members act (Dutton *et al.*, 2007) and may be more inclined to act towards the common good (Zulueta, 2016).

2.2 Altruism

The word altruism (from the Latin *alter*, "other") was coined by Auguste Comte in the 1830s as a general term to designate care for others (Morrison and Severino, 2007). Subsequently, authors from the field of economics and psychology (e.g. Simmons, 1991; Becker, 1976) defined altruism as any behavior that leads to sharing, collaborating or helping other people. Continuing with the literature on altruism, authors such as Khalil (2004) defined this phenomenon as a person's predisposition to think about the welfare and rights of others. It is considered a behavior that is performed voluntarily and intentionally without expecting anything in return (Morrison and Severino, 2007). Therefore, altruism is explained as an ethical behavior that focuses on the welfare and help of others without expecting an external reward (Simmons, 1991).

These are behaviors that can be observed in many circumstances, both in everyday situations and in situations of distress (Becker, 1976). More specifically, within organizations, altruism refers to those voluntary behaviors of helping another person with an organizationally relevant task or problem (Organ, 1988). Altruism in organizations therefore involves helping coworkers with work-related problems and includes actions such as "helping to solve a problem", "covering another person's position" and "guiding and helping new people who join the company" (Smith *et al.*, 1983). As more concrete examples of altruistic behaviors in organizations we can mention the following: helping colleagues with different linguistic backgrounds to develop their activities or helping with the tasks of an employee who is in a state of stress. Likewise, recent research (e.g. Guinot *et al.*, 2016) has shown some benefits of altruism in organizations. For example, evidence shows that behaviors based on generosity and helpfulness lead to the creation of interpersonal relationships based on mutual trust. Also, these behaviors tend to improve health and longevity, as well as social integration within companies (Morrison and Severino, 2007).

2.3 Resilience

The concept of resilience has been defined as "*the process by which an actor (i.e. individual, organization or community) builds and uses its capability endowments to interact with the environment in a way that positively adjusts and maintains functioning prior to, during and following adversity*" (Williams *et al.*, 2017, p. 742). In other words, resilience refers to the ability of a person, group, community, or organization to overcome certain difficult circumstances and continue successfully in the future. Therefore, resilience is not only an individual attribute, but can also be studied from a collective point of view (Rodríguez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021). At the organizational level, resilience refers to the organization's recovery in difficult, changing or volatile environments. In this study we adopt a conceptualization of resilience from this collective or organizational perspective of analysis.

In the last years some authors (e.g. Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Riolli and Savicki, 2003) have examined the concept of resilience in studies related to organizational management. Some of these authors, such as Comfort (1994) or Coutu (2002), conceive organizational resilience as a dynamic capacity that grows and develops within the organization. Particularly, it seems that work relationships based on communication, collaboration, trust and participation are needed to develop resilience (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). For this to occur, environments should be created in which people train and support each other to develop their potential. Hence, resilience seems to be linked to the strategic management of human resources designed to encourage a healthy organizational climate that helps the organization to overcome difficulties (Rodríguez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021). The rules, norms and routines of the company.

In conclusion, it seems that organizational resilience is a crucial ingredient to create a healthy work environment that helps the company to overcome difficulties (Rodríguez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021).

3. Hypotheses development

3.1 *The relationship between compassion and altruism*

Despite the paucity of studies on compassion at work, there is evidence of its importance to organizations. For example, the literature in recent years has suggested that compassion can drive employee engagement, improve interpersonal relationships, create positive emotions and encourage employee attraction (Dutton *et al.*, 2006; Guinot *et al.*, 2020; Lilius *et al.*, 2011). Likewise, authors such as Worline and Dutton (2017a, b) suggest that compassion at work leads to advantages that could benefit the company and its employees. These include workers interested in helping their colleagues, workers who are more loyal to the company, and more productive workers (Guinot *et al.*, 2020; Lilius *et al.*, 2011). In addition, authors such as Dutton *et al.* (2014) suggest that those organizations which promote compassion at work tend to foster a range of positive attitudes, emotions and behaviors among employees, such as empathy, cooperation or trust. On the other hand, several studies (e.g. Lilius *et al.*, 2008; Lilius *et al.*, 2011; Ko *et al.*, 2021) have found that compassion at work leads to more engagement on the part of the person who has suffered, more job satisfaction for the person being accompanied, and an increased sense of relevance on the part of the observers of the act of compassion.

