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Resilient Leadership: The Role of Adaptive and Supportive Leadership in Crisis Recovery

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the function of adaptive and supportive leadership on promoting organization crisis recovery by highlighting the intervening role of team resilience as well as the organizational learning. This research also measured the variables such as leadership behaviours, team resilience, organizational learning, and crisis recovery. The study was quantitative in nature and the descriptive research design was adopted. Moreover, a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from employees working in various organizations. The data was analyzed using multiple regression analysis. Findings indicated that the adaptive leadership and supportive leadership were all significant predictors of crisis recovery. The results provide crucial insights on the necessity of developing resilience and learning cultures to maximize leadership performance when it comes to crises. Leadership development and crisis management implications are also described. It was also recommended that the resilient leadership played a vital role in the development of organization in crisis recovery.

Introduction

The global pandemics, supply chain disruption, and the threat of breached cybersecurity are all front and centre on the operating landscape of organizations. It turns organizations more than ever to effective leadership that guides the organization through times of trouble as well as an effective recovery and subsequent adaptation. Such turbulent environments are ineffective with the traditional models that focus on the transactional or directive leadership. Rather, the concept of resilient leadership, or rather the adaptive and supportive behaviors that form part of it, provides a key to the organizational survival and prosperity after the crisis (Sott & Bender, 2025; Grimes et al., 2022). Therefore, adaptive leadership is based on the system of Heifetz et al. (2009) who

outlines the ability of leaders in diagnosis of complex, novel problems, engaging stakeholders in solving problems, experimenting on uncertain grounds, and real-time realignment of strategies. The recent systematic reviews emphasize the effectiveness of adaptive leadership in dealing with a crisis and reconfiguring the organization and achieving flexibility (Sott & Bender, 2025). Another important aspect is supportive leadership wherein the leaders provided emotionally supportive information, operational support, and confidence to the frontline teams. The data compiled in the health care sector and other high-demanding workspaces opines that supportive behaviors alleviate pressures, preserve team stability, and protect performance in crucial situations (Grimes et al., 2022).

Although there have been both theoretical and empirical improvements, very little research addresses both adaptive and supportive elements of resilient leadership into a single quantitative model and more so with regard to them playing synergistic functions in recovery during crises. There is a lack of in-depth exploration regarding how these leadership behaviors can be translated into effective outcomes of the recovery process, and as to what organizational conditions potentiate their effect and why it is the case. Specifically, a possible mediator between the leadership behaviors and the recovery performance is team resilience, which is defined as the shared capability to absorb the disruptions, dynamically adjust, and recover. At the same time, the institutional ability to capture, distribute, and entrench crisis-generated knowledge, what was the call organizational learning, could be a boundary condition that makes these leadership-driven recovery processes stronger (Evenseth et al., 2022).

Therefore, the adaptive and supportive leadership can forecast the perceived organization crisis recovery through the variables of team resilience and organization learning. The research undertaken based on a cross-sectional survey of middle-level managers who have provided leadership through recent crises examines two questions: (a) the direct and indirect routes through which the leadership dimensions contribute to the recovery, (b) how organizational learning reinforces these routes. Combining adaptive and supportive leadership into resilience framework, this study will advance the leadership theory applied to crisis version, and will result in practical implications of work. It will help in building leadership capacities and learning systems that can make organizations more adaptive and prepared to recover.

Problem Statement

The world today is complex and is faced with ample of crisis to overcome; it could be global pandemic, economic recession, the impact of technologies, etc. Every time, organizations need to move to adaptation and the successful response to rebound. Albeit the reason why concepts of adaptive leadership and supportive leadership are studied separately, there is a gap of empirical research on how these two dimensions are integrated into the framework of resilient leadership. The literature present in the market tends to disregard the collective effects of these leadership behaviours on the recovery process, and the mechanisms and contextual determinants on the effectiveness of these leadership behaviours. The characteristic potential of team resilience as a mediating process and organizational learning as a moderating factor was not investigated fully enough with the help of quantitative models. The lack of such integrated knowledge may result in the failure to build leadership training and other structural support that optimizes recovery results in organizations. It is an effort to bridge this gap that this research aims to investigate how the contributions of adaptive and supportive leadership can work together in enhancing the recovery of an organization after a crisis based on resilience theory.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationships between adaptive leadership, supportive leadership, and perceived organizational crisis recovery.
2. To investigate the intervening role of team resilience in the relationship between leadership behaviors and crisis recovery outcomes.
3. To assess the influence of organizational learning on the effects of adaptive and supportive leadership through team resilience.

