

## Haptonomy and resilience:

### *A literature overview*

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#### Abstract

This article aims primarily at understanding the role of the human body and embodied experiences in organizations, particularly from a haptonomic perspective. Secondary, the aim is to generate new insights into organizational relations that might positively influence resilience and put these insights into practice. To that end, this paper reports our search, selection, and discussion of the recent academic literature on resilience and haptonomy. Today, the notion of resilience is wide-spread in a range of academic disciplines, among which psychology, humanities and organizational sciences. Predominantly seen as a personal capacity or trait, resilience can also be understood from a relational perspective, i.e. as the result of cultural, social or ecological processes. This relational perspective is also at the very foundations of haptonomy. Therefore, this article investigates to what extent and how the relational and affective perspective of haptonomy may positively influence the way people in organizations deal with adverse circumstances.

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**Key words:** Haptonomy, touch, affectivity, resilience, organizations.

#### Introduction

One out of seven employees in the Netherlands suffer from mental exhaustion and sixty percent of all employees report stress related problems (CBS, 2015). Technological innovations, globalization, and individualization, among others, have made our professional world highly unpredictable. To date, almost a million employees in the Netherlands suffer from mental pressure and exhaustion, most of them not even thirty years old. Sixty percent of the employees in the Netherlands report stress related problems. Health complaints are both mental and physical (CBS, 2015). Over the last few decades, our world has changed dramatically. Technology, globalization and individualization have caused a huge impact on the lives of all human beings. Since the introduction of the internet in the early 90s of the last century, old boundaries have blurred and people all over the world are now virtually connected, in business and society. Many people can afford traveling and working around the globe; others are – unfortunately – forced to do so for economic, safety or other reasons. Communities that offered us safety and a sense of home are vanishing and, as a result, people are searching for something new to fall back on. In search for a reaction on this pressure, the notion of resilience is often

heard. Resilience has permeated through all academic disciplines and, as a result, it did raise many definitions.

In this article, we explore the notion of resilience, as introduced by Holling (1973), in order to find connections between resilience and haptonomy. Inspired by this metaphor, the academic world embraced the idea of the metal spring, that bounces back after being bent or pushed. The notion has also permeated humanities and sociology. As we have discovered, the definitions from the natural sciences cannot directly be translated to the world of people and organizations. Across disciplines, it remains open to debate whether resilience is an individual trait, a capacity, a process, or a blend of the three (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Unpredictability, insecurity and fear are not merely understood, but - above all else - deeply felt by employees.

Therefore, research on the supposed connection between resilience and what and how we feel is quite topical. Not only individuals, but also organizations, countries and communities are subject to a diverse and ever-changing environment (Chaskin, 2008; Bhamra & Burnard, 2011; Ates & Bititci, 2011; Buliga, Scheiner, & Voigt, 2016). Due to technological innovations and

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artificial intelligence, numerous jobs have disappeared in the western world, causing insecurity among employees. Other jobs were moved to emerging economies. The ‘new’ employee, the knowledge worker, has digital access to all the knowledge he or she needs. Yet, ‘the rapid absorption of knowledge, especially social knowledge, means that organizational and other forms of social change become increasingly unpredictable’ (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013, p. 45). The impact of this unpredictability is high.

The *incorporation*, which means ‘formed or added into a body’, brings us to the role of embodied experience. Incorporation is not (only) something we know, but something we feel or experience. Rationalizing the abovementioned concepts, we are interested how our world is bodily experienced and how that affects our sense of being resilient. In this particular situation it’s worthwhile to examine haptonomy as a way to explore those inner feelings. Haptonomy is still a relatively young field of study, mainly known in the Netherlands and in France and, moreover, still lacking a solid scientific basis, yet.

This and other articles aim to understand the role of the human body and embodied experiences in organizations, based on haptonomy in particular, in order to generate new insights into organizational relations that might positively influence resilience and put these insights into practice. Since we have presumed that embodiment is still under-exposed in relation to organizational resilience, it is interesting to study if and to what extent, haptonomy can contribute to fostering and enhancing resilience in the workplace.

