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Connecting organizational learning strategies to organizational resilience

Stephanie Douglas and Gordon Haley

Organizational resilience is a multidimensional concept that emerged from the capability of an organization to cope with uncertain and volatile conditions while leveraging strengths and adapting to survive turbulent environments. As a complex concept, organizational resilience is developed through resources and capabilities that support renewal, adaptation, and learning. The renewal domain focuses on the organization fostering dynamic capabilities that improve and adapt internal skills and capabilities (Hillmann and Guenther, 2021). Organizations face challenges today where previous knowledge and strategies cannot guarantee success. The renewal domain of organizational resilience is vital for the necessary adaptations to face the challenges requiring learning and creativity to increase dynamic capabilities, skills, and learning. Thus, to achieve resilience organizations need a focus on strategies that support knowledge, skill, and ability development to then develop the dynamic capabilities and routines within the organization (Douglas, 2021; Hillmann and Guenther, 2021; Rydstedt Nyman, 2019).

As we work to understand organizational resilience, it is necessary to investigate similarities and conceptual domain overlap (Hillmann and Guenther, 2021). Organizational learning and the renewal domain of organizational resilience both consider the continuous increase of skills and knowledge of individuals that are then aggregated to the collective, organizational level. The objective of this study is to analyze the conceptual and domain overlap in organizational resilience and organizational learning. From the analysis, implications are drawn to develop strategies for building individual learning and aggregating this to the collective organizational level as a guide for incorporating learning and renewal for greater organizational resilience. First, to understand the alignment and conceptual overlap similarities between organizational learning and the renewal domain of organizational resilience are explored. The relationship and correlation between the concepts are noted and outlined. Strategies are then identified to implement organizational learning that also fosters organizational resilience.

Organizational learning and organizational resilience overlap

Learning is central to the adaptive capacity of an organization. In developing organizational resilience, adaptation involves developing capabilities to change and learn through reflection and action to increase knowledge and capability in mitigating negative consequences from unexpected events. The goal of learning through this collective and dynamic process is for organizational advancement (Duchek, 2020). The renewal domain of resilience involves anticipation and sensemaking capabilities accessed through the organization's resources to lead to adaptation and learning (Hillmann and Guenther, 2021).

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An organization's capacity for resilience is then achieved through strategies fostering individual competencies that are aggregated to an organizational level. The capability of an organization to absorb, disseminate, and utilize new knowledge is a determinant of sustainable competitive advantage. With knowledge being a competitive advantage for organizations, learning increases the organization's performance and is a precondition for resilience (Rydstedt Nyman, 2019). If organizational learning is limited, so too is the organization's capacity for resilience. By identifying the conceptual overlap between the renewal domain of resilience and organizational learning, strategies for supporting learning are identified and should be implementing to foster the organization's resilience capacity.

Learning strategies for resilience capacity

Building resilience requires organizations to embody learning into a capability (Hillmann and Guenther, 2021). This requires systems for organizational learning to happen and remain continuous (Evenseth *et al.*, 2022). Such systems need to foster knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory to develop the dynamic capabilities leading to renewal and adaptation (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann and Guenther, 2021). A resilient organization continually learns, improves, and adjusts through adaptation emphasizing a knowledge base and how knowledge is managed within the organization (Duchek, 2020; Evenseth *et al.*, 2022). To do this, strategies must focus on experiential learning, developing systematic approaches to learning, and creating contexts to facilitate organizational learning (Evenseth *et al.*, 2022). When this knowledge capital is aggregated to an organizational, it contributes to the organization's capability for resilience (Douglas, 2021).

With the need for systems in organizations that allow continuous learning, improvement, and adjustment; organizations need to adopt strategies emphasizing knowledge acquisition, distribution, and interpretation. The emphasis on building a knowledge base and managing knowledge within the organization are then formalized and solidified through organizational memory strategies. The implications identified in the following sections support building resilience through capturing and the embodiment of learning into a capability.

Knowledge acquisition

To enhance knowledge acquisition, traditional practices must be adapted and customized to focus on sharing of knowledge along with knowledge creation. Practices such as performance-related rewards through effective performance management systems, training, and learning, knowledge-based recruitment, and selection should be designed to enhance knowledge acquisition within the organization. Adapting recruitment and selection of employees for more emphasis on knowledge creation provides a channel for knowledge acquisition.

By shifting recruitment and selection away from focusing only on current knowledge, skills, or experience to selection based on potential, an organization creates a channel for knowledge acquisition. Individuals with high potential are more likely to be capable of learning the knowledge necessary for an adaptive, agile, and innovative organization. Knowledge-based recruitment and selection should rely on not just choosing candidates with relevant knowledge. More emphasis should be on the potential for learning and networking capabilities (Douglas, 2021).

Employee training and development are also necessary; specifically, activities optimizing employees' present and needed knowledge and skills. The shift to knowledge-based training and development must involve regular assessment of current depth and breadth of employees' knowledge while also personalizing training to fit the changing organizational needs. Performance management systems are also essential to adapt to foster greater knowledge acquisition. Assessing performance based on criteria related to knowledge

sharing, creation, and application along with employee growth and learning provides motivation and incentive for acquiring knowledge. As such, compensation plans must also revolve around knowledge acquisition. Such compensation policies promote knowledge acquisition within the organization that motivate employees in sharing, creating, and applying knowledge acquired.

Knowledge distribution

Knowledge acquired is effective when individuals share and generate new forms of knowledge in others. The knowledge acquisition must move to distribution for the individual's knowledge to be leveraged and aggregated to the organizational level. Organizations can utilize employee recognition and reward strategies to incentivize knowledge sharing and distribution. Through reciprocity employees experience a mutual give-and-take of knowledge facilitating sharing and distribution leading to a perception of value for sharing knowledge. Real and perceived rewards resulting from sharing of knowledge provide motivation; thus, when performance management systems reward and incentivize sharing acquired knowledge it can increase motivation to do such.

Knowledge interpretation

When employees share and incorporate aspects of their knowledge that are not common to everyone, there is a shared understanding as well as coordinated decision making that is achieved. While employees must acquire and distribute knowledge, interpretation is achieved when individuals can share and generate further knowledge from others. Strategies that foster and encourage knowledge interpretation include:

- developing a partnership orientation with employees;
- localizing decision-making power;
- creating fluid team-based work and job design;
- building relational rather than transactional relationships with employees;
- creating a climate of open communication and collaboration, and
- encouraging problem-solving processes collaboratively and tied to organizational learning.

The overarching intent of such strategies is to create a workplace where employees are confident in their ability to explore options by utilizing the knowledge they have and sharing information. The main objective is to create space for collaboration and innovation through knowledge interpretation to promote agility and adaptation in the organization. Knowledge interpretation is a critical system for resilience as challenges increase for organizations. Interpretation provides the system for learning and dynamic capability development for organizations to adapt to challenges.

Organizational memory

The final step to building systems that promote continuous learning and adaptation from the knowledge base and knowledge management in an organization is solidifying such into organizational memory. Referring to the storage of knowledge for future use, organizational memory develops through formalized procedures promoting the retention of information. To be resilient, organizations need to develop and retain the knowledge base through formalization that happens with organizational memory (Duchek, 2020). By internalizing this knowledge through formal procedures such as policy development, the organization begins to formalize their resilience capability.

Keywords:

Organizational resilience,
Organizational learning,
Knowledge management

Conclusion

An organization's knowledge base and management of knowledge aligns and supports the needed adaptation and renewal for resilience to occur at the organizational level. Learning contributes to the organization's dynamic capabilities and change necessary for the organization's resilience.

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