

Chapter 11

Institutional Resilience in the Business Environment: An Insight into the Romanian Retail and Communications Markets

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the well-functioning of the public and private sectors and, consequently, on the institutions, the delivery of public services to citizens, and the business environment. The national authorities were forced to implement rapid measures to respond to the problems faced by the health and education systems, the business environment, and public services. In face of this major shock and its negative outcomes, the private and public institutions tried to develop and strengthen their resilience at a rapid pace.

The situations caused by the pandemic showed the need for both types of organizations to implement changes, be more flexible, and develop their adaptative and transforming capacities, respectively, their resilience. In this context, the present chapter analyses the activity and the measures taken by two main companies on the Romanian market- Kaufland and Vodafone Romania, in the 2020-2021 period. The purpose is to observe how the business environment reacted to the pandemic's outcomes, how they managed to overcome them, and the adaptative capacity of these companies.

The research methodology consists of an exploratory study conducted using the case study method. The case study presents the main decisions and measures taken and implemented from the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) until 2021 (in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic) by two important companies from the Romanian market, in order to draw pertinent conclusions about how two important branches in the business environment- retail and communications- were affected and how fast and adequately these companies managed to respond to the COVID-19

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challenges. The main purpose is to establish whether these companies were prepared for the shock and proved to be resilient. The reason for choosing to study Kaufland and Vodafone is due to their important position on the Romanian market and their active role played in Romanian society before and during the pandemic.

The present chapter is structured in the following manner: the first section covers a brief presentation of the COVID-19 pandemic evolution in Romania in the 2020 - 2021 period; the second section comprises the main aspects regarding resilience in general and institutional resilience in particular; the last section presents the two approached case studies, ending with a set of relevant questions.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, resilience, business environment, retail market, communications market, CSR

The evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic in Romania in the 2020-2021 period. A brief insight

The coronavirus pandemic was a shock for all countries and their economies. The public administration and also the private sector played a dual role in managing the pandemic's effects: (1) they tried to surpass the negative outcomes and also prevent other unforeseeable effects that could be generated by this shock, while (2) attempting to develop their resilience. Since 2004, Romania has adopted a legislative framework regarding risk situations, such as the coronavirus pandemic, through Regulation framework no. 1491 from 9th September 2004, regarding the organizational structures, responsibilities, and functioning of the operational committees and centres for emergency situations and the Government Decision no. 557/2016 for the management of risks.

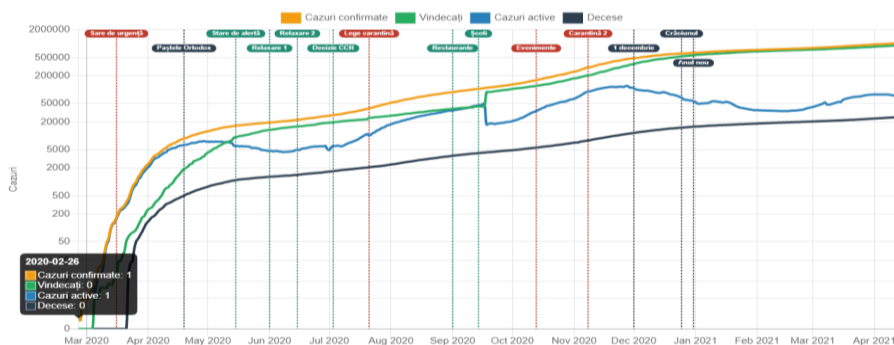
In this context, the counties' Inspectorates for Emergency Situations designed the plans for risk management in collaboration with other institutions with responsibilities in this domain. Even if a general legislative framework was adopted, the coronavirus pandemic, similar to other types of shocks, generated different unexpected situations which needed well-prepared authorities able to implement rapid measures in response to the shock and also generate support for the business environment that the economy relies on.