This leads us to the main question in this literature survey: how can haptonomy contribute to the understanding of resiliency and the fostering of social relationships within organizations?

## Methods

### Search on resilience

Databases Scopus, Google Scholar and PiCarta were inventoried for relevant articles and books. Due to its scientific relevance, especially in the field of organizations, the search was basically limited to English and Dutch peer-reviewed literature. The search process started with the search term: ‘resilience’. This produced roughly about 1,570,000 hits. The amount of hits has increased exponentially over the last ten years, so the first part of the search was mainly limited to this recent time-frame. The following search combinations were used: *resilience + overview*; *resilience + literature review*; *resilience + meta-analysis*.

The selection started with overview of articles, by which we reduced the number of hits to about 65,000. Afterwards, we selected on (1) *Corporeality, embodiment, body*; (2) *Organization, change, management* and (3) *Recent articles (from 2010)*. Abstracts of the articles in the final selection (n=63) were carefully read. Subsequently, we excluded the natural-ecological articles, articles on therapy (in general), on youth- and education and, finally, on healthy aging. It reduced the number of articles further to n=23.

Further, the snowball method was used to analyze the references of relevant articles and books for more literature. Finally, we searched for the most cited authors. The definitive list on ‘resilience’ now consists of n=34 articles. Relevant articles and book sections were thoroughly read. Finally, we got to a classification system, where we made the (often used) distinction between resilience as an individual competence from a psychological perspective and as a social competence from a socio-ecological perspective. Furthermore, we collected material on ‘applications of resilience’ in practice, some of which mentioning the role of feelings and/or emotions.

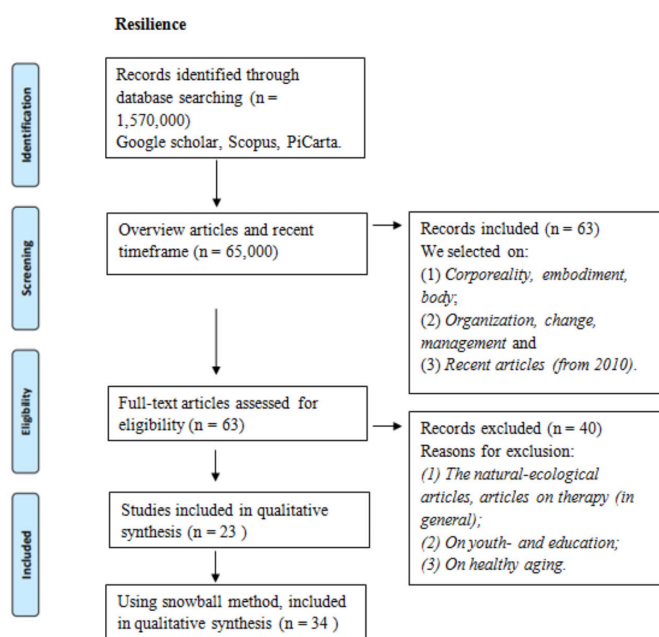


Figure 1. Selection literature on resilience

### Search on haptonomy

Quite different was the search for haptonomy. The research for resilience plus haptonomy did not give any results. To date, there is a small amount of scholarly research available on the subject. The search resulted in (Google scholar: 128, Scopus: 7, PiCarta: 21) 159 hits. The outcome of the (Dutch) term Haptonomie (Google scholar: 226, Scopus: 4, PiCarta: 100) delivered 330 hits.

Literature on haptonomy was also found at the library of the Academy of Haptonomy in Doorn (the Netherlands). Subsequently, we made a shortlist by narrowing the search by excluding prenatal and pregnancy care, geriatric haptotherapy and other therapeutic care. After using the criteria, only five articles were left. For haptonomy, we also used the snowball method. From there on we distinguished Dijkhuis, Pollmann, Troost, Buytendijk, Plooi, Gerritse, Van Luttervelt and Boot as practitioners and (non-scholarly) experts on the field. The definitive list on 'haptonomy' now consists 13 items.

Another 14 articles were selected on methodology, philosophy and phenomenology.

