Theoretical Reviews and Propositions for Explaining Resilient Organizations

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Abstract

The objective of this article was to provide a comprehensive review for explaining resilient organizations. In this regard, theories, conceptual papers, and research articles related to the concept of resilient organizations, organizational crisis, and organizational survivability and adjustment despite adversity and challenges were reviewed. This review contributes to the development of resilience in organizations and will help organizations to demonstrate successful outcomes regarding adjustability despite a crisis. Seven propositions are presented in order to explain resilient organizations. It is the authors' opinion that the research on resilient organizations can move forward based on this comprehensive review.

Keywords : comprehensive review, organizational crisis, resilient organization

Introduction

With a wide range of organizational crises, and the challenges of sudden change and unstable environments, the chance of the survivability of organizations has been tested, as it is unavoidable for organizations to be negatively impacted by different types of unexpected events (Duchek, 2020;Linnenluecke, 2017; van der Vegt, Essens, Wahlström, and George, 2015). Unlike crisis management, where the studies give emphasis to the investigation of the causes, risks, mechanisms, responses, and aftereffects of adversity, the study of resilient organizations extends the inherent shortcomings of crisis management by focusing on organizational success or survival during crises (Bundy, Pfarrer,Short, andCoombs, 2017; KoronisandPonis, 2018; Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, and Zhao, 2017). In this regard, the resilient organization is referred to in this study as successful outcomes of organizational adaptability despite the experience of a crisis.

Understanding of the resilient organization isstillin its infancy (Boinand van Eeten; 2013;Verreynne, Ho, &Linnenluecke, 2018). The mechanisms and antecedent factors of resilience embedded in the organizational context are little known and are often fragmented (de Bruijine, Boin, andvan Eeten, 2010; Karman, 2020). Annarelli and Nonino (2016)pointed the idea that the knowledge of how to create and implement a resilient organization is apparently ambiguous.The concept of the resilient organization is indirectly discussed in the context of high reliability organizations, mindful organizing, and the sufficiency economy philosophy based on the concepts of the Thai culture. It is alsoembedded the works of organizational adaptability to and survivability in changing environments (e.g., Hodgson, Herman, andDollimore, 2017; Inceand Hahn2020). The discussion of resilience in the organizational context (e.g., Alliger, Cerasoli, Tannenbaum, andVessey, 2015; Kennedy, Landon, and Maynard 2016; King, Newman, andLuthans, 2016) often appears to be restricted to an individual level of analysis, and a relatively small amount of works have contributed to the development of resilient organizations, which focuses on an organizational level of analysis.

The stream of resilient organizations has been called for further investigation by many scholars (e.g., Linnenluecke, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). A comprehensive review is needed in order to provide an explanation of resilient organizations as it adds an understanding to the stream of resilient organizations and assists in providing further study and research in this field. Therefore, the materials used in this review included books and journal articles associated with the conceptual frameworks, research, and theories intended to explain resilient organizations.

Definition of Resilient Organization

The term resilience has been pervasively used in English. The term is. in fact, derived from the two Latin words (i.e.,resilire and resilio), which means to rebounce or to jump back (Indirli, 2019; Wilkinson, 2018) In modern-day dictionaries (e.g., Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary), the term resilience has been, for example described as "(1) the ability of people or things to feel better quickly after sth unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etc.; (2) the ability of substance to return to its original shape after it has beenbent, stretched orpressed" (Hey and Holloway, 2015: 1276); "(1) the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens; (2) the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, passed,

bent, etc."(Perrault, 2018: 1348). This indicates that people often associate the meaning of the term resilience with the perspective of psychology and engineering as the term denotes about better feelings of people after unpleasant events and flexibility of substances.

In academics, the concept of resilience has been involved in many fields of studies (Ortiz-De-Mandojanaand Bansal, 2016). Solely in the field of organizational study, the concept of resilience has rooted from many disciplines such as ecology, engineering, disaster management, psychology, and strategic management (Limnios, Mazzarol, Ghadouani, andSchilizzi, 2014).Andersson, Cäker, Tengblad, andWickelgren (2019)alsoobserved that the origins of the term resilience in the organizational context related to different perspectives of scientific inquiries, including organizational theory, information technology, industrial relations, engineering, supply chain management, and social science perspective. This results many definitions and typologies describing the concept of the term resilience (Burnard, Bhamra, and Tsinopoulos, 2018).