In Romania, the first case of coronavirus was recorded on 26 February 2020, in Gorj County, situated in the South-West region. The first patient was in direct contact with an Italian national who visited Romania. Firstly, most of the people who tested positive for coronavirus came from countries such as Spain, Italy, or other countries with a high number of infections, or had contact with persons who travelled abroad. Official data (Statista, 2021) show that up to July 2021, 1,081,120 cases of coronavirus were registered. Of the total number of cases, 1,045,351 persons were cured and 34,168 people were deceased.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the virus spread relatively slowly. The highest daily increase was in during the autumn, on November 18 when 10,269 new cases

were registered. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, in the first wave of infections, Romania had a testing capacity of 2000 people per day, which increased to 20,000 tests per day, in the second wave. The cities that registered the highest number of coronavirus cases were Bucharest, Cluj, Iași, Brașov, and Timișoara (Statista, 2021; Geospatial, 2021).

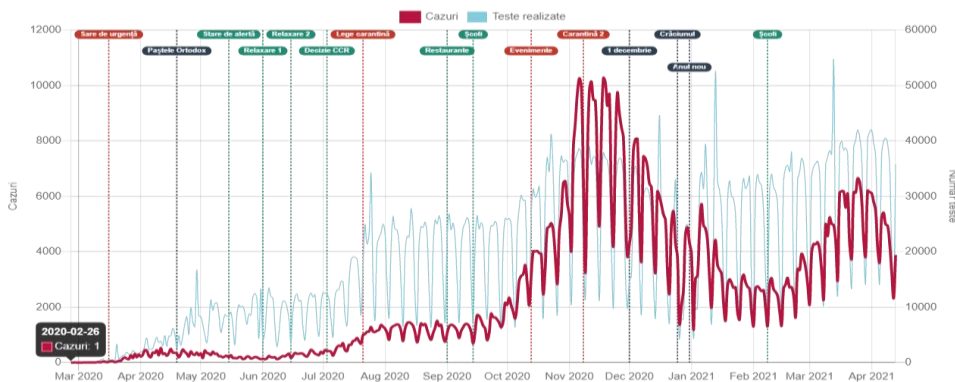
Figure 11.1 The evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to April 2021



Source: COVID-19 geo-spatial, 2021

As can be observed, the number of cases at the national level (highlighted in orange) followed an upward trend from March 2020 until the middle of 2021 while the number of active cases (highlighted in blue) varied. From the beginning of 2021, the number of active cases was lower than in the previous months, with an increasing tendency in March and April, while in January and February registered a downward trend.

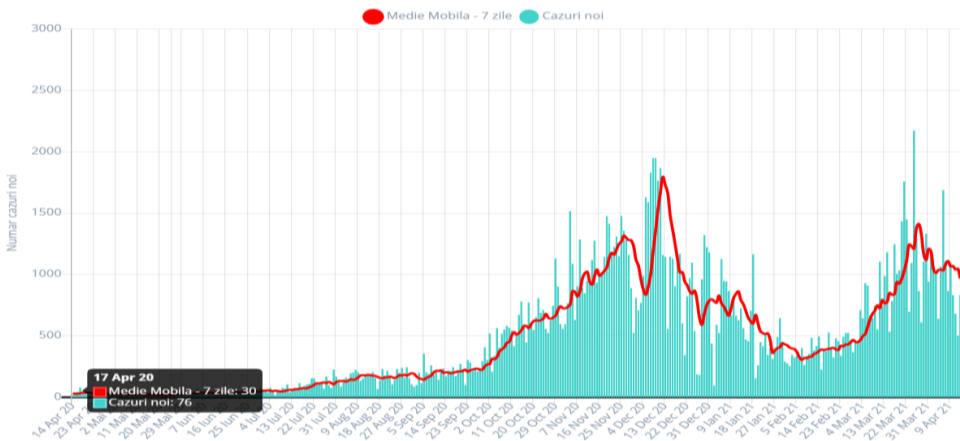
Figure 11.2. COVID-19 distribution of cases per day from March 2020 to April 2021



Source: COVID-19 geo-spatial, 2021

Regarding the daily cases registered at national level (highlighted in red), the number varied pretty much from month to month, the most significant increase being registered in November and December, followed by a downturn trend in February and the beginning of March 2021.