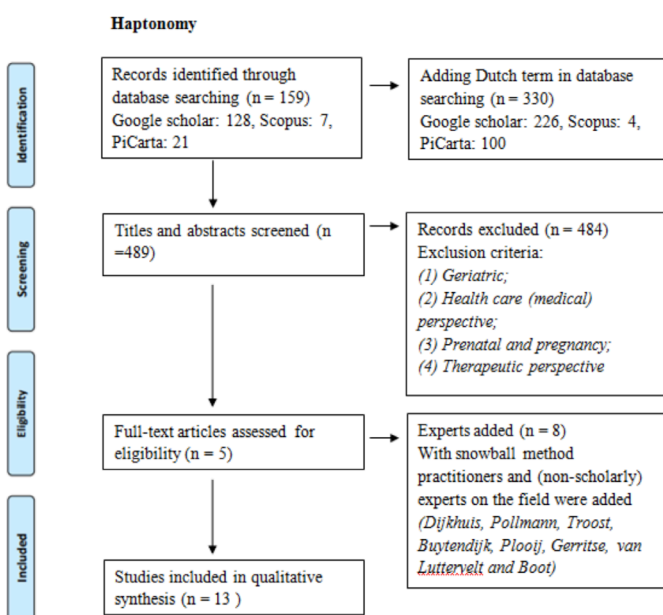


Figure 2. Selection literature on haptonomy

## Results

### *Different paradigms*

In this article, we observe different philosophical perspectives that are used in literature on organizations, resilience and health management. Before we analyze our search into the relation between organizations, resilience and haptonomy, we explored the different perspectives on how we look at and experience the relationships with people around us. Simply, because it affects the way we look at the world as it shows itself to us. In other words, we must carefully reflect on our professional perspective: to rigidly choose only one of the perspectives reduces the other, and narrows our minds. The intention, the approach, the gesture initiates a pre-linguistic sense. We must emphasize here that making the distinction between the perspectives is not a matter of good or false, it is the

reduction to one of the two that prevents us from seeing the whole picture.

Positivistic epistemology assumes that the truth about phenomena can be discovered by application of a scientific method, testing a hypothesis by gathering and analyzing data. Interpretivist epistemology states that knowledge can only be created and understood from within the contexts that give meaning to experience. From here, we enter the world of the hermeneutics, who believe that language constitutes reality. There is, postmodernists say, no independent reality against which knowledge can be tested, as modernists believe. They reject that words represent independent things. Instead they believe that *language* constitutes reality: (only) what is spoken is real. This notion is known as the 'linguistic turn'. As German philosopher Heidegger put it: 'in the saying it comes to pass that the world is made to appear' (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013, p. 14; Heidegger, 1998, p. 35). From this point of view, the researcher is no longer a mere observer, who is disconnected from the object he is studying. The researcher is an actor who not only watches the play but who also plays a part in it. The researcher plays an active role in finding the truth. It demands 'self-reflexivity, using methods of understanding and discovery on yourself as on the world around you in order to reveal what it is that you are assuming when you use or produce knowledge' (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013, p. 46). These different philosophical perspectives have implications for the way we look at resilience and haptonomy.

### *Resilience*

Resilience originates from the Latin 're-salire', which literally means 'to spring back to the original, steady state'. In natural sciences, resilience refers to the capacity of a material or an ecosystem to recover from pressure or disturbance, and return to its previous state, unchanged. A natural environment that sustains a natural or an industrial disaster and recovers also demonstrates resilience (Carpenter, Walker, Anderies & Abel, 2001; Ungar, 2012). As mentioned before, the first one on the long list of scientists was the Canadian social-ecologist Holling (1973) who introduced the notion of resilience in relation to social ecologies. In his article, Holling outlines how altering views of behavior within ecological systems can create different approaches to the management of resources (Holling, 1973; Davoudi, 2012; Bhamra & Burnard, 2011). Holling made the connection with natural sciences and engineering, and defined resilience as the measure of the persistence of systems and of the ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationship

between state variables (Holling, 1973; Holling, 1996).