In the organizational context, the term resilience has been discussed in a variety of denotations, including "the ability of organizations to anticipate, avoid, and adjust to shocks in their environment"(Ortiz-de-Mandojanaand Bansal, 2016: 1615); "an ability to react to, and recover from, an acute shock or interruption"(Herbane, 2019: 477);"the capability of the organization to foresee andresist events by adapting to them and naturally recovering" (Al-Abrrow,Alnoor, andAbbas, 2019: 2);"firms' ability to maintain or regain functioning despite a major mishap or in the presence of continuous stress" (Clément and Rivera, 2017: 346); "a special organizational capability to prepare for, respond to, and learn from adverse events (including crisis as an unexpected but severe adverse event) so as to bounce back for survival in the short run and also bounce forward for thriving over time"(Li, 2020: 503).

Based on this discussion, it can be seen that the term resilience in the organizational context are defined by linking with three main themes. First is organizational adaptability. The keywords that are associated with this theme are such as 'a dynamic capability', and 'adapting'. The second theme is outcome of organizational resilience. The keywords that are used to described this theme include 'firms' ability to maintain or regain functioning', 'bounce forward for thriving over time', 'an ability to react to, and recover', 'recovering', 'response', and 'prepare'. The last theme is unpleasant events. The keywords that are mentioned in these definitions, for example, are 'shocks', 'an acute shock', 'interruption', 'major mishap', 'the presence of continuous stress', 'crisis', and 'adverse events'. Therefore, this study

defined the term resilience—namely resilient organization—as successful outcomes of organizational adaptability despite the experience of a crisis.

Theoretical Background and Propositions for Explaining Resilient Organizations

Based on a comprehensive literature review, the resilience of organizations can be explained as follows.

Organizational Adaptability

Organizations are often described as a system. Scholars, such asLowell (2020) and Roth(2019), have explained that organizations are a complex whole made up of many interdependent parts and subsystems, and an organization's system is dynamic, as it exchanges resources with its external environment. With this understanding, organizations are viewed as a system that is homeostatic (Demers, 2007). This means that changes or a shift within a system can only happen to organizations when they are in chaos, and when their system's equilibrium is disturbed (Teece, 2018; Turner and Baker, 2019). During a crisis, organizations buffer themselves from adverse situations and return to a state of equilibrium by incorporating complex interconnections of people, technical systems, and interventions in order to mitigate crisis consequences (Alvintziand Hannes, 2010; Pauchant, Mitroff, andLagadec, 1991). Therefore, the following proposition is offered:

Proposition a: In the face of a crisis, organizations adjust themselves to mitigate the consequences of a crisis in order to survive.

Because chaos influences an organization's system to be far from an equilibrium state, a system in this condition presents a self-generating rule, which can be depicted in the form of creativity and growth, in order to create a new system's equilibrium (AeeniandSaeedikiya, 2019). This is evident in the work of Reinmoeller and van Baardwijk (2005), who studied organizations (e.g.,Akzo Nobel, Philips, Shell, Uniliver, DSM, Wolters Kluwers, VNU, Robeco, and Heineken) that outperformed competitors in terms of financial functions and continuous performance from 1993 to 2002. These organizations were found to have survived and even grew notwithstanding the downturn of economy in 1983, 1993 and 2002 due to their concentration on innovation (Reinmoellerand van Baardwijk, 2005). Therefore, the following proposition is offered:

Proposition b: Organizations generate a more appropriate business model in the face of a crisis.

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The sufficiency economy philosophy is an innovative approach gifted to the Thai people by His Majesty King BhumibolAdulyadej (Song, 2020). This approach was constructed to be suitable to a wide range of problems and situations, especially to help individuals, communities, and organizations to better cope with challenges because it is a trajectory of recovery that guides both people and organizations to be more resilient, balanced, and to have long-lasting development (Avery andBergsteiner, 2016; BaruaandTejativaddhana, 2019; Sarapirom& Sarkar, 2018).