Figure 11.3 COVID-19 distribution of cases per day in Bucharest from March 2020 to April 2021



Source: COVID-19 geo-spatial, 2021

From the beginning of the pandemic, 9.38% of the population of Bucharest got infected with the coronavirus. The number of new cases maintained an upward trend throughout the whole year. The number of cases started to increase considerably from October 2020, reaching its peak point in December 2020. Then, in the first month of 2021, the number of new cases seemed to be on a decreasing trend. At the beginning of March 2021, the situation got worse and by the end of March, the number of new cases increased considerably. From the beginning of the pandemic, 171.838 people suffered from coronavirus, and Bucharest was situated on the 1-st place in the country due to its high disease rate.

Literature review regarding the concept of resilience

From a general point of view, resilience can be understood as the capacity of any type of system to cope with shocks and stressors arising from the external environment, by trying to preserve its main characteristics and functions (Cai et al., 2012; Wojtowicz, 2020). At the same time, the system will try to use all the existing resources in order to continue to develop. Resilience can also be considered as the capacity of a system to adapt and return to the initial state of equilibrium in which it was before the occurrence of the shock (Klein et al., 2003). From other authors' points of view, resilience is about absorbing the shock, adapting to new

circumstances, transforming, implementing necessary changes, and evolving to another state of equilibrium (Holling, 1973).

As was mentioned before, the main definitions of this concept presume that in face of disruptions, a system can behave in two manners- either to bounce back or to bounce forward. This definition is suited also when approaching institutional resilience, which can be understood as an institution's capacity to bounce back to its initial state of equilibrium where it was before the crisis (Horne, 1997; Horne & Orr, 1998; Mallak, 1998; Robb, 2000; Rudolph & Repenning, 2002; Balu, 2001; Dutton et al., 2002; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003; Gittell et al., 2006) or to bounce forward and try to become even more successful than it was before (Weick, 1988; Layne, 2001; Guidimann, 2002; Coutu, 2002; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2003; Freeman et al., 2004; Jamrog et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2018).

Institutions play a key role in achieving an equilibrium between the stability and the flexibility that characterize the governance systems, by providing stability and predictability to social interactions (Garrick & De Stefano, 2016; Milman et al., 2013; Koontz et al., 2015; Nyborg et al., 2016; Beunen et al., 2017). Institutions are important for society's well-development; consequently, they need to adapt to the changing environment in which they exist. They should prove to be resilient, and, as a consequence, the concept of institutional resilience appeared. Studying institutional resilience is important because concepts such as policy-making or governance are closely related to the changing environmental, social, and political contexts.

The studies in the field revealed that institutional resilience was addressed from two perspectives. On the one hand, some authors (Horne, 1997; Horne & Orr, 1998; Mallak, 1998; Robb, 2000; Balu, 2001; Dutton et al., 2002; Rudolph & Repenning, 2002; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003; Gittell et al., 2006) considered that institutional resilience is the ability of an organization to return to its initial situation before experiencing an unexpected shock or situation. On the other hand, other authors (Weick, 1988; Layne, 2001; Coutu, 2002; Guidimann, 2002; Jamrog et al., 2006; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2003, 2005; Zhang et al., 2018) conceptualized institutional resilience as the capacity of an organization to recover from a shock or a problematic situation- stressor and to evolve by acquiring new characteristics and developing new opportunities. From this point of view, building resilience requires a process of developing appropriate strategies and responses to several types of risks and stressors that may arise throughout the existence of an institution.

