

DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE: EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATION-INITIATED SUPPORT INTERVENTIONS

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Abstract

The capacity of organizations of all types and sizes to face unexpected and unpredictable events is vital for survival and growth. Resilience is a desirable human characteristic. Individuals who can bounce back in stressful situations, setbacks, and failures in their lives are the ones with the characteristic of resilient. Resilient employees have a greater capacity to perform their job tasks and are better suited to adapt to adverse conditions. Knowing the effectiveness of organization-initiated support interventions in building resilience create opportunities to respond much better and emerge stronger in the world, which is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. The COVID-19 pandemic was such an unexpected and unpredictable event, which tested the capacity of organizations and their employees. During the lockdown periods for the pandemic, organizations had to introduce several support interventions that supposed to help in getting the work done from employees, who were working from home. Although not necessarily targeted to enhance employee resilience, the present study argues that organization-initiated support interventions introduced to mitigate hindrances of the lockdown could have increased employee resilience. Accordingly, the present study investigated organization-initiated support interventions introduced during the state-regulated lockdown that could have increased employee resilience. The findings provide an assessment of organization-initiated support interventions and their effects in building employee resilience.

Keywords

Resilience; organization support; organization interventions; positive psychology; psychological capital; COVID-19

JEL Classification

J24 Human Capital, Skills, Occupational Choice, Labor Productivity

M15 IT Management

N95 Asia including Middle East

O15 Human Resources

O31 Innovation and Invention: Processes and Incentives

O33 Technological Change: Choices and Consequences

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Introduction

The characteristics of the world currently experiencing is identified as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, which is abbreviated as VUCA [1]. The capacity of organizations of all types and sizes to face unexpected and unpredictable events is vital. The COVID-19 pandemic was such an unexpected and unpredictable event, which tested the capacity of organizations [2]. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations were on the verge of running out of businesses while many employees were on the verge of losing their jobs. All types of organizations across the world- small to large, start-up to well-established, local to multinational- faced the said challenges with varying degrees of impact. Although it is customary to have contingent plans up to date, during the state-mandated lockdown period, organizations were forced to seek alternative approaches to tackle problems arose unexpectedly affecting top to bottom since the business as usual was no longer possible.

Among the challenges organizations faced in manufacturing, financial, logistics, legal and compliance, people management gave the biggest challenge during the state-mandated lockdown periods. Maintaining a smooth flow of operations has become a challenge. On the one hand, working principles of organizations needed significant and unprecedented changes for the smooth functioning during the state-mandated lockdown periods. On the other hand, social distancing protocols followed by the lockdown had significant and unexpected changes in the way people systematized their work and social affairs [3].

To overcome challenges in managing employees, organizations had to introduce several support interventions that supposed to help in getting the work done from employees, who were working from home. Although not necessarily targeting to enhance employee resilience, this paper argues that organization-initiated support interventions introduced by organizations to mitigate hindrances of the lockdown could have increased employee resilience. As reviewed in the next section, resilience is an important positive psychological capital which should be possessed by humans [4]. Employees, who are resilient can make important contributions to all types of work organizations in terms of long-term organizational survival, growth, and sustainability. Therefore, the present study investigated organization-initiated support interventions introduced in response to the state-regulated lockdown that could have increased resilience in employees.

With regard to the importance of the study, organizations worldwide employ millions of average people. Understanding interventions that could enhance employee resilience is important, especially, during a crisis or an unexpected and unprecedented event. During the lockdowns as well as most part of the pandemic vast majority of employees performed their job tasks while being stationed at home. This working from home trend may continue in varying degrees across business sectors worldwide in the post-COVID era [5]. Hence, organizations should be interested in finding out what organization-initiated support interventions work on them, what interventions are right, and what interventions need improvements. Knowing the effectiveness of organization-initiated support interventions create an opportunity to respond much better and emerge stronger in the world, which is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Hence, an assessment of organization-initiated support interventions and their effects in building resilience could provide valuable insights for informed decision-making.

Literature review

Resilience

Individuals encounter stressful situations, setbacks, and failures in their lives. However, individual responses to these may vary; some will bounce back, while others may descend into depression [6, p. 2466]. The individuals who bounce back are the ones with the characteristic of resilient. Resilient individuals show ability to make a psycho-social retort in difficulty [7]. According to Wagnild and Young

[8, p. 165], “the quality of resilience is attributed to individuals who, in the face of overwhelming adversity, are able to adapt and restore equilibrium to their lives and avoid the potentially deleterious effects of stress”. In the context of work, resilience is “positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress, and increased responsibility” [9, p. 702]. Further, Luthans et al. [4, p. 547] state that resilience goes beyond attaining success, where they state, “when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success”. A similar view is expressed by Cooper et al. [6, p. 2466] and they viewed resilience as “bouncing back from setbacks combined with remaining effective in the face of tough demands and difficult circumstances and growing stronger in the process”.

Research also provides evidence that resilient employees are reported to be resourceful [8], better in managing their stress, health, and happiness [8], better in performing their jobs [10], more committed for their work [11], more satisfied with their jobs [12], and depicted more creative performance behaviors [13].

