Organizational Resilience in Prisons and Police Forces

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1. Introduction

In 2020, the world was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic; starting in February, the spread of the virus led to the worldwide implementation of emergency measures to contain its transmission. However, the impact of the pandemic—including the extent of the spread of the virus and the response of authorities—varied from country to country, partly due to differences in institutional functioning. It is thus crucial to learn from this exceptional historic period. Furthermore, the scientific literature with respect to organizational resilience, even if better developed currently, is far from reaching consensus on its definition and on its different stages or phases [1]. Moreover, there are scientific studies that cope with this organizational issue, specifically in very narrow business sectors. For instance, maritime business [2], among nurses [3], or more generally in the healthcare system [4]. It is also important to stress that organizational resilience has been studied above all in private organizations [5], often very important ones (as Apple, Microsoft, Kyocera, and so on), as if resilience were somehow the field of choice for private companies and organizations. As a result, it is also important to look at public organizations and how they develop organizational resilience. Critical public infrastructures have already been studied through this resilience lens [6]. It is therefore of interest to better study organizational resilience in public organizations as well. Astonishingly, publications with respect to organizational resilience during or closely following the COVID-19 pandemic crisis are scarce or even lacking [4][7].

2. Conceptualizing Organizational Resilience

The concept of OR is based on a common perception of the meaning of resilience, illustrated by its Latin etymology resiliere, ‘to bounce back’ [8]. This is close to the definition given by the physical sciences [5]: ‘a physical system’s capacity to return to its original form after a disturbance’ [9] (p. 491). Interest in applying this concept to organizations has emerged in response to the multiplication of disruptive or catastrophic events against the background of accelerating economic, societal, and technological transformations. Such events impact organizational functioning and may even threaten their survival [9][10][11][12][13]. The definition of such disruptions

includes those originating in nature, such as Hurricane Katrina, the Fukushima accident, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and those generated by humans, such as the 2008 financial crisis, terrorist attacks, or cyberterrorism [6][11][13]. The definition of OR is clearly not a consensus among scientists [9][14][15][16][17][18][19]. OR was first understood as the implementation of skills enabling an organization to cope with shocks and 'continue to meet its objectives' [9] (p. 496) and realize its mission [11]. Now it is also conceived as a structural issue, in the sense that organizational structures also matter when it comes to explaining organizational resiliency [14]. Other studies consider organizational resilience above all as a learning process [16], mainly as a leadership issue [20], or even an issue that could primarily be solved by social interventions through human resources management practices [4][7]. All these perspectives, which are complementary rather than contradictory, nevertheless highlight the need for organizations to go outside their usual operational framework [8].

OR encompasses diverse phenomena; many dimensions are associated with it and no clear definition has yet been established. Thus, the concept remains difficult to operationalize and measure [8][10][15][19]. The most widespread conceptualizations of OR fall within the perspectives of resilience engineering (RE) and the more recent ecological resilience (ER) [8][11].

3. Resilience Engineering and Ecological Resilience

RE, imbued with a '"machine" view of systems, with simple cause and effect dynamics' [9] (p. 491), conceptualizes OR as the ability to bounce back 'quickly to the functional "acceptable" state' [11] (p. 86), primarily through the maintenance of functions and rapid recovery via the mobilization of resources required to cope with the shock [19].

Contrastingly, ER applies the notion of OR to complex social systems whose adaptive dimension is recognized. In addition to the capacity to bounce back from adversity [21], ER includes the ability to adapt to the crisis and continue to 'thrive' during it [8][9][11]. From this perspective, when faced with shocks, the most important factor is the ability to '[adapt and transform] through the emergence of new structures such as policies, processes, and organizational culture that enable organizations to continue to perform their functions' [9] (p. 491). In this way, the system learns from the disruptions encountered while absorbing them and reorganizing itself to emerge stronger [9]. Thus, a dynamic aimed at 'getting stronger' [8] (p. 191) is emphasized, since the objective is to overcome the previous state of functioning in order to grow through learning and flourish after the shock, rather than to merely remain the same and stabilize. Such crisis responses are part of a long-term, continuous, proactive process combining anticipatory and adaptive activities, demonstrating the organizational capacity to learn [8]. Finally, according to Barasa et al. [9], 'organizations must focus on developing a capacity to adapt to changing environments' (p. 500). While planned resilience is important, adaptive resilience is even more so in contexts characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. Accordingly, while Tennakoon and Janadari [8] identify adaptive capacity as an overriding predictor of OR, they anchor it in the capacity to anticipate and integrate prior crisis learning as part of a proactive, ongoing process.