Institutional resilience can also be understood as the ability to manage crises, maintain the position the organization had before the shock, and exploit adverse situations in a positive way (Kantur & Iseri-Say, 2015). The authors also stated that in order to develop resilience, an organization must have well-established competencies, procedures, practices, processes, and standards to progress and integrate the concepts of adaptation and flexibility into its culture (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Some authors have also proposed several factors with impact on developing and strengthening organizations' resilience. These factors would be the

development of leadership, the ability to understand the characteristics of the environment in which the organization exists, and the ability to manage risks and adapt to rapid changes caused by shocks or human capital (Lee et al., 2013; Chaabouni et al., 2015).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the retail market. A case study on Kaufland Romania

Institutional description of Kaufland Romania

Kaufland is the largest retail company on the Romanian market having as main competitors other important retailers such as Lidl, Carrefour, and Auchan. The company entered the Romanian market in 2005 and in 2020 had around 15,000 employees working in 135 discount hypermarkets, 17 of them being located in Bucharest. According to an internal study, Kaufland's activity in Romania since its entry into the market, has generated a total of over 460 mil. Euros in direct value added, offering 12,500 full-time jobs and supporting almost 48,000 jobs in the Romanian economy through its activity and investments (Romania Insider, 2020b).

In 2018, Kaufland had an annual turnover of 2.4 mil. Euros (Romania Insider, 2020a). In 2019, the retailer obtained a turnover of 2.56 mil. Euros, 9% higher than in the previous year. In the first six months of 2020 Kaufland's sales from its own production achieved over 80 mil. Euros, with 16% more than in the same period in 2019 (Ziarul Financiar, 2021), showing that the beginning of the pandemic did not have a negative impact on the retailers' sales.

The positive trend in sales is explained by the fact that the large retail stores were never closed in Romania, limiting the negative impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on their operations. Even more, given that many shops and malls were closed at certain times during the pandemic, the large retail stores benefited from more concentration of the demand. Consequently, it seemed that the pandemic had a positive impact on the activity of the large retail stores compared to other economic activities.

Main aspects of Kaufland's activity during the COVID-19 pandemic

Analysing the retailers' activity during the pandemic, it can be observed that in the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis, Kaufland took measures to ensure the continuity of its activity under safer conditions. As early as March 2020, Kaufland Romania announced that it *installed plexiglass panels at the cashiers to protect employees and customers, marked safety distances on the floors, and provided all shopping units with disinfection stations*. The company has launched *an informative campaign on coronavirus preventive measures*. In addition, *supplier payment periods have been reduced from 30 days to 7 days to support the suppliers of the company* (Romanian Economic Monitor, 2021).

As measures meant to increase consumption, in April 2020, Kaufland confirmed *a large coverage of free home delivery services* in secondary cities that previously did not have access to such services (e.g., Buzău, Slatina, Târgu Mureș, Alba Iulia, Deva, Bacău, Baia Mare, Focșani, Râmnicu Vâlcea, and Piatra-Neamț) (Romanian Economic Monitor, 2021). Also, it started to sell cooked meals in its shop rotisseries or fresh bakery. Other important measures aiming to increase consumption in the COVID-19 context included an increase in shopping vouchers and promotions for selected products (IDevice, 2021).

Another aspect to be mentioned is that Kaufland announced that it would offer gift vouchers worth a total of 1 mil. Euros to its employees in Romania to reward the team's involvement during this COVID-19 period and motivate them (Romania Insider, 2020b).

Before the pandemic, Kaufland Romania has been involved in several CSR projects that aimed to support local NGOs. Since 2018, Kaufland has implemented a program titled “Stare de bine!” (i.e., wellness state) together with the Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society (FDSC). The program consisted in offering over 1 million Euros grants to local NGOs for projects related to cultural activities, sports, or healthy lifestyles (Foundation for the Development of the Civil Society, 2021). Kaufland Romania has been ranked as the leading company in Romania in terms of sustainability (The Azores Sustainability and CSR Services & Allies for Sustainability), being rewarded for its efforts to ensure social responsibility through 7.7 mil. Euros in total invested in CSR projects, with 2.41 mil. beneficiaries of these programs (Kaufland, 2021).

Given Kaufland’s preoccupation with corporate social responsibility and its impact on local communities, its engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic was a continuation of activities that have already been implemented. For example, in April 2020, Kaufland announced a total of 500,000 Euros in donations to NGOs fighting against the coronavirus pandemic- a program in which 14 organizations have been selected for funding (World Bank, 2021). In November 2020, a fire destroyed the intensive care unit of the Piatra-Neamț County Hospital, leading to the death of ten COVID-19 patients. Kaufland announced it would provide 250,000 Euros for the construction of a modular intensive care department for Piatra-Neamț County Hospital. This modular hospital will be an external intensive care unit. Kaufland thus joined the project of Dăruiește Viață NGO, which is involved in building the new modular hospital in Piatra-Neamț (Romania Insider, 2021).