Compassion triggers a set of helpful actions and a feeling or state of empathic concern to relieve another person's pain (Kanov *et al.*, 2004). That is, compassion leads to detecting the pain of others and leads to voluntary actions to alleviate that pain or suffering. Thus, when the individual detects the suffering or pain of others, he or she acts and helps immediately, voluntarily and without expecting anything in return (Worline and Dutton, 2017a, b). In other words, a compassionate environment, individuals may feel more predisposed to help others to alleviate suffering (Worline and Dutton, 2017a, b). Therefore, helping can be understood as a hallmark of work environments prompted by compassion. In this context, other-interest is above self-interest. Such interest in other welfare may include helping responses only aimed to benefit other although they are not in a suffering situation. This entails, for example, giving advice, sharing knowledge or facilitating the onboarding of new employees. So, we propose that a supportive climate of compassion can be a precondition for the expression of helping behaviors in any circumstances, not only referred to the response emerged by others' suffering. This leads us to suggest that compassion at work is positively related to the proliferation of altruistic behaviors among employees. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Compassion at work is positively related to altruism.

3.2 *The relationship between altruism and firm performance*

As mentioned above, altruism is conceived as a voluntary behavior in helping, empathizing and caring for others without expecting any reward. More specifically, altruism in organizations has been considered as an organizational phenomenon that can trigger certain processes, such as greater willingness to accept and understand other people's opinions, and more participatory decision-making processes (Guinot *et al.*, 2016). In turn, when individuals behave altruistically, voluntarily helping another in a task, the interaction between the parties increases (Loi *et al.*, 2011). This results in a more participatory decision-making process and risk-taking behaviors that are linked to some organizational processes such as learning capability, which helps the organization to function properly (Guinot *et al.*, 2016).

On the other hand, authors such as [Organ et al. \(2006\)](#) state that altruism is a typology of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) that leads to a series of voluntary behaviors on the part of the employee that go beyond the obligatory and established demands of their job and that are not rewarded by the company ([Han et al., 2010](#)). In turn, these helping behaviors promote communication, participation and learning ([Rotemberg, 2006](#)), which may help to improve the functioning of the company.

Moreover, empirical evidence supports that helping or cooperating with others can increase information exchange and dialogue ([Guinot et al., 2016](#)). When high levels of communication and shared information exist in the organization, its members may be more prepared to take decisions, and accept responsibilities and risks, which can increase organizational functioning. Indeed, [Kolm and Ythier \(2006\)](#) suggest that information that is spontaneously shared rather than monopolized promotes efficiency, productivity, transparency and thus trust. Therefore, altruistic behaviors enable cooperation, which increases performance or efficiency. On the other hand, it is considered that a work environment based on altruism awakens certain feelings in the employee, such as feeling supported, cared for and valued in times of need ([Ko et al., 2021](#)). In this supportive organizational climate, employees may feel more committed to the organization and willing to share their skills and knowledge ([Han et al., 2010](#)).

Therefore, an altruistic environment in the organization seems to be linked to certain behaviors, feelings and organizational processes which may improve firm performance. In fact, some empirical works have shown a positive relationship between organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)—which involves altruism in organizations—and organizational performance (e.g. [Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1997](#); [Smith et al., 1983](#)). However, although empirical research broadly supports this relationship, evidence is lacking on how some specific forms of OCB are related to performance ([Guinot et al., 2016](#); [Organ et al., 2006](#)). In consequence, we explore the direct effect of altruism (as a form of OCB) on firm performance through the following hypothesis:

H2. Altruism is positively related to firm performance.