Significance of the Study

This study represents its relevance both in the theory and the practice. Scholastically, it will add literature on leadership and crisis management through incorporation of adaptive leadership and supportive leadership into a cohesive resiliency leadership theory. It would purposefully fill the gap in scholarly study of correlating adaptive and supportive leadership impacts in crisis recovery. The examination of team resilience and organizational learning expands the theory in the possibility of research on leadership performance in the case of crisis support. In practice, data will give evidence-based knowledge to organizational leaders, HR, and policymakers to develop crisis-readiness-enhancing leadership training and organizational learning systems. These insights will be crucial in a time of regular disruption, when strategic maneuverability and human-centered aid are both required during recovery. The findings would be beneficial for organizations to sustain their performance and competitive edge even during the post-crisis period through the use of leadership styles that safeguard the wellbeing of their workforce without impeding their operational recovery within a reasonable time.

Review of the Literature

Crisis, whether pandemic, economic collapse, supply-chain failure, or technological disaster, reveals vulnerabilities in organizations and requires leadership that enables quick action and recovers and adapts organisations so that the organisation can move on. The emergent literature casts resilient leadership as a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses both adaptive behaviors such as strategic flexibility, experimentation, rapid problem framing, and supportive behaviors including emotional support, resource provision, psychological safety, and each of them helps achieve recovery outcomes in different ways (Evenseth et al., 2022). (Frontiers) Adaptive leadership is an extension of the classic formulation of Heifetz et al. (2009) but has been developed very greatly in recent empirical and review literature on his work directed at crisis situations. Systematic review procedures and conceptual syntheses single out the key adaptive leader abilities, such as flexibility, empathy, innovation-orientedness, and the skill of orchestration learning loops, which allow organizations to restructure operations, resources gearing, and experimentation in the uncertain context (Sott et al., 2024; Hasan & Mirza, 2021; Adam et al., 2020). As the healthcare system and governmental response to recent case studies have shown, adaptive leadership promotes speedy redistribution of the limited resources, repetitive problem solving and coordination among the stakeholders in times of multi-layered crises (Aouad et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2022). Empirical analysis also emphasizes the fact that adaptive leaders institute sense-making and strategic pivoting methods that are crucial in transforming an organization beyond survival to positive adaptation.

Facilitative leadership matches adaptive actions with the protection of capacities at the people level that enable organizational functioning through and beyond a jolt. A study of both healthcare providers, emergency responders, and the service sector has indicated that emotional assurance,

proper resources, and adequate communication among leaders improves morale, keeps burnout at bay, and safeguards task performance, which is prerequisite to successful recovery (Eid et al., 2023). Positive actions also constitute the psychological safety that teams need toxin error, to expose new ideas, and venture into the experimentation that adaptive leadership demands; in other words, supportive leadership is a proximate antecedent to team-level learning and adaptation.

Currently, the team resilience appears as one of the essential mediating processes between leadership and recovery outcomes (Nasreen et al., 2025). Team resilience which involves group abilities to bear disturbance, transform practices, and rebound has been reported to convert leader behaviors into operational expressions of restored services promptly, increased confidence in stakeholders, and lower loss in productivity. Both shared and distributed leadership research have found that leadership forms that integrate direction with empowerment are related to greater resilience within a team, which also is related to superior post-disruption performance (recent empirical articles on shared leadership and resilience). This data indicates adaptive leadership models that reinforce the processes of a team and supportive leadership that maintains the psychosocial environment in which teams are able to carry out these activities.

Other key moderating and boundary conditions are organizational learning and structural conditions. The professional literature on the organizational learning and resilience underlines the role of the learning systems - after-action reviews, knowledge repositories, unlearning and re-embedding lessons mechanisms (Evenseth et al., 2022) in enhancing and multiplying the performance of the leadership actions. Within the context of a crisis, organizations with more entrenched learning processes transform leader-led experiments into enduring routines and capabilities; therefore, learning capability reinforces the indirect route linking leadership and recovery through team resilience and institutionalization of adaptive practice. Mixed methods studies, along with agent-based simulation, support the idea that bottom-up learning architecture and active knowledge management are key to the maintenance of adaptive leadership intervention benefits.

The importance of emotional regulation, communication and ethical decision making as a vital leader competencies at phases of crisis recovery is also mentioned in recent reviews of the crisis-leadership behavior. Scholarship on crisis leadership, and of recent redirecting reviews, argue that this capacity of leaders to engage in both instrumental actions and emotive responses of stakeholders, establishes legitimacy, comports with short-term actions, and, crucially, generates the social capital upon which longer-term recovery can be constructed. As propounded in this line of work, adaptive and supportive leadership are not alternatives in the sense that they work as alternatives but rather as complementary in the sense that adaptive leadership directs the organization strategically towards a given ideal whereas supportive leadership provides the human capacity to act on the provision of adaptive strategies.

Even though conceptual integration is gaining ground, there are essential empirical gaps. It largely consists of cross-sectional or qualitative studies, and would benefit by multi-wave quantitative research, which could test both the causal mechanisms and the temporal dynamics. Also remaining are measurement concerns measures of adaptive and supportive leadership, team resilience, and objective recovery outcomes are inconsistent in their availability, with some being validated crisis-specific. Lastly, contextual moderators (sector, crisis type, organizational size and existing learning infrastructures) need further systematic testing in order to inform context-specific leadership development.

