Intellectual Structure of Research in Organizational Resilience

Subjects: Management

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Organizations, businesses, and communities at large are exposed to unprecedented adversities, uncertainties, economic, social, and ecological shocks and disruptions caused by natural disasters, climate change, political turmoil, global recession, economic instability, fluctuations in energy-source prices, war and terrorism dilemmas, pandemics, and several other newly rising social turbulences.

organizational resilience   social turbulence   disruptions   pandemic

1. Introduction

Organizational resilience (OR) is envisioned through the lenses of "Social Turbulence" and Big Challenges", which envision communities as being exposed to vulnerability and uncertainty more frequently and are hence in need of well-thought-out responses to such turbulence and challenges. "Big Challenges" are predominantly caused by social, economic, and environmental factors, and their nonlinear nature, uncertainty, spontaneity, and speed pose an increased risk of transforming situations into crises [1].

In socially turbulent times, the environment becomes volatile, business norms shift to unstable paradigms, routine functions face unique disruptions, confusion reigns, it is more difficult to reach consensus, existing solutions are inadequate, and devastating events become crises. To deal with such vulnerabilities, social turbulence demands swift, comprehensive, and customized responses from societies, organizations, and individuals [2][3]. The perceived consequences of vulnerability create space for urgent responses. The pattern of urgency in response is determined by the organization's level of preparation, ability to anticipate challenges, capacities, capabilities to bounce back, and ability to identify opportunities lurking in the murkiness of crises [4][5].

Sources of social turbulence include but are not limited to political, social, economic, geographic, and environmental factors. Equally, each such event has its own diverse dynamics, so a proven response in one situation might be ineffective and irrelevant in other situations.

The uniqueness of each turbulent event demands a versatile and local approach to tackle it effectively; for instance, political unrest might have an entirely unique set of contributing factors, and therefore a very targeted and situational response might be necessary for effective resolution. Conversely, social turbulence caused by a global pandemic of uncertain traits (for instance, COVID-19) posing high uncertainty, rapid spread, and severe disruptions makes the response more uncertain, escalates confusion, earns the least consensus, and ignites agitation [6][7][8].

A resilient organization prepares itself through a learning process to combat uncertain disruptions effectively in a social turbulence environment. The organizational learning process entails (I) scientific approaches to enhance organizational ability to predict and forecast the most unlikely future disruptions; (II) building organizational capabilities to absorb uncertain shocks to lessen damaging impacts on organizational processes; (III) creating and promoting a culture of adaptability and hence the ability to secure adaptive scenarios in vulnerable circumstances; and (IV) striving through the disruption with the aim of excelling in the post-disruption era rather than just struggling to survive. OR research aims to create valuable knowledge for organizations to attain greater vigilance, preparedness, and action plans for unexpected, uncertain, and devastating vulnerabilities.

Contrarily, a brittle organization attains the least resiliency, behaves haphazardly in crises, and finds it hard to absorb disruptions and bounce back. A brittle organization finds itself in a disastrous situation in times of social turbulence caused by uncertain vulnerability and sudden shocks; these organizations are characterized by an inability to forecast disruptions and failure to absorb shocks, resulting in reactive rather than adaptive behavior and an inability to perceive disruptions as opportunities and instead retreating into survival mode. A brittle organization always perceives social turbulence as a source of disastrous consequences, whereas a resilient organization takes social turbulence as an opportunity to test its capabilities and bounce back with more profound achievements [9][10][11].