In conclusion, Kaufland was not more prepared for the pandemic in terms of internal procedures and day-to-day activities than all other retail companies in Romania. Kaufland had a limited home delivery system. But it was very well prepared for its outreach in society and community support given its good track record of CSR activities (Kaufland, 2021).

The retailer reacted relatively promptly to the context of the pandemic and the new COVID-19 imposed restrictions. Since March 2020 it announced additional

protective measures in its stores and adapted other aspects of its operations to the context (e.g., donations, support for local suppliers, shopping vouchers) (Romania Insider, 2021).

Data on Kauflands' 2020 turnover suggests that the company managed to wither the storm financially and to continue its growth trend, albeit more modest than expected. Its business model was adapted to the new COVID-19 restrictions (e.g. cooked meals, fresh bakery, free home delivery) and revenues continued to increase (Kaufland, 2021).

In addition, Kaufland tried to exert a positive impact on society during the crisis by supporting NGOs that were fighting the pandemic and shortening the payment periods for its local suppliers. Its free home delivery, employee bonuses, and shopping voucher programs helped its internal operations and sales but were at the same time elements of support for the local communities surrounding Kaufland's stores (Kaufland, 2021).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the communications market. A case study on Vodafone Romania

Institutional description of Vodafone Romania

Vodafone is the largest operator of mobile and fixed services in Europe and the largest provider of IoT services in the world. Vodafone operates mobile and fixed networks in 21 countries and 49 partner mobile networks. As of 31 March 2021, Vodafone Group had over 300 million mobile users, over 28 million fixed broadband users, over 22 million TV customers, and over 123 million connected IoT devices (Vodafone, 2021a).

Vodafone launched in Romania in 1997 and now it has around 4,000 employees in Romania and over 50,000 in Europe. Vodafone Romania has a total of 667 stores, with 105 only in Bucharest (Vodafone, 2021), with an annual turnover of 905 mil. Euros (2019/2020) and a customer base of 11 million at the end of December 2020 (Vodafone, 2021a).

At the end of the financial year in 2019, Vodafone Romania announced a total revenue of 734 mil Euros, an increase of 16.9% compared to 2018. In the last trimester (January- March 2020), it registered a downfall of 3.6%, which reflected already the impact of the coronavirus on society (Dumitrache, 2020). In 2020, the company's revenues from services were 801 million Euros, revealing a decrease of 1,5% compared to the previous year (Vodafone, 2021b).

A report published by Vodafone showed that COVID-19 decreased sequential organic service revenue growth due to reduced revenue from roaming and visitation, project delays, and decreased automotive activity in business, as well as lower prepaid revenue in several smaller markets. The COVID-19 crisis has lowered the service revenue growth in the first quarter by 1.3%, which is represented by:

1.6 percentage points from lower roaming and visitor revenue; 0.5 percentage points from lower business revenue, predominately reflecting COVID-19 impacts including corporate project delays; 0.8 percentage points from other impacts. Overall trends in resilient trading performance showed an increase of 0.4% (3 February 2021), and they continued the commercial momentum, despite the lockdown. Also, the report showed an increase in the customer demand for high-speed internet connection, which can be understood, since most of the working activity was done online (Vodafone, 2021a).

Main aspects of Vodafone's activity during the COVID-19 pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic, Vodafone introduced a five-point plan all over Europe to counter the impact of the coronavirus. They targeted *to improve the services' quality, enlarge the network capacity, and help the governments with insights into people's movement*. That is why Vodafone Romania, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Babeş-Bolyai University, and the Romanian Association of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies (APCCR) has developed a phone line where people affected on an emotional level, medical staff, or anyone who dealt with any kind of discomfort provoked by the pandemic could call, get in touch with psychologists, and get therapy sessions free of charge (Vodafone, 2021c).