Holling introduced the notion of resilience in the social realm, particularly in relation to social ecologies. Holling borrowed the metaphor from the natural sciences: a metal spring bounces back to its original steady state after being bent or pushed. He defined resilience as 'the measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables' (1973, p.14). 'Across disciplines, it remains open to debate whether resilience is an individual trait, a capacity or a process or a blend of the three' (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016, responding to Holling 1996).

#### *Metaphor of resilience wide-spread in academic disciplines*

Subsequently, the concept of resilience emerged in various world views and scientific traditions, such as ecology (Walker, Holling, Carpenter & Kinzig, 2004; Berkley & Gunderson, 2015), psychology (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000), social-ecology (Walker et al., 2002; Carpenter, Walker, Anderies & Abel, 2001), disaster management (Bruneau et al., 2003; Paton, Smith, & Violanti, 2000) and organizational behavior (Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Horne & Orr, 1998; McDonald, 2006). These documents have in common that – inspired by the metaphor – authors tried to apply the notion of the spring-bouncing-back to their own discipline (Bhamra & Burnard, 2011). The amount of literature on resilience is vast and still growing. Despite the wide-spread adoption of the concept of resilience in the academic world, also points of critique are heard. Resilience is sometimes seen as a 'buzzword'. There is critique around the definition, its malleability, its wide use across many disciplines, the complexity of its use as a framework and the purpose of resilience, i.e. 'resilience to what end?' (Davoudi, 2012). Organizations also deal with adversity, and resilience is regularly found in organization theory. Shin, Taylor and Seo (2012) found that little is known about the resources that enable employees to rise above the difficulties and stress accompanying organizational change. They encourage future researchers to find other resources that have the potential to enhance employees' commitment to, and behavioral support for, organizational change.

#### *Felt sense*

Recently, also feelings and emotions have appeared in academic literature on resilience. As mentioned above, the rapidly changing world of employees leads to insecurity, uncertainty and fear. Common sense says these emotions are first experienced on a physical level and rationalized

afterwards. The significance of feelings and emotions in organizations are described in various academic fields. Gendlin (2012), for instance, conducted research demonstrating that a client's ability to realize lasting positive change in psychotherapy depended on his innate ability to access a non-verbal, bodily feeling of the issues that brought them into therapy. He called this intuitive body-feel the *'felt sense'*. Allan, Eatough and Ungar (2015) describe that 'researchers were surprised how much personal work was involved and how much it had to do with something 'in' them. Some participants identified it as a 'part' or a 'piece' inside them while others discussed a feeling or also described a 'felt sense'.' (p. 863). Finlay (2005) notes that we 'mostly live our body-world interconnections pre-reflectively, without thought, with the body having its own wisdom and memory' (p. 272). A study in 2014, by Rajan-Rankin, adopts a phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experience of managing emotion and developing resilience. '*Embodiment* is a valuable lens by which emotional conflicts are experienced, deconstructed and resolved (...). Students showed appreciation that acceptance of one's own emotions are an integral part of their own selfhood and essential to develop a resilient and professional persona.' (p. 2426). In fact, beyond acceptance, emotions are deeply felt and lived through.

#### *Critical voices on resilience*

Lately, also critical voices on the notion of resilience are heard. Using a metaphor may inspire and limit us at the same time. In his book 'Images of Organization' (1997) Morgan writes: 'Any given metaphor can be incredibly persuasive, but it can also be blinding and block our ability to gain an overall view. (...) We can get seduced by the idea that management must engineer and operate an efficient organizational machine, only to find our designs undermined by a changing environment or by human beings that have to bring the machine to life. Or, in becoming converts to the idea of developing 'learning organizations' that can evolve in a brain-like way, we can easily overlook the political realities that block effective learning' (p.348). Management theories tend to sell the positive insights of a metaphor, while ignoring the limitations and distortions it may create. He advocates to 'recognize and cope with the idea, that all theories of management and organization are based on implicit images that persuade us to see, understand and imagine situations in a partial way' (p. 349). Comparable critical notes come from Davoudi (2012), stating that 'with all translations and reframing, however, there is a danger that new ideas and concepts are taken out of their context and brought