4. A Third Way between the RE and ER Perspectives

In Ruiz-Martin et al.'s [12] metamodel of the evolution of organizations from a fragile to an antifragile state, resilience is included as an intermediate stage of the continuum (i.e., from fragile to robust to resilient to antifragile). In a fragile state, a complex system (such as an organization) goes through and responds to a shock by breaking or sustaining damage [12][13]. A robust system, on the other hand, withstands known disturbances by absorbing them; however, ongoing stress may cause it to break and fail to recover. A resilient organization is not only robust, but also reacts to crises and unknown shocks by adapting to some extent, before bouncing back to the previous state of equilibrium or accessing a new point of stability [12]. It is thus better prepared to recover and survive than a robust organization, because response mechanisms are built into its design [12][13]. According to Tokalić et al. [13], a resilient system returns to its pre-shock state as soon as stress decreases. In defining OR, the authors thus rely on the RE perspective and confirm the adaptive dimension as a step preceding or leading to a return to the original state. However, Ruiz-Martin et al. [12] and Tokalić et al. [13] agree that if the new point of stability is better than the previous one, in other words, if the organization has become stronger and benefited more from the crisis than it has suffered from it, it is considered antifragile, a state beyond mere resilience. Indeed, antifragility enables a system to take advantage of both threats and opportunities to continue to flourish in a turbulent environment.

5. The Time Dimension of OR

Other scientists highlight the temporal dimension of OR, which manifests in three phases [15]. Firstly, upstream of the shock (t − 1), the proactive, anticipatory, preparatory, or planning phase is identified [9][10][11][15][19]. Then, during the shock (t), two types of resilient responses are possible [15]. The first consists of absorbing the change and its harmful consequences [11][15][22] by maintaining the pre-shock equilibrium [15]. The second is adaptation through reorganization, transformation [9][11], reconfiguration, or the recombination of 'existant or novel resources' [15] (p. 406); such adaption should occur quickly in order to move to a new equilibrium point. Finally, after the shock (t + 1) comes the phase of rebound or recovery from the crisis, which involves returning to the pre-shock state or reaching a new point of stability [15].

For Vakilzadeh and Haase [10], the process has three stages, corresponding to those cited by Conz and Magnani [15]. For Barasa et al. [9], the resilience process requires the implementation of actions in two phases, before and after the shock. This model corresponds to the one proposed by Rahi [11], to which Tenakoon and Janadari [8] also seem to subscribe. If one places the conception of Hillmann and Guenther [19], as well as for Ruiz-Martin et al. [12], on a timeline based on the conceptualization of the former, resilience occurs before and during the crisis.

6. Operationalization: Resilience Factors

In terms of the operationalization of OR, two main categories of analysis emerge from the literature. Firstly, Barasa et al. [9] define organizational hardware (or 'hard organizational material') as comprising three key ingredients: material resources, financial resources (enabling, among other things, the mobilization of other resources during the crisis), and technological resources (which can, for example, lead to the development of good information and

communication systems; [10]. Secondly, organizational software [9] groups together the softer or intangible aspects of the system, elements that are perhaps more important than the first because, in addition to their usefulness in their own right, they contribute to mobilizing the resources that form the organizational hardware in an emergency and ensure that such formation occurs appropriately [9]. This second category contains all the other relevant variables in resilience.

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