Usually, organizations are well prepared for routine challenges; however, challenges posed by abrupt, unpredicted, and uncertain shocks are not those for which organizations are prepared. An organization's ability to anticipate, absorb, and respond to such disastrous events is considered OR. The unprecedented emerging adversities and uncertainties facing organizations in the form of natural disasters, political turmoil, economic instability, ecological disorder, pandemics, and social dilemmas are demanding new organizational paradigms and proactive strategies to combat, absorb, rebuild, and ultimately sustain organizational performance [12][13]. Such shocks, disruptions, and adversities are inevitable for almost all organizations, and avoiding such situations becomes most likely impossible [14][15]. Exposure to such adversities causes huge economic, social, and psychological damage, and organizations are threatened, even for their survival [16][17]. To prepare for such unpredictable and unforeseen events, organizations need to build their ability to recover quickly and effectively and become resilient. Resilience is the ability of an organization to bounce back effectively, efficiently, and powerfully by absorbing unusual shocks and extraordinary disruptions [18][19][20][21].

Uncertainty associated with adversity may have damaging consequences due to the low ability to predict the occurrence of such events and their timing. This situation highlights the need for organizations to develop the ability to anticipate extraordinary disruptions well in advance of their occurrence. An organization can enhance its ability to forecast such events by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches [22][23][24][25]. Making well-informed judgments based on the real-world database can minimize the level of uncertainty. The market expertise of experienced employees might also aid organizational anticipation of the potential occurrence of unusual events.

The concept of resilience evolved from an individual paradigm to combat highly depressive shocks in one's personal, professional, or societal life: divorce, severe financial losses, death of dear ones, betrayal by close friends, job terminations, sustained long-term unemployment, losing respect or dignity in the community, and other disruptions [26][27][28][29][30]. The ability to recover from such miseries with minimum damage and bounce back to normal life is a huge challenge that requires a set of attributes that are either built-in or need to be learned [31][32][33][34].

The philosophy behind OR is similar in many ways to that behind individual resilience [35][36][37][38][39]. However, here the adversities are being collectively faced by organizations, and many internal and external stakeholders could be potential victims. The response in such situations is more likely to be collective than individual. The response mechanism is multidimensional, as adversity might have different degrees and consequences. Given this, defining the dynamics of OR becomes more challenging [40].

The recent unprecedented development in the field of network construction and pattern recognition for large datasets has attracted immense attention from researchers seeking to explore their field through a more scientific approach in an effective, quantitative, and reliable manner [41][42]. The bibliometric data is highly enriched with plenty of valuable observations, for example, publication title, authors' details, publication year, outlet source of publication, main and sub-research domains, contributing institutions and countries, etc.

Bibliometric analysis has been made simpler and more powerful through the development of advanced computer-based bibliometric analysis programs. There is frequent evidence of published research that deploys bibliometric methods to synthesize a research concept and its evolution.

The development and progression of any research concept, theme, or theory is a scientific outcome of effective, authentic, valuable, and replicable published work in different kinds of outlets, for example, journals, conference proceedings, books, newsletters, etc. These published works create an impact on the landscape of any research field that reflects the intellectual structure, knowledge streams, and dynamics of both horizontal and vertical progression. Exploring the foundation, evolution, dissemination, clustering, and spread of the research field is characterized by several bibliometric attributes [43][44][45][46][47][48][49][50].

2. Organizational Resilience

The notion of resilience has been defined and discussed in several contexts, and therefore, it is hard to derive a common definition across all disciplines. However, some common grounds and overlapping themes can be identified from the available definitions of OR: (1) elasticity of a system to absorb a shock(s) and return to its pre-shock status; (2) capacity to combat unforeseen adversities, disruptions, and shutdowns; (3) a learned approach towards the process of efficient anticipation of any potential adversity; the ways to engage and channel organizational resources to cope with the adverse situation; and finally, raising the level of adaptability by smoothing the transformative process among the internal stakeholders [51][52][53][54][55][56][57][58][59].

A resilient organization is characterized not only by its ability to secure survival out of adversity but, in some instances, by its ability to perform even better. OR is an outcome of several organizational factors: human resources, technology, operations, a strategic plan, risk management, data-driven strategies, and organizational synergy. It is argued that resilience within these organizational factors would ultimately lead an organization down a resiliency path [60][61][62][63][64][65].