into planning uncritically'. Even viewing resilience as a metaphor means 'positioning it in webs of cultural, social and ecological significance: webs of our own making' (p. 302). The more the notion of resilience was used in different contexts, the more ambiguous the definition(s) and understanding of it became. Although the original image is clear: a metal spring, being bent or pushed, bounces back to the pre-disturbance state. The bouncing back is a predictable, mechanical reaction on pressure from outside. From this [engineering] point of view, resilience is tangible, responsive and linear. The benefits and similarities were first seen by engineers: the focus is on 'efficiency, control, constancy and predictability' – all attributes at the core of desires for fail-safe design and optimal performance (Reid & Botterill, 2013). First comes pressure, then the bouncing back. Finally, the old equilibrium state is restored. We are finally back to where we came from, one could easily say. Translated to other disciplines, however, the comparison becomes more complex to apply.

#### *Human factor in organizations*

Lopes, Cunha, Kaiser and Müller-Seitz (2009) published on Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), articulating the importance of a humanistic management approach by both the organization and their members. 'As such, POS embraces the study of topics such as gratitude, resilience, energizing relationships (...) that involve the pursuit of human growth and self-development' (p. 279). Authors underline that throughout the twentieth century, influential philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre continued to voice their humanistic concerns. Meaning making becomes, in fact, a human need and is the very basis of humanistic theories. Pragmatic humanistic behavior is grounded in the conviction that only genuine true concerns about treating people grounded in the fundamental human values can lead to business success and development. Van Breda (2011) defines corporate resilience as the 'organization's achievement of the triple bottom line of profit, environmental sustainability and social engagement, while maintaining the well-being of the workforce' (p. 6). Positive influence on corporate resiliency is found through supportive networks, collaboratively problem-solving capabilities, appraisal and harmony (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011). Avery and Bergsteiner (2011) conclude in a comparing study that the Rhineland model (sustainable leadership) leads to better performance outcomes than the Anglo/US model (shareholder driven leadership): 'Sustainable leadership embraces aspects of humanistic management in that it includes valuing people and considering the firm as a contributor to social well-

being. These practices form a self-reinforcing leadership system that enhances the performance of a business and its prospects for survival' (p. 6).

#### *Searching for interventions to enhance resilience*

A meta-analytic research, conducted by Vanhove, Herian, Perez, Harms and Lester (2016), reveals that resilience building training programs show small overall effects and that the effects even diminish over time. Coaching on a one-to-one basis and classroom-based training did slightly better. Sullivan-Taylor and Branicki (2011) did research on resilience building programmes and conclude that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' method to creating resilience. Shin, Taylor and Seo (2012), however, found that little is known about the resources that enable employees to rise above the difficulties and stress accompanying organizational change. They encourage future researchers to find other resources that have the potential to enhance employees' commitment to, and behavioral support for, organizational change.

Could haptonomy be one of these other resources? How can haptonomy contribute to enhancing resilience and fostering social relationships within organizations?

## **Haptonomy**

Searching for different ways to foster and to enhance resilience in organizations, we will now investigate the field of haptonomy. Originated from physiotherapy, haptonomy discovered the significance of *affective touch*. It studies how we touch and how we are being touched and how that affects and goes beyond our feelings and emotions, especially our emotional self-experience (feeling oneself). It contributes to ones well-being, safety and vitality. Later, we will go deeper into the essence of haptonomy. Now, we present the origin of this particular field of study and its founder.

In the 1950s, Veldman discovered as a practitioner that his patients could testify to him the difference when they were touched as a 'broken machine' and when they were touched and treated as a living, human being. Later, research showed that the former ('machine') treatment leads to a higher tension of the muscles and the latter to a lower tension. The kind of touch also appears to affect blood pressure and body temperature (Pollmann-Wardenier, Dijkhuis & Troost, 1993; Gerritse, 2002). It shows the immediate connection between the prior intention of the toucher and the pre-reflective bodily reaction of the touched. Inspired – and scientifically supported – by the German doctors and scientists Schmitt and Glaser, as well as by the Dutch psychiatrist Terruwe and the Dutch phenomenological psychologist Buytendijk, Veldman further developed his