3.3 The mediating effect of organizational resilience in the altruism–performance relationship

Although most empirical evidence indicates that OCBs positively influence organizational performance, further research is needed to thoroughly examine the mechanisms through which this relationship occurs ([Guinot et al., 2016](#); [Organ et al., 2006](#)). As [Organ et al. \(2006\)](#) suggested, OCBs such as altruism might have different effects on performance depending on the mediating variables influencing such a relationship. Accordingly, we propose a path that could shed light on the altruism–performance linkage. In turn, other authors have suggested that altruism could be positively linked to resilience, since altruism or concern for others increases the capacity to respond to stressful events and to overcome adversity ([Lemmon and Wayne, 2015](#)). Therefore, in an altruistic-based work environment—characterized by interpersonal help and compassion towards others—employees receive more attention and attendance from others, which creates the necessary conditions for organizational learning and transformative changes ([Guinot et al., 2016](#); [Lemmon and Wayne, 2015](#)). In other words, a climate of altruism seems to promote coping mechanisms that help the organization to adapt and recover more easily from stressful and adverse circumstances. Therefore, it seems that some behaviors such as altruism may facilitate organizational recovery from complex and difficult situations. Hence, the organization could emerge in a stronger position after exposure to traumatic events, suggesting that altruism may help organizations to advance in developing their resilience capacity.

Likewise, in today's turbulent, surprising, unstable and continuously evolving marketplace, some organizational researchers have emphasized the importance of organizational resilience capacity in achieving positive organizational results (e.g. Coutu, 2002; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). Organizational resilience enables a company to thrive in an ever-changing and threatening environment. Resilient organizations adopt effective strategic postures, transform to survive, develop new capabilities and create new opportunities to adapt to change (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). In fact, resilience is characterized as an essential organizational asset to survive in today's business environment, as it makes firms more flexible, adaptable, competitive, and aware of past mistakes (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007). As a result, resilient organizations can be expected to have higher levels of firm performance, particularly in turbulent market conditions (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). However, even though resilience is considered to be extremely useful and leads to positive results in the organization, the empirical exploration of specific links between resilience capacity and its potential antecedents and consequences requires more research attention (Rodríguez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021).

In line with the above arguments, this study proposes that the relationship between altruism and firm performance may be explained by the mediating role of organizational resilience. That is, a work environment based on altruism may encourage organizational resilience, which in turn may improve firm performance. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. The relationship between altruism and firm performance is mediated by organizational resilience.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample and data collection

The study is based on a population of 11,594 organizations located in Spain. This list of organizations was elaborated by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. The list encompasses heterogeneous small to medium sized organizations that meet at least one of the following requirements: (1) the organization has obtained public funding for R&D in the last three years; (2) the organization has proven to be innovative by developing its own innovative products/services; and (3) the organization has proved its capability for innovation through any official certification recognized by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. This list of companies was chosen because of the heterogeneity of the companies included, with companies of different sectors and sizes, so that the findings obtained could be generalized. Accordingly, there was no initial screening, but the objective was to obtain a sufficient number of cases. The sample consists of a total of 300 cases ($N = 300$). The data collected included socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and nationality.

Fieldwork was initiated by directing telephone calls to these companies to complete the survey (see appendix with questionnaire). Telephone interviews are a useful technique when different people in the same company are asking questions or when questions are difficult to reach, as is the case for managers in the larger organizations in this study (Valle *et al.*, 2000). Companies from the initial list were called randomly, until a sufficient number of cases could be collected. Lastly, as we intended, data were collected from a total of 300 firms on the initial population. Thus, a sample of 300 cases was obtained. The size of the companies ranged from 10 to 260 employees, with a mean value of 47 employees ($SD = 39.8$) and a mean company age of 26 years. The working population of the sample $N = 300$ is more male with 69% compared to 28.7% female. We can see that the difference between the two genders is quite significant, with the deviation towards the male gender being double. Regarding the level of education, the sample shows that more than half of the workers with strings attached have higher education, where the percentage does not differ much between

women and men. Specifically, a percentage of 60% with university degrees and 20% with a Master's degree stands out.

