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EXAMINING CULTURE, LEADERSHIP, AND
ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE LEVELS: TOWARDS AN
EMPIRICAL-BASED ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE
FRAMEWORK

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic, constant natural disasters, the economic crisis, and other recent global uncertainties have exacerbated the problems of numerous organizations that are currently in decline. Educational institutions, especially smaller ones that lack financial reserves to weather economic storms, are not immune to collapse. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the Philippines, several schools were fighting for survival. The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak along with other challenges underlines the importance of organizational resilience. Organizational resilience is the capacity to prepare for, anticipate, respond to, cope with, adapt to, and learn from adverse events. It is influenced by lots of factors, including culture and leadership. It is also an interplay of different dimensions, making this construct multilevel. Each level of resilience may or may not necessarily lead to resilience at one level. Therefore, this study used literature review to investigate how resilience at one level can facilitate the development of resilience at another level. Additionally, it also examined the influences of organizational culture and leadership on each organizational resilience level. The results will benefit Filipino-Chinese school administrators, HR practitioners, researchers, school employees, and other decision makers.

Keywords:

Organizational Resilience, Culture, Leadership, Educational Institution

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, relentless natural calamities, economic crisis, and other uncertainties recently occurring worldwide have intensified the struggles of many organizations presently experiencing an organizational decline. A decline arises when changes in the environment cause restrictions on the availability of internal sources crucial to organizational survival (Moran, 2016). The organizational decline may be characterized by a fall from grace, a decline in profits, dramatic organizational challenges, shrinking financial resources, customer demands, or market shares, and decreasing levels of organizational commitment or inability of its leadership to prompt the necessary changes to realize its goals or maintain its growth (Ghazzawi, 2018; McMillan & Overall, 2017). Various dysfunctional characteristics cause a decline in the organization, both internal (e.g., leadership, culture, etc.) and external (e.g., changes in the environments, vulnerability, etc.) (Ghazzawi, 2018).

Educational institutions are not unsusceptible to decline, especially the smaller ones that lack financial reserves to weather economic storms. In the Philippines, some schools were already battling for survival even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the reforms in the educational system (e.g., introduction and implementation of the K12 program) had caused declines in some schools' revenues at varying levels. Educational institutions with insufficient preparations for this transformation were thrust into severe dilemmas, and the transition process resulted in profound implications to the organization's growth and sustainability. In Filipino-Chinese schools offering Chinese curriculum, some have experienced an organizational decline, as shown in the decreasing number of enrollees. Some of these schools even closed and ceased operations. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the difficulties of the remaining and surviving schools.

The on-going COVID-19 pandemic further emphasizes the significance of resilience to organizations. Resilience can enable organizations to confront the crisis and capitalize on it to avoid negative consequences, flourish, and become progressive. However, for organizations to truly withstand the crisis, organizations need to develop resilient leaders. A leader with high levels of resilience can respond to the crisis in positive ways. By showing resilience, leaders can increase the resilience of people around them (Eliot, 2020).

The study will, through literature review, determine the associations between leadership, organizational culture, and organizational resilience.

Literature Review

The Concept of Organizational Resilience

The term 'resilience' comes from the Latin word 'resilire', which means to leap or jump back or bounce back (Ma et al., 2018). It was introduced by Holling (1973) (Ma et al., 2018; Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018), who stressed that "resilience determined the persistence of a system and was a measure of the ability of this system to absorb changes and still persist" (Ma et al., 2018, p.247). As a concept, resilience emerged to stress the need to raise any system's continuity capability against disruptions (Sahebjamnia et al., 2018).

In organization-related literature, the concept of resilience is still underdeveloped (Mousa et al., 2020). The current literature on organizational resilience is scattered but dominated by organizational learning, human resource management, business strategy, organizational theory, and strategic management (Ma et al., 2018).

The concept of ‘resilience’ is new in business and management research (Anderson et al., 2019; Duchek, 2019). It had drawn attention recently when researchers and scholars began to examine how organizations grow and develop new capabilities amidst challenging times (Ma et al., 2018). However, despite significant efforts to conceptualize ‘organizational resilience,’ research in this area remains fragmented (Conz & Magnani, 2019; Duchek, 2019; Ma et al., 2018; Mousa et al., 2020). To date, there is still little consensus on the conceptualization of organizational resilience, which is considered to still be in its infancy stage (Duchek, 2019; Ma et al., 2018). Most studies on organizational resilience focused on theory building and qualitative studies, resulting in many conceptual articles (e.g., Andersson et al., 2019; Duchek, 2019; Ma et al., 2018; Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018) while empirical studies are limited. There are also many unexplored or ignored areas (e.g., nature, dimensions, and measurement of organizational resilience) (see Ma et al., 2018).

According to Ma et al. (2018), organizational resilience was mostly defined from a systematic perspective (i.e., ability and function of the system). However, in the recent studies, organizational resilience was defined as the ‘ability, ‘capacity’ or ‘capability’ of the organization to prepare, anticipate, respond, cope, adapt, and learn from adverse events (e.g., Anderson et al., 2019; Duchek, 2019; Li, 2020). Though the basic meanings of resilience are the same across conceptualizations, previous scholars agreed that there was a deficiency in conceptualizing the term ‘organizational resilience’ (Hillman & Guenther, 2020; Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018). There is no consensus yet, however, on some issues like: (1) whether resilience is a single or multi-level; (2) whether its focus is strategic or operational, or (3) whether which type of disruptions are being dealt with by organizations (Hillman & Guenther, 2020; Ruiz-Martin et al., 2018).