knowledge and skills, and composed a theory and practice, based on a human-centered attitude. Buytendijk advised Veldman to study the work of Merleau-Ponty. Veldman discovered the practical application of Merleau-Ponty's 'prolongement miraculeux du corps', our capacity to expand our body to the world, outside the borders of our physical body (Buytendijk, 1969). Based on this insight, Veldman transformed the diagnosis-based treatment into a holistic approach, called haptonomy ('hapsis' is the Greek word for tactile sense or touch and 'nomos' means rule, or ruling theory). Haptonomy is still a relatively young field of study, mainly known in the Netherlands and in France and, moreover, still lacking a solid scientific basis, yet. The findings of haptonomy have primarily been applied to health care and pregnancy care. Concerning the latter, promising scientific articles of Gert Klabbers have been published in various academic magazines (Klabbers, 2014; Klabbers, 2016; Klabbers, 2017; Klabbers, 2018).

#### *Embodied experience*

The connection with others brings us more than just information. Beyond knowing, it tells us how we *feel*. We can be really moved by the sight of a newborn baby, the smell of a beautiful flower or the kiss of our loved ones (Pollmann-Wardenier, Dijkhuis & Troost, 1993; Gerritse, 2002; Boot, 2004; Plooi, 2005; Talma, 2010). Whatever happens in the outside world touches or moves us, in one way or another, and our body functions as an interface for the experience. Actually, we *are* our body, since our body is not an isolated vehicle that we use (Merleau-Ponty, 2009). This movement, deep down inside us, provides us not only with information but also with a profound judgement, a direct sense of good or bad, safe or unsafe, happy or sad. This judgement is even pre-reflective (Finlay, 2005), by means that it comes before we even think. The American philosopher Gendlin calls it the philosophy of the implicit, the 'bodily felt sense': our body simply knows (2012). Troost (1988), one of the early adopters of haptonomy, wrote a book on his own experience with haptonomy, called 'Het lichaam liegt nooit' (*The body never lies*). Haptonomy, the science of affectivity, explores this phenomenon. 'Haptonomy is not a trick', Veldman (1988) says in his seminal work '*Haptonomie, Wetenschap van de Affectiviteit*' (Haptonomy, Science of the Affectivity), definitely not a religion or a 'soft' treatment, but a concrete social science with reproducible and verifiable evidences (Verhoeven, 2013).

#### *Philosophical and humanistic approach of organizations*

Duyndam writes in 2013, as an introduction for the Dutch Research Review Committee: 'Humanism aims at two important notions: meaning-in-life and humanization. Meaning-in-life represents more than just an insight; it also includes affective relations with the social environment and the desire and devotion to be significant and useful in society. Meaning-in-life is therefore not only the outcome of an intellectual and practical activity, but it involves *the ability to be touched* and (sometimes) the reconciliation with the inevitable. Humanizing entails promoting a humane relationship with fellow-creatures; not only one-to-one, but definitely also in society and organizations'. These words of Duyndam are important for our understanding of the subject. What do we experience when we are touching or being touched? What kind of knowledge do we gain from that? How does this 'felt' knowledge relate to the cognitive/rational knowledge we have? How reliable is the information of what we feel?

In this section, we will explore the substance of haptonomy and illustrate the connection with the ideas of Merleau-Ponty. We emphasize the importance of our body as a mean to relate to the world around us and describe how we can experience and understand the world by touching it. This is a relevant side-step, because Merleau-Ponty inspired Veldman in his theorizing his discovery (1988). It is important to keep in mind, that Veldman first did the – practical - findings we describe below, and that he afterwards deepened his understanding by studying Merleau-Ponty, among others. Merleau-Ponty emphasized the human body as the primary locus of knowing for us, actively engaging in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2009; Romdenh-Romluc, 2011). Our body, Merleau-Ponty discovers, contains a so-called 'body-scheme', that gives us the notion of our body as a whole and has a memory for the reality we face in our lives. Acquainted to the world, images of all human beings, situations and objects in our daily lives are 'embedded' in our body. This body-scheme develops and learns continuously during the years of our lives. The wholeness of our body and our body-scheme are direct means to express ourselves as directed at the world. Our body, he concludes, is pre-conditional for our connectedness to the world around us. Our own body is the 'from-which' we face the world. Merleau-Ponty argues that the relationship between the body and the world around us is 'one of embrace' (Allan, Eatough & Ungar, 2015). The human body offers more than a mere positional spaciousness: it is situational, meaning that our body actively relates to the world around us (*être-au-monde*). Merleau-Ponty says: 'To say that an object is on the table,