To guarantee the soundness of the model and prevent the common method variance, we addressed different questions to different respondents in the same organization. More specifically, human resource managers were asked about compassion and altruism because those questions are focused on human issues such people's perceptions and the organization's internal climate. On the other hand, the CEO responded to questions about the organization's resilience and firm performance because these variables are related with specific outcomes or collective capabilities.

We consider that due to their position and experience in the company, both human resource managers and CEO have a wide perspective and a deep and considerable knowledge about their organizations. They are assumed to know whether their company's work environment is one in which, for example, people help each other, have empathy, are aware of others' needs or sympathize with others. This procedure for assessing psychological constructs within a group or an organization, known as the psychological climate, has been used in previous research (e.g. [Parker et al., 2003](#)). Also, their close contact with the different departments allows them to offer a global image of what is happening in their organizations. Therefore, they can be considered a reliable source of information to evaluate their companies ([Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2021](#)). In addition, the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed to encourage participation and stimulate more honest responses, thus improving results reliability.

To carry out this research, we used a questionnaire on the study variables by using a 7-point Likert scale. Each item on the Likert scale was expressed positively and participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on the questionnaire. The items for each variable are listed in [Appendix](#).

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Compassion at work. We assessed compassion at work using the scale proposed by [Petchsawang and Duchon \(2009\)](#). Because the four items these authors use to measure compassion were devised for the individual level, we adapted them to the organizational level. For examples of the questionnaire items are: "People in this company are aware of and sympathize with their coworkers", and "People in this company try to help their coworkers relieve their suffering." The scale is a 7-point Likert type, with 1 indicating the lowest level of compassion and 7, the highest. Although the alpha in these original compassionate items is weak (0.63), the scale is acceptable and it has been widely adopted in numerous studies that have studied compassion following the same conceptual definition, some producing stronger alphas (e.g. [Gupta and Pandey, 2014](#); [Petchsawang and McLean, 2017](#)). In this study we have focused on assessing compassion at organizational level -the level at which organizational members act to alleviate the suffering of others-, hence, we have chosen to use this scale based on other studies that start from this same approach to compassion (i.e. [Guinot et al., 2020](#)).

4.2.2 Altruism. To measure the construct of altruism, the scale used was based on [Podsakoff's et al's \(1990\)](#) organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) measure. This scale includes the five dimensions of OCB identified by [Organ \(1988\)](#), one of which is altruism. The psychometric properties of the scale have been previously analyzed and the validity of the measurement instrument has also been confirmed. Finally, [Podsakoff et al.](#) included a total of five items to measure the "altruism" dimension. In the present study, these items were used to measure the construct "altruism". Previous research has used this scale to measure altruism in organizations (e.g. [Guinot et al., 2016](#)). Examples of the items included in the scale are: "People in this company help others who have been absent" or "People in this company help others who have heavy workloads".

4.2.2.1 Organizational resilience. We measure “organizational resilience” using three items from Lengnick-Hall *et al.*'s (2011) measurement proposal to evaluate whether an organization displays resilience. The scale includes the following items: “Our company is always learning”, “Our company prospers despite the challenges” and “Our company develops new capabilities and engages in transformative actions”.

4.2.2.2 Firm performance. Firm performance was evaluated with four items from the scale proposed by Tippins and Sohi (2003). CEOs were requested to report on their firm's performance over the previous two years. The items that made up this scale were (1) customer loyalty, (2) sales growth, (3) profitability, and (4) return on investment. A Likert scale of 7 points was employed, where 1 gave the participating company the lowest score in relation to the firm's performance and 7 the highest.