At the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020), due to the rapid spread of COVID-19, the Vodafone stores had to quickly adapt. They managed to reduce the working program to six hours in a few days and took shifts of working remotely, keeping at the same time the same quality of services. When the quarantine emerged, Vodafone stores had to shut down their physical activity, but the personnel successfully managed to continue their work from home (Vodafone, 2021a). Because all the Vodafone shops were closed during the quarantine period (March-May 2020), it is quite clear that the COVID-19 has negatively influenced the business. In light of these events, in the March-April 2020 period, the company *offered support to the customers by facilitating their communications with their families*, by giving free bonuses available for the quarantine period (Vodafone, 2021a).

The COVID-19 pandemic displayed Vodafone's capacity to respond quickly to society's crucial requirements. Because more people were working and socializing from home, data traffic increased by 50%. They had to act quickly to ensure that they could handle the demand without disrupting service. They increased network investments and transitioned 95% of Vodafone staff from office to remote work in under two weeks. These significant changes provided them with new opportunities in terms of how they serve their clients.

In addition, Vodafone can be considered a reliable partner for the digitization of various sectors in Romania during the accelerating trend laid out by the pandemic – from education, and health, to public administration. It has connected hundreds of schools at a very accelerated pace in Romania in support of the online shift in education during the pandemics and has been able to deliver hundreds of thousands

of tablets in a very short time to ensure access to digital education for as many children as possible (Vodafone, 2021c).

Vodafone Romania was also involved in CSR Projects aimed to help society. When COVID-19 started to spread aggressively, Vodafone Romania announced the collaboration with an NGO called “Asociația Voluntarilor Arad” where they donated 150,000 Euros to the Emergency Fund for the acquisition of a testing machine and of 5,000 PCR tests which were used to test people who came in Romania via the Nădlac border (Vodafone, 2021a). More than that, in November 2020, when a fire destroyed the intensive care unit of the Piatra-Neamț County Hospital (Neamț County, North-East of Romania) (Romania Insider, 2021), Vodafone has become a partner in the fight for hospital renovation and construction by joining the “Dăruiește Viață” project, where they announced a 50,000 Euros donation for there construction of the intensive care unit (Romania Insider, 2021).

Due to COVID-19, the schools operated based on the number of infections either online or on-site. At the beginning of the pandemic, for a quite long period, the process of education took place exclusively online. In Romania, there are still many areas without Internet reception. Consequently, many children did not have access to online school. Based on this scenario, Vodafone Romania has financed a program, named “Școala în valiză” (“School in a suitcase”).

The program is developed by World Vision Romania with the purpose of connecting the schools from the rural environment to digital infrastructure. Through the program, teachers are provided with laptops and students with tablets. They are also taught to use them (School in a suitcase, 2022).

Another important activity was the launch of the DreamLab application by the Vodafone Foundation to support international oncology studies, later adapted for research on the SARS-COV-2 virus. The Vodafone Group Foundation has donated 200,000 Euros to enable the DreamLab app to support research on antiviral properties and a further 200,000 Euro to support UNICEF’s work in machine learning and data science research, helping to use technological and scientific insights to protect the most vulnerable populations (Vodafone, 2021c).

In conclusion, COVID-19 involved a marked shift to digital services in education, but also healthcare, and various other public services. In a context in which restrictions prevented physical presence for various activities, digital service providers had to step up to ensure the necessary digital tools and infrastructure. Vodafone Romania adapted to the COVID-19 context from both the perspective of its business and also from the perspective of its commitment to CSR having a positive impact on society.

Questions/Tasks/Debate topics for classroom discussion

- In your opinion, did the two companies prove to be resilient in facing the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Do you believe that the companies were prepared for a shock of such magnitude?
- What other measures could be implemented to strengthen the business environment's resilience?
- Which company proved to be more resilient and why?
- Which company proved to have a better adaptative capacity and why?
- Which company seemed to be more prepared for this shock?

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