you have to move yourself – actually or virtually – to this object. In doing so, the object is no longer positioned in the world outside us but is incorporated in our bodily experience'. Our body is not just the executant of the goals we frame, nor just the locus of causal factors shaping our representations. Our understanding is *itself* embodied. That is, our bodily know-how, and the way we act and move, can encode components of our understanding of self and the world' (Benner, 1994, p.xiv).

We have found that haptonomy, originally rooted in physiotherapy, offers us an interesting world view. A perspective that emphasizes the strong connection between embodiment and social relationships. The relationship between doctor and patient, but also between the toucher and the touched. The application of this philosophical perspective in health and pregnancy care has proven to be promising (Klabbers, 2018). The search for an intervention in organizations.

## Conclusion and discussion

### Conclusion

We have explored the beginning and further development of haptonomy, known as '*the science of affectivity*'. In 1988, Veldman published his Opus Magnum: Haptonomy, Science of the Affectivity (*Haptonomie, Wetenschap van de Affectiviteit*). Veldman discovered in the 1950s, while treating his patients, that these patients could actually testify that it made a big difference to them when they were treated as human beings and not as the traditional patients or 'human machines with a defect', that could be fixed. The treatment is inviting, vitalizing and consequently activating the patient to actively participate in his own treatment. The felt effects of this treatment are more sustainable and, since he has an own responsibility, better accepted by the patient. Nevertheless, the debate on the evidence-basedness of haptonomy is still going on. Only recently, scientific evidence has been published on the positive effect of haptonomy on the health and well-being of patients (Klabbers, 2018).

Exploring the field of resilience, we discovered a large variety of definitions and world views. Originally, the traditional, positivistic perspective on resilience dominated. Resilience was seen as an individual capacity or trait, that could be trained or developed. Like traditional doctors, who (once) treated their patients as 'people with problems that could be fixed', interventions were unilateral. Over the years, slowly another perspective on resilience entered the academic field. Resilience could also be seen as the outcome of a process in which both patient and doctor played an important role. Their relationship, the connection between

the toucher and the touched, predicted the level of resiliency.

Haptonomy, being a holistic philosophy and – at the same time - having a practical application in health and pregnancy care, might be helpful in finding ways to contribute to enhancing resilience and fostering social relationships in organizations. We call for further research to deepen our understanding of the role of the human body and how haptonomy can foster and enhance resilience of people in organizations. An interesting adventure, since resilience and haptonomy need to be understood, experienced and accepted.

### Discussion

As we have discussed in the phenomenological debate, we actively relate to the world around us. Merleau-Ponty (2009) tells us that we are 'in-the-world' and 'to-the-world' (both implied in the French *être-au-monde*), referring to intentionality in a bodily sense. A rapidly growing number of scholars, studying resilience, concentrate on the social ecology that generates resilience. Like natural ecologies – a wood, a lake, an island, even the world-as-a-whole – are able to recover from an internal or external crisis (fire, pandemonia, earthquakes, meteorite), social ecologies can also recover from critical adversity and show resilience. Domestic problems, bullying in the classroom, a department in an organization facing a crisis, elderly people feeling isolated, they are all examples of social ecologies that can show resilience.

The shift in discourse is evident in studies, already conducted. If, however, the science of resilience is to advance credibly, the focus of our attention needs to be more often on ecological conditions that contribute to good growth under adversity (Ungar, 2011).