4.2.2.3 Control variables. Since outside sources can affect the firm's performance, firm age, firm size and estimated turnover were included as control variables. Empirical studies examining firm performance as a dependent variable have commonly used firm size and firm age as control variables (e.g. Chiva and Alegre, 2009; Guinot *et al.*, 2020), as it has been demonstrated to affect firm performance (e.g. Tippins and Sohi, 2003; Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle, 2011). Moreover, estimated turnover has been also introduced as a control variable since variations on this are decisive in the assessment of performance (Bhatnagar, 2006; Whyman and Petrescu, 2015).

4.3 Descriptive statistics and reliability of the measurement scales

The descriptive statistics of the indicators considered in the study (means and standard deviations) and the correlation factors are presented in Table 1. Two indicators were used to check the reliability of the scale, in addition to Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951): composite reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and mean variance extracted (Alegre and Chiva, 2008) (see Table 2). Both values of Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability are above the minimum acceptable value of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Furthermore, the average variance extracted shows values above the recommended minimum of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 1998; Nunnally, 1978).

Since these are subjective assessment measures, we conducted a Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) to evaluate the variability of the common method and to test the social appropriateness of the responses. Results from confirmatory factor analysis with all 12 indicators loaded into a single factor (χ^2 (104) = 1,732,893; IFC = 0.584; RMSEA = 0.234; BBNNFI = 0.520) showed a poor adjustment, indicating that the single factor does not capture all the variance in the data. Therefore, and according to this procedure, common method variance may not be considered a problem in our research. In addition, to avoid common variance bias, we use two key information sources (CEOs and HR managers) to get data for the study variables.

5. Data analysis and results

The structural equation methodology is applied to empirically validate this research model, using the statistical software EQS 6.1. The procedure used by Tippins and Sohi (2003), which implies the estimation of two structural models, was followed to test the proposed hypothesis. Following this procedure, the presence of a mediating effect is first tested by the comparison of a direct effect model against another model that includes a mediating variable (organizational resilience). The first model (direct effects) examines the isolated effect of independent variables on dependent variables (i.e. the individual relationship between altruism and firm performance). In order to further test the mediating effects, the coefficient of the direct effects model must be significant. Results revealed that the coefficient of the direct relationship of altruism to firm performance is significant ($\beta_1 = 0.172$; $t = 2.706$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 1.
Means, standard
deviations and
correlation
factors ($N = 300$)

	Mean	S.D	Perf1	Perf2	Perf3	Perf4	Res1	Res2	Res3	Alt1	Alt2	Alt3	Alt4	Alt5	Comp1	Comp2	Comp3	Comp4	
Perf1	5.61	1.035	1																
Perf2	5.04	1.422	0.400*	1															
Perf3	5.01	1.490	0.422*	0.666*	1														
Perf4	4.99	1.397	0.476*	0.675*	0.833*	1													
Res1	5.66	1.030	0.211*	0.200*	0.228*	0.218*	1												
Res2	5.59	1.145	0.254*	0.308*	0.278*	0.336*	0.578*	1											
Res3	5.69	1.162	0.227*	0.307*	0.348*	0.333*	0.640*	0.674*	1										
Alt1	5.56	1.267	0.037	0.105	0.50	0.073	0.020	0.030	0.093	1									
Alt2	5.53	1.244	0.107	0.133*	0.121*	0.160*	0.087	0.124*	0.172*	0.843*	1								
Alt3	5.67	1.173	0.082	0.150*	0.146*	0.199*	0.051	0.063	0.122*	0.767*	0.862*	1							
Alt4	5.56	1.221	0.073	0.095	0.118*	0.167*	0.074	0.093	0.125*	0.785*	0.867*	0.848	1						
Alt5	5.62	1.141	0.090	0.132*	0.137*	0.163*	0.096	0.071	0.111	0.665*	0.782*	0.731*	0.795*	1					
Comp1	5.29	1.210	0.081	0.103	0.117	0.103	0.089	0.052	0.096	0.558*	0.644*	0.536*	0.606*	0.685*	1				
Comp2	5.44	1.162	0.063	0.064	0.096	0.099	0.092	0.050	0.118	0.576*	0.647*	0.578*	0.629*	0.698*	0.795*	1			
Comp3	5.37	1.163	0.074	0.077	0.063	0.056	0.120	0.031	0.098	0.595*	0.626*	0.574*	0.632*	0.679*	0.754*	0.848*	1		
Comp4	5.39	1.111	0.095	0.118	0.104	0.115	0.124	0.064	0.116	0.604*	0.641*	0.581*	0.644*	0.693*	0.745*	0.828*	0.863*	1	