Compiled from His Majesty's various remarks and addresses on various occasions, Bergsteiner and Dharmapiya (2016)explained the concept of the sufficiency economy philosophy was derived from personal wisdom of middle path which involved the elements of virtue, knowledge, and sufficiency mindset. Bergsteiner and Dharmapiya (2016) also recognized these elements as the fundamental elements which contribute to the sufficiency economy philosophy's actions and outcomes such as self-reliance, resilience, and immunity. In this regard, Bergsteiner and Dharmapiya (2016) developed the framework called the sufficiency economy philosophy model to provide the meaning of the sufficiency economy philosophy.
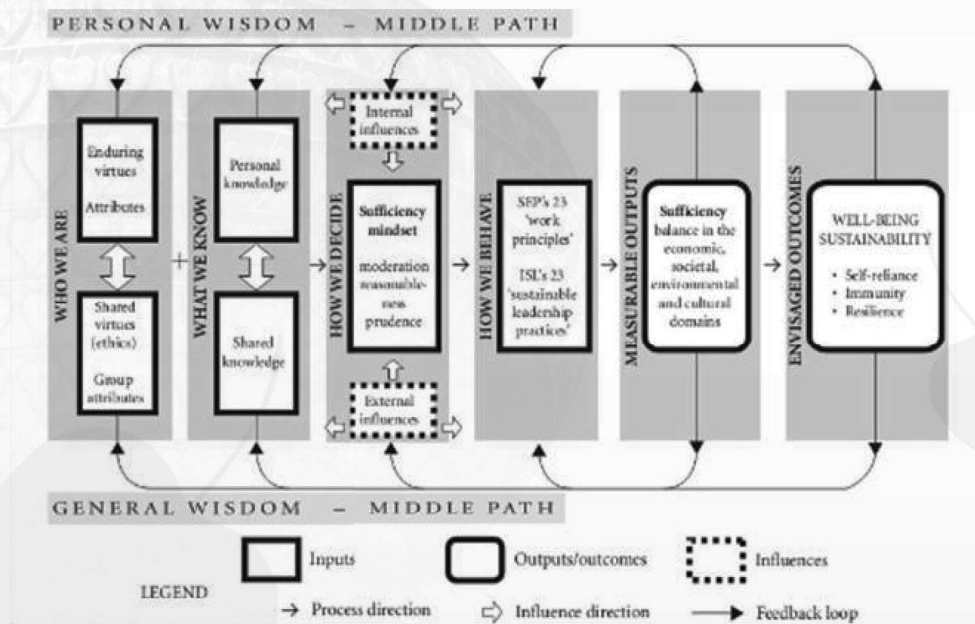

Figure 1 The Sufficiency Economy Model

Source : Bergsteiner, H., &Dharmapiya, P. (2016). The sufficiency economy philosophy process. In G. C. Avery & H. Bergsteiner (Eds.), *Sufficiency thinking: Thailand's gift to an unsustainable world* (pp. 32-52). NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

(2016: 52)

In 1997, when the Thai nation encountered the challenges of an economic crisis,many organizations were in evidence forced to close down (Wibulswasdi, Piboolsravut, andPootrakoo, 2012). However, there were a group of organizations in Thailand (for example Hana Electronics, Nippon Pack, Pornthip Phuket, and Siam Cement), which strictly followed the principles of the sufficiency economy philosophy, demonstrated the ability to withstand and even recover from the crisis (Kusumavalee, 2009; Suriyankietkaew and Kantamara, 2019;Wibulswasdi et al., 2012). With this evidence, the principles of the sufficiency economy philosophy can be seen as a fundamental construct supporting organizations amidst crises. In this regard, it can be said that organizations are resilient because of the following proposition:

Proposition c: The principles of the sufficiency economy philosophy can be expected to buffer organizational crises.

Virtuousness

The word virtue originally derived from the Latin word "virtus," which is used to denote strength or excellence (Khorakian, Maharati,andLorestany, 2016). In the organizational context, virtuousness is defined as"the processes and practices that support the best of human condition, the most ennobling behaviors and outcomes, the excellence and essence of humankind, and the highest aspirations of human beings" (Arjoon, Turriago-Hoyos, andThoene, 2018:144). Cameron (2017) hasdivined virtuousness into two forms—the tonic virtuousness (i.e.,virtuousness occurs in generalized circumstances) and the phasic virtuousness (i.e., virtuousness occurs in specific circumstances, such as shocks or disrupted events).

Studies (e.g., Flynn, 2019; Meyer, 2018; Worlineand Dutton, 2017) has extensively confirmed that virtuousness helps to buffer organizations against crises. The investigation of Bright, Cameron, and Caza (2006) of eight organizational samples in 16 different industries in the U.S., for example, revealed that organizations with higher virtuousness scores presented a high tendency toward organizational effectiveness despite the adversity of downsizing. Based on this investigation, Bright et al. (2006) found that forgiveness and responsibility are parts of phasic virtuousness, which influences the virtuous behaviors of people within organizations and alleviates the adverseeffects of organizational downsizing, and organizations are tending

to be more resilient when both phasic and tonic virtuousness, particularly phasic virtuousness, are clearly shown in the organizations. Similarly, a study ofGittell, Cameron, Lim, and Rivas, (2006) conducted on the U.S. airline industry following the September 11 tragedy in 2001 (9/11) found that Southwest Airlines was able to have a quicker recovery than other competitors in the industry as it focused on phasic virtuousness, which are love and reciprocal attachment (Gittell et al., 2006).In connection with the evidence, it can be said that organizations are resilient because of the following proposition:

Proposition d: Both phasic and tonic virtuousness buffers organizations from crises.