From the positivistic perspective, resilience can be understood as a personal trait or capacity that can be trained or developed. People, having faced adverse circumstances (like an illness, the death of a loved one, a divorce or poverty), after some time take up their lives and go forward (never back). Early research investigators concentrated on individual traits that influenced the level of resiliency (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, 2001). Psychologists, in particular, searched for rare and special qualities that could predict a (higher) level of resilience. Coutu (2002), for instance, describes in Harvard Business Review three defining characteristics of resilient people: they have the ability to (1) accept reality as it shows; are able to (2) give meaning to the adverse conditions and (3) can improvise with whatever is at hand.

From the interpretivist perspective, resilience is the outcome of a social relationship. A striking example of

the potential undesirability of the 'normal' is the 2005 hurricane Katrina. It not only destroyed the physical fabric in New Orleans, but also revealed social processes which many people did not consider to be the acceptable, as the pre-disaster normal to which they wanted to return. Australian research suggests that nurses can actively participate in the development and strengthening of their own personal resilience to reduce their vulnerability by building positive relationships, maintaining positive, by developing emotional insight, achieving life balance and spirituality and becoming more reflective (Jackson, Firtko & Edenborough, 2007).

Slowly, the focus on the individual capacities shifts towards a more socio-ecological, contextual approach. Resilience is regarded as multifaceted. Across disciplines, it remains open to debate whether resilience is an individual trait, a capacity or a process or a blend of the three (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Kossek & Perrigino, 2016; Friborg, Barlaug, Martinussen, Rosenvinge & Hjemdal, 2005). Opposite to the natural resilience, evolutionary resilience challenges the whole idea of equilibrium and advocates that the very nature of systems may change over time, with or even without an external disturbance (Davoudi, 2012). Shaw (2012), in reaction on this vision of Davoudi, states that 'two particular resilience discourses can be distinguished. First is the 'survival' discourse that arises from the term's roots in ecological systems and disaster management. The main focus is 'to recover, bounce-back and persist after a crisis'. An alternative discourse is one that 'involves attending to possibilities for life, not just survival'. 'The message (...) is to see resilience in terms of bouncing *forward*, reacting to crises by changing to a new state that is more sustainable in the current environment.' Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) advocate firmly that resilience is a process or phenomenon, and definitely not a personal characteristic of an individual. They even suggest that the term 'resiliency' should be avoided, because this term carries the connotation of a personality characteristic more than does the term 'resilience'. Shaw (2012) warns that 'resilience with a neoliberal focus on self-reliant individuals presumes the developing of their own resilience' (p. 311). Masten (2001) articulates resilience as '*ordinary magic*': 'resilience appears to be a common phenomenon, that results in most cases from the operation of basic human adaptation systems. If those systems are protected and in good working order, development is robust, even in the face of severe adversity' (p. 227).

An interesting debate has started on the question whether people (like metal springs) would 'bounce back' after having faced adverse circumstances. More deeply, scholars

are engaged in a serious debate on the 'applicability of resilience'. The distinction between the positivistic and the phenomenological paradigm was made. Most psychologists, for instance, regard resilience as an individual trait or a capacity. Looking at resilience from this (cartesian) point of view, people can be trained or treated to 'make' them more resilient. It presumes that resilience is malleable and can be isolated from the environment. Socio-ecologists, on the contrary, consider resilience as a social process and have faith in the socio-ecology of people facing adversity. This change in perspective also changes the way to deal with adverse circumstances. A group of people that share a mutual interest becomes a socio-ecology if and when the group reacts resilient in adverse situations.

Resiliency and haptonomy are closely connected. Of course, people facing adverse situations never bounce back like a metal spring, but 'bounce forward', one might say. The old equilibrium, whether it has actually existed or not, never returns. In fact, a new situation arises from the adverse circumstances. Sometimes even stronger. From this point of view, a person can never be resilient on his own. This is where haptonomy and its philosophical background come in. Resiliency is the result of the interaction between a human being and his environment. Haptonomy as an approach that emphasizes the (social) relationship between the toucher and the touched. An approach that offers practical help by affectively touching people and thus restoring the relationship between the touched and his or her environment.

In the empirical part of our research – still to be conducted – we will further investigate into our hypothesis on the relationship between haptonomy and resilience [or: corporate/organizational resilience]: to what extent and how can haptonomic interventions in an organizational context enhance the resilience of individual employees as well as of the organization as a whole?

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