A second model (the mediation model) explores this same relationship, but with added organizational resilience as a mediating variable. Based on [Tippins and Sohi \(2003\)](#), the mediating effect of organizational resilience on the relationship between altruism and firm performance can be supported when (1) the partial mediation model explains more of the variance in firm performance than the direct effects model; (2) there is a significant relationship between altruism and organizational resilience; (3) the significant relationship between altruism and firm performance observed in the direct effects model is significantly reduced or disappears in the partial mediation model; and finally, (4) there is a significant relationship between organizational resilience and firm performance.

The fit indicators show that the two models obtain an excellent fit ([Table 3](#)). In addition, the mediation model explains more variance in firm performance than the direct effects model (0.202 vs. 0.030). Results also indicate that, in the mediation model, there are positive relationships between altruism and organizational resilience ($\beta_2 = 0.145$; $t = 2.078$; $p < 0.05$), as well as between organizational resilience and firm performance ($\beta_3 = 0.409$; $t = 5.060$; $p < 0.01$). Moreover, the significant relationship between altruism and firm performance indicated in the direct effects model remains significant in the mediation model ($\beta_1 = 0.110$; $t = 1.983$; $p < 0.05$). These results provide support for [H3](#) and [H2](#). Results also indicate a positive and significant effect between compassion and altruism (see [Figure 1](#) and [Table 4](#)). In sum, all the hypotheses proposed are confirmed.

6. Conclusions

In an era of increasing uncertainty and continuous change, the organizational literature has suggested that altruistic behaviors and compassionate attitudes of organizational members can contribute to organizational functioning ([Guinot et al., 2016](#); [Kanungo and Conger, 1993](#)). In order to provide more detail on the mechanisms that explain such relationships, this study provides a detailed analysis of the consequences of altruism and compassion in organizations and reveals some organizational conditions that can drive firm performance. To this end, we propose that compassion at work leads to a climate of altruism, and at the same time, this climate can directly increase firm performance, and raises it indirectly through the mediating role of organizational resilience. Both the direct and indirect effects are significant in the model. Thus, it is confirmed that a climate of altruism in organizations can be a condition for improving organizational resilience and performance.

Although some findings in the literature have shed light on altruism and compassion in organizations, to date few studies have examined the role of altruism and compassion in organizational settings. In general, both concepts have been investigated more at the

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	Extracted meanvariance
Compassion	0.943	0.943	0.807
Altruism	0.951	0.959	0.788
Firm performance	0.851	0.866	0.628
Organizational resilience	0.885	0.832	0.625

Table 2.
Reliability of the measurement scales

Model	S-B χ^2	df	p-value	BBNNFI	CFI	RMSEA
Direct effect model	41.212	26	0.077	0.986	0.990	0.045
Mediation model	230.604	148	0.000	0.964	0.969	0.044