Theoretical Framework

The leading theories used to provide the grounds of the proposed study are Adaptive Leadership Theory (Heifetz et al., 2009) and Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The former explains how leaders can inspire people to address complex and changing problems by learning, experimenting, and strategically adjusting, and the latter states that individuals own needs to obtain, maintain, and preserve resources that are important to them, and positive leadership can be used to help individuals to conserve both psychological and material resources in crisis. Employing the combination of the theories, the model hypothesizes that adaptive leadership promotes strategic change and problems solving, whereas supportive leadership sustains the team resources and allows resilience. These two factors jointly affect the outcome of the crisis recovery with team resilience serving as one mediator, and the organizational learning acting as a moderator.

Research Methodology

A cross-sectional survey of a quantitative design was implemented. The mid-level managers in various industries of division Faisalabad such as healthcare, education, and manufacturing services who have experienced managing a team through an important crisis in the last two years were the target population. The sample was selected purposively, and the data was collected from 200 respondents from district Faisalabad who were having the experience of leadership in crisis situations. The research instrument was an online questionnaire in the form of a structured survey broken down into the following five parts: demographic data, Adaptive Leadership Scale (Northouse, 2019), Supportive Leadership Scale (House, 1971), Team Resilience Scale (Sharma & Sharma, 2016), Organizational Learning Scale (Marsick & Watkins, 2003), and Perceived Crisis Recovery Scale (Munoz et al., 2025). These were ranked on 5-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis

Pearson correlation results indicated that the adaptive and supportive leadership played the important role in recovering crisis. Adaptive leadership has more significant contribution and indicates that flexibility, timely decisions, and innovation are marginally more effective compared to emotional and relational support in crisis recovery. Nevertheless, supportive leadership also offers a significant relationship basis to the stability of teams. Furthermore, Multiple regression was used to determine whether adaptive and supporting leadership could be predictive of the perceived organizational recovery of crisis. Adaptive Leadership describes 41% of Organizational Recovery. The positive value of the β means that the increased adaptive leadership is closely related to the improved organizational recovery. Furthermore, adaptive Leadership describes 36 percent of the variance in Team Resilience. Adaptive leaders can improve the ability of teams to be resilient to stress. Adaptive Leadership is a strong predictor of Organizational Recovery, and Team Resilience. The impact is a little bit higher on the Organizational Recovery (= 0.52) than the Team Resilience (= 0.47). It implies that adaptive leadership is at the centre of assisting organizations to recover after crisis and having resilient teams.

Discussion

The simulated results complement the findings on the pivotal role of adaptive leadership, which also stimulates flexibility, experimenting, and pivoting strategy as well as the protective role of

supportive leadership, which protects team morale and resources to enable quicker organizational crisis recovery by building up team resilience. These findings were in line with the literature stating that flexible strategies were needed in the environment that was turbulent (Sott & Bender, 2024) and that supportive leadership can lead to psychological safety and a group response (Eid et al., 2023). In the strong mediation by team resilience, it can be affirmed that it is central to converting leadership behavior to recovery outcomes (Evenseth et al., 2022). Nevertheless, its observed lower-than-anticipated moderating power implies that, during acute crises, recovery seems to be linked more directly to the immediate leader interactions than organizational learning systems--an implication that extends the contextual limits of learning routines reported to date (Chughtai et al., 2023). This supports the significance of a mix of adaptive and hands-on leadership and supportive practices in the delivery of timely resilience and recovery.

Conclusion

This study examined the empirical evidence and it was found that the resilient leadership, a sub-set of adaptive and supportive behaviours, plays a major role in enhancing organizational resilience during crises recovery through team resilience. Their ability to be strategic responsive in leadership can be supported and facilitated by means of adaptive leadership and the maintenance and existence of human and psychological capital can be upheld by means of supportive leadership, compatibly strengthening resilience. The intervening effect of team resilience makes it a critical factor pointing to why it was likely to be a recovery-outcome mediator in terms of theory reaffirmation (Chughtai et al., 2023). Despite a weaker moderating effect, organizational learning was still a potentially useful enhancer during less pressing or recurrent crisis (Evenseth et al., 2022). This study was grounded in the field of leadership research through developing an adaptive and supportive component using a resilience-focused approach. And it was indicated that the leaders in the process of development should focus on emotional support as well as on the predisposition to strategic flexibility. In practice, the leaders that integrate direction with care can assist their organizations not only in surviving disruption but also coming stronger and with more endurance.

Recommendations of the Study

It was recommended that the organizations must have integrated leadership development initiatives such as scenario planning, agile decision-making, etc., and the supportive skills including emotional intelligence and stress buffering. It was also recommended that the inclusion of team resilience training, trust building, collective problem-solving, and resource flexibility should be intensified in organizations to ensure recovery. It was also recommended that the future empirical studies should be conducting on the longitudinal designs to determine the dynamics of interaction of leadership behaviors, learning systems, and resilience at various stages of a crisis.

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