OR is attributed to many organizational factors: resources, capabilities, and structures. It is argued that an organization with abundant resources, a high level of capabilities, and efficient structures could achieve resilience against any type of severe adversity. Resource enrichment boosts an organization's ability to combat unforeseen challenges and disruptions in times of crisis. Given the traditional approach to resilience as anticipation, coping, and adaptation, a resilient organization develops its ability to anticipate any sudden change that could escalate into a major threat and thereby proactively enhances its capabilities through available resources and infrastructure in multiple ways to prepare itself to combat adversity. Finally, resources acquired, increased capabilities, and an efficient structure facilitate an organization's adaptation process. This approach of anticipation, coping, and adaptation is a continuous process and brings learned experience to an organization, which, through an effective knowledge management process, becomes an asset for future adverse events [66][67][68][69][70][71][72][73][74][75].

Several key areas have been identified by the researchers that provide a basic foundation for an organization to become well-versed in the three stages of resiliency: anticipation, coping, and adaptation. These factors include but are not limited to leadership, infrastructure, environment, culture, knowledge economy, business model, innovation, and resilience plans.

The advocacy behind the role of leadership in developing and promoting resiliency suggests that leaders are policymakers who provide a roadmap to their organizations. Leaders can comprehend the philosophy behind the mission of becoming a resilient organization; it is their understanding and ideology about the resiliency theme that can drive, lead, and promote the propagation of the value and vitality of this ever-needed characteristic [76][77][78][79].

Further, as resilience is not a one-time achievement but a permanent behavior and capability that might be challenged and tested under several different settings and circumstances over time, it should be realized and embedded within organizational culture as a permanent trait. Leadership is critical to the process of cultivating resilience in the workplace during all three stages of resilience. Leaders who can foresee and anticipate adversity ahead of its actual occurrence could lead and guide organizations in much more effective ways during and after a disruption. The real challenge during the adversity cycle is to absorb the social, economic, and psychological shocks with the least damage to the organization. Finally, leaders can promote positivity among internal stakeholders toward accepting and fighting back against unexpected interruptions and shocks [80][81].

3. Resilient Organization

A resilient organization considers continuous improvement and upgradation and never assumes a perfectionistic approach towards their processes and systems; it believes that preparation for unexpected shocks is much more

complex than preparing for day-to-day business challenges. Resources required to tackle and respond to routine process disruptions can be managed in a well-planned manner; however, the nature of sudden and uncertain disruptions can hardly be thought of well ahead of their occurrence; therefore, practically, it is quite challenging to plan a response to an uncertain vulnerability [82][83][84].

A resilient organization learns from each disruption and builds their knowledge, experience, and other skills to accumulate resources as a means of combating the future. This learning becomes an integral part of organizational systems and, in future crises, helps an organization face, respond to, and emerge strongly from such disastrous events much more effectively than brittle organizations. A resilient organization develops a sense of system awareness and calibrates the system very minutely by paying deep attention to process deviations. This proactive approach to system behavior helps organizations cultivate the ability to foresee uncertain future vulnerability with confidence. Acting upon minute process details can nurture a culture that elevates a positive attitude towards such disruptions. An organization that creates a culture rooted in proactive behavior is likely to more effectively face uncertain and sudden disruption [85][86][87][88].

A resilient organization acts in a highly reliable manner in times of crisis and transforms apparent threats caused by sudden disruption into potential opportunities. In comparison to a brittle organization, a resilient organization has better chances of not only anticipating, absorbing, responding to, and bouncing back to its former state but also excelling much ahead of that prior state. This transformation is due to organizational structure, culture, and resources. A resilient organization believes in the continuous improvement of its systems and works to promote its capabilities. The essential capabilities to achieve OR are routinely addressed. The capabilities should be targeted to promote OR include competence, skills, and knowledge of uncertainty regarding organizational processes and systems [89][90][91].

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