Leadership

Leadership is conceptualized as “the process of exercising social influence” (Teo et al., 2017, p.136). This idea (i.e., ‘leadership as an influence process’) has been acknowledged in most leadership theories (Seidel et al., 2019). The process occurs through the leader’s behaviors. In the educational setting, leadership plays an essential role in the delivery of organizational vision and mission. An organization that acts homogeneously can achieve goals effortlessly.

Servant leadership, like most leadership styles, is critical in educational organizations (Gocen & Sen, 2020). An individual who develops and empowers others to develop their utmost potential is called a servant leader (Gandolfi et al., 2017). In an organization, a servant leader attends to followers’ needs and helps them more willing to accept responsibilities (Seidel et al., 2019). In school settings, servant leadership pertains to the human desire “to be known, to care, and to be cared for in pursuit of the common good” (Bowman, 2005, p.257, as cited in Gocen & Sen, 2020, p.2). This leadership’s focus is on others rather than upon themselves (Seidel et al., 2019).

Organizational Culture

In organizational research, culture is defined as “a set of norms, attitudes, values and behavior patterns that form the core identity of an organization or operating unit” (Mujib, 2017, p.1). Some scholars described organizational culture as an “abstract” or “link or bond” between the organization and its members (e.g., Madueke & Emerole, 2017; Schein & Schein, 2017). However, the most common definition of organizational culture consists of values, beliefs, and assumptions shared among members and guides members’ behavior.

Organizational culture guides people to understand which actions are deemed acceptable or not within an organization (Batugal & Tindowen, 2019).

Leadership and Organizational Resilience

The survival of an organization during intense disruptions depends not only on its members' resilience but on its leadership as well (Teo et al., 2017). Besides effective organizational response to a crisis, a leader must serve as a guide for its members. The organization's resilience largely depends on the leader's abilities and capabilities to improve organizational response and increase recovery from the crisis (Morales et al., 2019).

Leadership and Culture

Culture experts believe that culture is a cure for many organizational problems like organizational decline. Culture can be affected by lots of factors, including leadership. Leaders influence organizational culture through their values, strategies, and leadership style (Warrick, 2017). When the leader and employees agree to the core values, beliefs, and behaviors, a strong culture emerges (Sow et al., 2017).

Culture and Organizational Resilience

Organizational culture has been seen as "a set of forces that shape and determine human behavior" (Adewale & Anthonia, 2013); therefore, it impacts organizational outcomes. Organizational culture affects many outcomes (e.g., productivity, satisfaction). Thus, it is regarded as one of the workplace's components that influences every aspect of organizational life (Madueke et al., 2017). Meanwhile, employee resilience is an antecedent of organizational outcome variables (Caniel & Baaten, 2018). Hence, culture is regarded relative to resilience in the organization.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model of this study proposes associations of the constructs mentioned above. The study is based on the previous studies' various findings that document the links between the constructs under investigation. In addition, this study is also anchored on the following concepts:

This research is primarily drawn from the 'resilience theory.' According to Eliot (2020), resilience theory is rooted in psychological studies of children who suffered traumas or loss of lives. In this study, resilience will be emphasized as imperative for organizations to cope effectively against the Covid-19 pandemic. Ducheck (2020) conceptualized resilience as a capacity within an organization to respond to unexpected events. Accordingly, during unexpected events (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic), organizations should develop and implement solutions as an offensive response to resist destruction. Researchers agreed that resilience is possessed by every individual that can be developed and enhanced in individuals through certain strategies. Hence, the study believes that focusing on developing resilience at all levels within an organization is essential towards strengthening its capacity to withstand crises (e.g., organizational decline).

This study is also anchored on the 'organizational culture framework' by Cameron and Quinn (1999). The Competing Values Framework (CVF) sets the fundamental paradigm for organizational culture in most studies. CVF shows that organizational culture has two dimensions: focus and structure (Balaji et al., 2020). The focus dimension differentiates organizations that center on an internal environment and integration from those that

emphasize an external environment and differentiation, while the structure dimension distinguishes organizations that value flexibility and discretion from those that accentuate stability and control. Apparently, organizational culture is a means toward an end. It is a competitive advantage. Organizational culture relates to the proper mindset and actions towards problems and opportunities facing the organizations. Thus, it can help educational institutions strengthen their capabilities to enable them to withstand the challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. Culture can keep the employees in line with organizational goals. Hence, an organization that capitalizes on culture can survive during organizational crises.

The 'servant leadership theory' serves as another foundation for this study. The theory posits that leaders adopt behaviors that transcend their self-interest to serve their followers' interests. This study is anchored on servant leadership, as many previous studies stressed that servant leaders positively impact subordinate resilience (e.g., Eliot, 2020).

Finally, the study is drawn from the 'self-enhancement theory,' which proposes that individuals form their self-worth based on how they are treated by others. As leaders play a key role in representing an organization, perceptions of servant leadership enhance employees' self-worth within the organization.

Research Method

This study examined existing literature to investigate how resilience at one level can facilitate the development of resilience at another level. Additionally, it also examined the influences of organizational culture and leadership on each organizational resilience level. This work consolidated, rationalized, and presented published research articles containing local and worldwide studies. Books, book chapters, and conference proceedings are not included in the examined literature.

Conclusion

Based on the study's intensive literature review, there are associations between leadership, organizational culture, and organizational resilience. This means that the leadership style demonstrated by school administrators and the culture of the organization (school) influence the resiliency of the organization. Employees will be able to better grasp organizational events if they are familiar with the culture of the organization. Their ability to fully comprehend what is happening inside the organization will make them more flexible when challenges arise. To establish culture of resiliency, there is a need to implement an organization that adopts a culture of excellence. A resilient corporate culture promotes the formation of a sense of community among employees, which can help the organization become strong amidst challenges.

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