Table 3.
Fit index for the hypothesized models

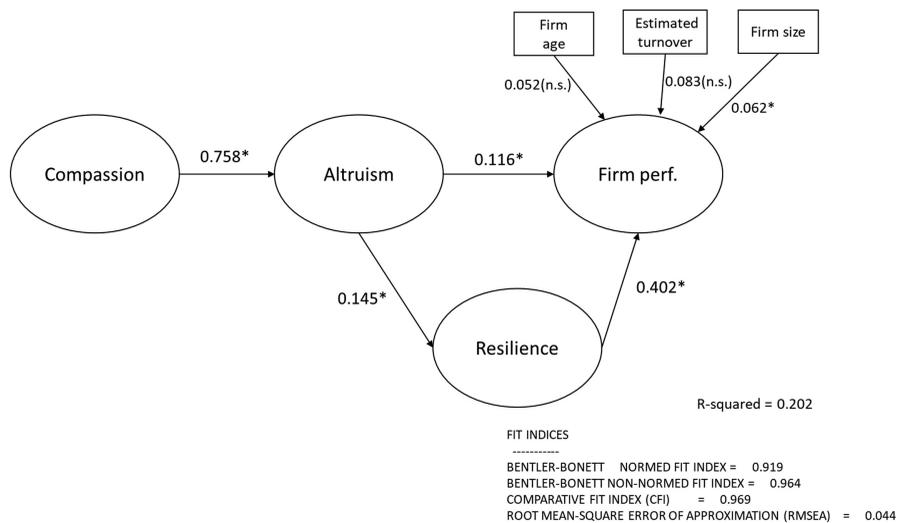


Figure 1.
Research model
and results

Note(s): * Significant relationship (n.s.) non significant relationship

Table 4.
Results of the
hypothesized models

	Direct effects model	Mediation model
Relationship		
Altruism - Firm performance	0.172 (2.706)	0.116 (1.983)
Altruism - Resilience	–	0.145 (2.078)
Resilience - Firm performance	–	0.402 (5.060)
Compassion - Altruism	–	0.758 (13.573)
R-squared	0.030	0.202

Note(s): The estimated parameters are standardized; Student *t* values are specified in brackets

individual level than the organizational level. Furthermore, some researchers have suggested the need for a new paradigm in management theory that focuses on a more humane and compassionate approach to drive OCBs like altruism (e.g. Guinot *et al.*, 2016; Rynes *et al.*, 2012). These authors emphasize the importance of altruism in organizations as a phenomenon capable of generating important benefits for the organization.

The results make two main contributions to the management literature. First, this study is the first to propose and empirically validate that a climate of altruism—characterized by concern, help and empathy for the well-being of other people—encourages the necessary conditions to trigger the transformative changes that enable the organization to recover from crises and emerge in a stronger position. An organizational climate of altruism therefore improves organizational resilience capacity. In turn, organizational resilience enables a firm to take appropriate actions to turn unexpected and adverse situations that potentially threaten its survival into sources of opportunity and growth. Hence, resilient organizations can capitalize on disruptive events to build more adaptive strategies and actions that contribute to their success. These findings reveal the need to promote a culture of altruism in organizations based on individual values such as interpersonal caring and mutual concern, while reducing the egocentrism and excessive interpersonal competitiveness that currently predominates in organizational life.

Second, this study sheds light on the consequences of compassion in organizational settings by confirming that a climate of altruism proliferates when compassion is widely shared among organizational members. However, although this study has focused on showing the consequences of altruism in organizations to find positive effects, altruistic behaviors can also be detrimental to the individuals who act in this way. Being altruistic means that employees could perform functions that go beyond their own duties. This may also have negative implications if, for example, employees suffer from role overload or job stress, since altruism may lead to behaviors such as taking on additional responsibilities or working extra hours (Bolino *et al.*, 2013). It could therefore be problematic if one employee or team displays excessive altruistic behavior. In consequence, companies should be aware of this risk and manage extreme levels of altruistic behaviors that might have harmful effects. Moreover, excessive presence of altruistic behaviors to maintain organizational functioning may be symptomatic of poor management in the company. Nonetheless, as this study finds, in general the presence of compassionate and altruistic behaviors can be considered an intangible asset for organizations.

Among the practical implications, compassion can be nurtured through teamwork where members have more contact and communication with each other and can easily notice and respond to other people's suffering. In addition, human resource practices can also contribute to the development of compassion and altruism in organizations. Recently, Chiva *et al.* (2014) proposed a new HRM system – the common welfare HRM system – where HRM practices focus on concern for the welfare of others and transcendence of ego through service to others. For example, in the recruitment and selection process, people are sought who are altruistic and able to act with compassion. Likewise, the “compassionate leadership” variant shows the existence of a positive relationship between this style of leadership, understood as one that creates honest relationships with employees, and improved business results (Grant, 2008; Engstrom and Cedar, 2011). For example, authors such as Hakanen and Pessi (2018) and Poorkavoos (2016) suggest that compassionate leadership is one of the drivers of positive employee and organizational outcomes. It is a leadership style that fosters well-being, participation, mutual support, communications, engagement and job performance.