Financial Reserve

A large amount of evidence (e.g.,Kachaner, Stalk, and Bloch, 2012; Gittell et al., 2006; Pal, Torstensson, andMattila, 2014) has confirmed that financial reserve is animportantelement that buffers organizations against different kinds of crises. Kachaner et al. (2012) and Gittell et al. (2006) pointed that financial reserve helps organizations to absorb short-term financial loss during crises. Cash on hand and liquidity are also important to help organizations to withstand crisis as it supports organizations to deal with sudden needs of resources (Gittell et al., 2006; Pa; et al., 2014). These studies also investigated a vast array of contexts as they appeared in various counties, such as Canada, France, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United States (Kachaner et al., 2012; Gittell et al., 2006; Palet al., 2014).Therefore, the following proposition is offered:

Proposition e: Financial reserve is expected to buffer organizational crises.

Practices of Mindful Organizing

Mindful organizing is often described as "the collective capability for detecting and correcting errors and unexpected event" (Vogus, 2012: 665). Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) have pointed out that mindful organizing is the collective capability process of: (1) the preoccupation with failures rather than successes, (2) the reluctance to simplify interpretations, (3) the sensitivity to operations, (4) the commitment to resilience, and (5) deference to expertise, as exhibited by the encouragement of a fluid decision-making system. It is the process that enables people in organizations to cope with organizational breakdowns and to stop them before they become complex and unmanageable (Su, 2017).

Many studies conducted in various contexts, including the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) (e.g., Boinand van Eeten, 2013), the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) (e.g., Boinand van Eeten, 2013), New Zealand organizations(e.g., McManus,

Seville, Vargo, andBrunsdon, 2008), and Swedish textile-related SMEs (e.g., Pal et al., 2014), have supported the idea that attention to context is animportant factor that enables organizations to survive from crises and unexpected events, as it helps to stop errors from becoming full-blown crises. With connection to this discussion, organizations are considered resilient because of the following proposition:

Proposition f: Organizational members are aware of the signs of a crisis, unusual happenings, and failures in an organization.

Practices of Human Resource Management

A number of scholars (e.g., Mitsakis, 2020; Tasic, Amir, Tan, andKhader, 2020) have emphasized that the resilience of organizations needs to build on the strengths of human resource operations. Horne and Orr (1998) for example have put forward the idea that resilient organizations involve the combination of seven major components of behaviors: the community, competence, connections, commitment, communication, coordination, and consideration (Horne and Orr, 1998). Similarly, Lengnick-Hall, Beck, andLengnick-Hall (2011) emphasized the significance of human resource practices (e.g., organizational learning, organizational culture, open communication, continuous socialization) and came up with the recommendation of cognitive, behavioral, and contextual elements. These factors,therefore,affectvarioustypes of desirable outcomes (e.g., expertise, opportunity, creativity, robust responses, coordination, communication and knowledge sharing, and preventive action), which contribute to the development of resilient organizations (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Therefore, the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition g: Organizational members are a significant resource of organizations that facilitates the resilience of organizations amidst a crisis.

Conclusion

With little understanding of why organizations are resilient, this paper comprehensively reviewed theories, conceptual papers, and research articles in order to provide a comprehensive review for explaining resilient organizations. This comprehensive review found that organizations are able to be resilient when they comply with the following seven propositions:

Proposition a: In the face of a crisis, organizations adjust themselves to mitigate the consequences of a crisis in order to survive.

Proposition b: Organizations generate a more appropriate business model in the face of a crisis.

Proposition c: The principles of the sufficiency economy philosophy can be expected to buffer organizational crises.

Proposition d: Both phasic and tonic virtuousness buffers organizations from crises.

Proposition e: Financial reserve is expected to buffer organizational crises.

Proposition f: Organizational members are aware of the signs of a crisis, unusual happenings, and failures in an organization.

Proposition g: Organizational members are a significant resource of organizations that facilitates the resilience of organizations amidst a crisis.

This review adds to the research on the resilient organization and can assist with the future directions of research in this field. It is recommended that the propositions discussed here be tested for the future direction of research in this area. This article suggests two methods, which are Yin's (2014) explanatory case study and multilevel research. This is because Yin (2014) advocates a theory-first approach, which provide explanations that reflect theoretical propositions. Multilevel research also is recommended because resilient organizations are nested in different levels of the organizational unit.

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