

Resilience in an unstable world

How do you build resilience in a volatile world where crises follow and reinforce one another at unseen speed? This is one of the key themes explored in our Trend Report. In this report, BDO looks ahead to 2030 together with trendwatcher Tom Palmaerts. We show how Belgian companies can shape the future with agility and confidence. Culture must empower both systems and people to withstand shocks.

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CAN WE STILL MAKE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

There is a pervasive sense of uncertainty. Consumers feel uncertain about the future. Companies are feeling it too, as reality constantly derails their five-year plans. Every day, statements by political leaders influence financial markets, supply chains and consumer confidence. Yet the broader trends have been the same for years: an ageing population, more single-parent households, social media that connects and divides at the same time, and a growing appetite for authentic and meaningful experiences.

"In today's context, deliberate risk management is more essential than ever. Too many companies only start thinking about risks once they are confronted with them. They lack a systematic approach that quantifies and prioritises risks and links them to value creation. Modern risk management combines data, scenario analysis and strategic decision-making. It's not about avoiding fear but about making informed choices and deploying your organisation's strengths with agility."

Koen Claessens, Managing Partner
Advisory BDO Belgium

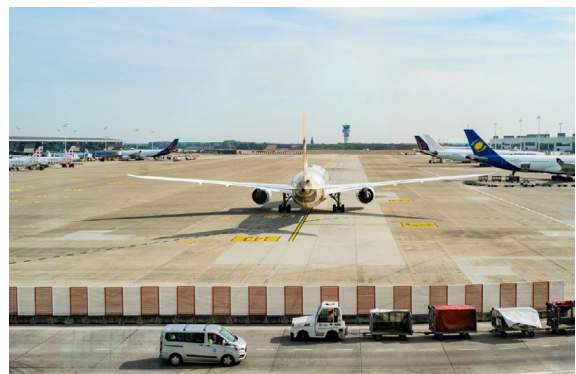
RISK MANAGEMENT UNDER PRESSURE

In the summer of 2025, Tomorrowland gave a prime example of what resilience can do for an organisation. Despite a fire that destroyed the entire main stage, the festival went ahead. The winning formula: open communication, a strong brand and a robust network. This incident shows how crucial preparation and trust are. Belgian companies will inevitably face natural disasters, cyberattacks or disinformation. It's not a matter of 'if' but 'when'.

Innovation can play a significant role in this regard. In 2025, Belgian company Citymesh tested remote-piloted drones that reach a fire scene even before the fire brigade has responded. This way, emergency services gain immediate visual insight into the circumstances, enabling faster and safer decision-making. For companies, this is the essence of resilience: elaborating alternative scenarios, diversifying supply chains, preparing employees and discussing crisis situations.



Major crises also reveal the enormous impact an organisational culture can have. A telling example occurred during the 2023 strikes at baggage handler Aviapartner, when TUI fly deployed its own staff to load and unload luggage. Flights went ahead and passengers didn't have to cancel their holiday plans. The same thing happened elsewhere in the sector: during the peak chaos at Schiphol in the summer of 2022, even Transavia pilots carried luggage to limit delays. These moments show that operational resilience is not just about systems and planning, but about a culture in which employees are willing to step up when it matters, regardless of their role or position.



MENTAL AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Uncertainty doesn't just come from outside. In Belgium, growing numbers of young people are struggling with burnout or depression. The NIHDI recorded a 60 percent increase over the last five years. More than 14,000 people under the age of 34 are now on long-term sick leave. Whatever the causes, the economic reality is that companies are losing both people and capacity.



**↑ 60%
OVER 5 YEARS**
BURNOUT OR DEPRESSION

As a result, mental and social well-being is becoming a strategic priority. Trust, lifelong learning, an inclusive culture, diversity, celebrating successes: these are no longer 'soft' topics but hard conditions for continuity. A Human8 study shows that young people mainly put pressure on themselves through constant comparisons with others. Research by Axa and Trendwolves reveals that young women have significantly lower self-confidence. Gen Z is even three times more likely to feel lonely than baby boomers, making the office a key meeting place. If Gen Z'ers come into the office on Fridays and catering has been scrapped on Fridays to save costs, the impact on motivation and retention is felt instantly.

In other words, resilience requires more than planning. It demands a culture in which people and systems can absorb shocks together, and in which companies head into the future both prepared and connected.

Every crisis identifies vulnerabilities but also new opportunities. From the oil crisis that accelerated energy efficiency to the pandemic that made hybrid working possible: time and again, resilience emerges as the foundation for innovation. Companies that see resilience as a lever for renewal discover new markets, business models and talent flows faster than their competitors. Resilience is not a shield but a springboard.

"Resilience will be a defining factor for future success. Being prepared for unpredictability doesn't mean being able to anticipate every scenario but ensuring your organisation is agile enough to respond quickly and in a well-considered manner. This requires diversification, robust data, flexible processes and leadership that can deal with uncertainty and turn it into action. In the company of tomorrow, agility will be the greatest asset: the ability to adapt without losing direction."

Koen Claessens, Managing Partner
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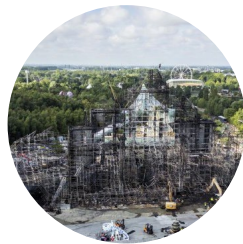
NIHDI (June 2025)

WAKE-UP CALLS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS



Five-year plans are losing their predictive value

Daily geopolitical statements and unexpected crises undermine strategies. Recommendation: work with flexible scenarios instead of rigid plans.



Disaster damage is not a hypothetical risk

After the fire, Tomorrowland could only take place thanks to a strong brand and fast communication. Every company will eventually face disasters or cyberattacks. Recommendation: develop a crisis plan that everyone knows, test it regularly and build redundancy into your supply chain.



New technology strengthens resilience

Citymesh drones show how innovation helps organisations respond faster in emergencies. Recommendation: explore how technology can help detect risks early and accelerate decision-making.



Mental well-being is an economic factor

In five years, the number of young long-term absentees has risen by 60 percent. As a result, companies are losing talent, continuity and money. Recommendation: invest in mental health, peer learning and an inclusive culture as a structural strategy, not an HR add-on.