Concerning policymakers, we consider that they should promote the importance of compassion and altruism in organizations, explaining that is not only good for people in organizations but also for organizations themselves. This could be done, for instance, by publishing rankings of organizations that perform well and are compassionate and altruistic. Furthermore, policymakers should remind managers and company owners that organizational resilience is a matter of the climate they set up in the organization. Conferences and round-table discussions could be fostered.

6.1 Limitations and future directions of research

The organizations included in the study sample are from various sectors and of varying sizes. Future research could therefore usefully focus on a single sector or firms of a similar size. Another limitation is the transversality of the sample. The cross-sectional nature of our study does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about causality in the observed associations. Long-term longitudinal studies are therefore needed to provide stronger evidence on the cause and the consequence of the relationships examined.

As we noted earlier in the article, few studies have examined the role of altruism and compassion in organizations. Accordingly, there is a need to continue exploring ways of creating an altruistic environment in organizations. Moreover, in light of the benefits of altruism in organizations, future research should continue to analyze the consequences of compassionate attitudes and ways of promoting altruistic behaviors in organizations. For example, it would be interesting to examine the role of altruistic and compassionate

leadership in organizations, examine relationships between altruism and other variables (e.g. burnout, welfare, type of organizations, etc.). Another underexplored area of empirical research concerns the antecedents and consequences of organizational resilience, since only in the last few years have organizational researchers begun to investigate this firm capability. Therefore, further research is necessary in the field of altruism, compassion and resilience in organizations. We hope our study contributes to shed light on these organizational phenomena and provides a basis and inspiration for more research in these promising organizational research fields.

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(The Appendix follows overleaf)

Appendix Research questionnaire

Please, answer the following questions about your organization, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

Organizational resilience: Lengnick-Hall *et al.*'s (2011)

Our company is always learning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our company prospers despite the challenges faced	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our company develops new capabilities and engage in transformative actions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please, rate your firm's performance over last 2 years compared to your competing firms, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very low	Low	Somewhat low	Neither high nor low	Somewhat high	High	Very high

Firm performance: Tippins and sohi (2003)

Customer retention	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sales growth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Profitability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Return on investment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please, keep on answering about the people who work in your company, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

Altruism: Podsakoff's *et al.*'s (1990)

People in this company help others who have heavy workloads	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People in this company help orient new people even though it is not required	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People in this company willingly help others who have work related problems	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People in this company are always ready to lend a helping hand to those around them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Compassion: Petchsawang and Duchon (2009)

People in this company can easily put themselves in their coworkers' shoes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People in this company are aware of and sympathize with their coworkers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People in this company try to help their coworkers relieve their suffering	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People in this company are aware of their coworkers' needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

About the authors

Zina Barghouti is Research Fellow in the Department of Business Administration at University Jaume I of Castellon, Spain. Her doctoral thesis deals with compassion, organizational resilience, and altruism in organizations. She has published her research at international journals such *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* and *UCJC Business and Society Review*. Zina Barghouti is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: barghout@uji.es

Jacob Guinot is Associate Professor of Management and Organizations in the Department of Business Administration at University Jaume I of Castellon, Spain. His research is focused on organizational trust, organizational learning and altruism in organizations. He has published his research at international journals such as *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Personnel Review*, *Journal of Management & Organization* or *Human Resource Development Review*.

Ricardo Chiva is Full Professor of Management and Organizations at Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain. He has published his research at journals such as *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Management Learning*, or *Journal of Product Innovation Management*. His current research interests are organizational learning and human resource management and development, drawing on interdisciplinary theories and methods.

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