Most importantly, resilience is identified as a human characteristic which could be developed and improved through the appropriate use of organizational practices [4]. For example, Seligman [14] states that resilience can be trained and taught through appropriate resilience-building interventions. COVID-19 is a stressful situation that created many setbacks and failures in individuals. The present study investigated whether organization-initiated support interventions played a role in enhancing resilience in employees while working from home.

Working from home

The state-mandated lockdown in response to the pandemic was a new experience that forced organizations to find ways to get the work done remotely. The literature distinguishes between remote work and working from home. Remote work is identified as a method of performing job tasks with the aid of digital technologies outside of the traditional on-site office, not necessarily from home or the place of living [15]. Working from home is identified as a method of performing job tasks from the residence (or place of living) outside of the traditional on-site office atmosphere [16]. Accordingly, employees can work remotely fulltime and never from home whilst employees can work from home, where job tasks are executed, with all required office equipment in place. Still, both allows employees to successfully perform day-to-day job tasks without commuting to the office (place of employment), physically, every day. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the differences between remote work and work from home disappeared [17], and millions of people worldwide forced to work from home with bare minimum amenities and physical infrastructure. This led to the need of some sort of organization involvement to support employees who performed their jobs while confined to home.

Organization-initiated support interventions

Interventions by organizations play a vital role in building resilience in employees. Previous research provides evidence for the importance of organization interventions for building resilience [18] [19] [20]. With reference to commonly implemented organization practices, most research studies conducted prior to the pandemic suggest that the appropriate workplace practices can enhance employees’ physical, psychological, and social well-being for optimal job performance [21] [22] [23]. Specifically, it was found that providing autonomy and flexibility, placing trust on them, creating a safe workplace atmosphere, and communication clarity lead to positive accomplishments in the workplace [21] [23] [24]. Further, appropriate interventions for proper use of technologies for remote work led to get work done effectively [17]. Furthermore, the direction provided by the management is also identified as important for positive results [25] [17].

However, there are too major concerns with these studies that give rise to a research gap. On the one hand, these studies were conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, all most all pre-pandemic studies identified common set of interventions, which are of standard practices of organizations. However, the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic was new and sudden. Organizational retorts were quick, i.e., not pre-tested, and with trial and error in response to unpredictable circumstances. Still, most importantly, despite the fact that support provided by organizations can vary from one organization to the other, all most all organizations worldwide implemented some sort of support practices to ensure employees perform their job roles smoothly and maintain their physical and mental health while working from home. Therefore, following hypothesis was proposed for the study.

H1: Organization-initiated support interventions introduced in response to COVID-19 lockdown promoted resilience in employees who were working from home.

Methodology

With regard to measures used in the study, resilience was measured using 6 items from resilience scale of Wagnild and Young [8, 168], which were on a Likert scale of 7-points (strongly disagree=1, strongly agree=7). Organization-initiated support interventions were the initiatives by the organizations during the lockdown. This was measured using 16 items on a Likert scale of 5-points, which were developed for the present study (strongly disagree=1, strongly agree=5).

With regard to the sample, respondents were fulltime employees in white-collar or professional jobs worked in Sri Lanka by way of work from home during COVID-19 government-mandated lockdown period in the country - March to May 2020. The study used sampling methods of convenience and snowball to collect data. Although millions of fulltime employees qualify under this classification, following the guidelines and thresholds stipulated by Sekaran and Bougie [26, p. 263], 245 responses were received for the survey administered through Google Forms. When the respondents were grouped by the age range, 70% were in 20-35 range, 22% were in 36-50 range whereas 8% were in 51-65 range. When the respondents were grouped by sex and marital status, 49% were classified as males and 51% were classified as females while 49% were classified as married and 51% were classified as single. This group included all respondents who identified themselves as either never married, divorced, separated or widowed. Seventy-seven percent had either bachelor's degree or postgraduate degree as the education qualification while the rest of the respondents identified as certificate/diploma holders. When the respondents were grouped by the industry sector to which they were employed, 74% from services whereas the rest were from manufacturing.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used appropriately in the data analysis. Principal component factor analysis for EFA and structural equation modelling with AMOS software for CFA were deployed.

Results

The EFA yielded four factors for organization-initiated support interventions and one factor for resilience. Organization-initiated support interventions were labelled as work direction (WD), work collaboration/coordination (WCC), physical wellness (Phy-well), and psychological wellness (Psy-well). The fit indices of EFA for organization-initiated support interventions and resilience are shown in Table 1. The correlation values are shown in Table 2 together with values for average variance extracted (AVE).

Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis – fit-indices (source: authors)

Construct	EV	C	AVE	CR
Resilience	58.63	.86	.57	.89
Organization-initiated support interventions:	67.94	.92	-	-
WCC	18.23	.86	.58	.85
WD	17.30	.84	.51	.84
Psy-well	16.65	.81	.53	.82
Phy-well	15.77	.76	.53	.77

Note: EV= Explained variation; C= Cronbach's alpha; CR=Construct reliability

Table 2: Correlation between constructs (source: authors)

	Construct	M	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Sex [†]	-	-	-								
2	Age [#]	34.32	2.51	.031	-							
3	Marital status [†]	-	-	.079	.182*	-						
4	Sector [†]	-	-	.046	.076	.073	-					
5	WCC	3.85	.74	.029	.095	.065	.017	.760				
6	WD	4.05	.72	.066	.079	.098	.026	.430**	.710			
7	Psy-well	3.68	.81	.034	.102	.073	.033	.427**	.467**	.727		
8	Phy-well	3.77	.78	.013	.098	.081	.029	.482**	.448**	.416**	.729	
9	Resilience	5.94	.78	.104	.120	.107	.098	.384**	.454**	.370**	.332**	.766

Note: M=Mean; S.D.=Standard Deviation; **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05; [†]Binary coded, [#]in years; square root of AVE shown in diagonal entries.

Table 3 shows CFA fit indices for the model. All fit indices satisfied the thresholds recommended by Arbuckle [27].

Table 3: Confirmatory factor analysis – fit-indices (source: authors)

Construct	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Coefficient of determination
Resilience	3.931	.865	.810	.108	.173

Table 4 shows model estimates of CFA along with the scale items used to measure organization-led support interventions and resilience. Figure 1 also gives model estimates figuratively. The coefficient of determination is 0.173. This shows that 17% of the variation of resilience is accounted by organization-initiated support interventions. All the four practices in building resilience are significant; still, the highest contribution is from work direction related practices. Overall, hypothesis is supported.

Table 4: Model estimates and scale items - Resilience (source: authors)

Path	Standardized regression estimate
Resilience <-- WD	.322***
Resilience <-- Psy-well	.178**
Resilience <-- WCC	.169**
Resilience <-- Phy-well	.132*

Path			Standardized regression estimate
You are satisfied with the support received from your department/section for work	<--	WCC	.851***
You are satisfied with the support received from other departments/sections of your organization for work	<--	WCC	.810***
There is no resistance from your department/section for the way work is conducted	<--	WCC	.767***
Employees of your organization are willing to share work	<--	WCC	.694***
Your organization's expectations from its employees are quite clear	<--	WD	.824***
Your organization offered flexible work hours/days	<--	WD	.812***
Your organization's treatment to all employees is consistent	<--	WD	.776***
Your organization delegated responsibility to employees for their own work	<--	WD	.601***
Your organization reassured the importance of employees to it	<--	WD	.592***
Your organization is confident about its survival	<--	Psy-well	.825***
Your organization is appreciative of the work done by you during this difficult time	<--	Psy-well	.707***
Your organization extended the deadlines for your work goals	<--	Psy-well	.692***
Your organization shared positive outcomes with employees	<--	Psy-well	.661***
Your organization regularly collects information on employees' health conditions	<--	Phy-well	.815***
Your organization took necessary actions to make employees aware about hygienic behaviours	<--	Phy-well	.792***
Your organization is interested in knowing the health status of employees	<--	Phy-well	.545***
I feel that I can handle many things at a time	<--	Resilience	.712***
My belief in myself gets me through	<--	Resilience	.711***
I can get through difficult times because of experience	<--	Resilience	.690***
I am able to depend on self, more than anyone	<--	Resilience	.669***
I can be on my own if I have to	<--	Resilience	.664***
I can manage one way or other	<--	Resilience	.629***

Note: *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

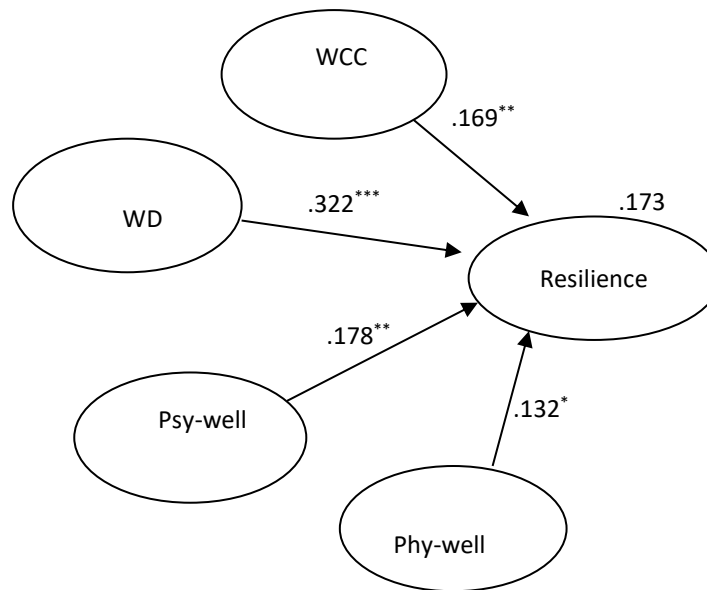


Figure 1: Conceptual framework with standardized regression estimates (source: authors)

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Discussion, conclusion, and implications

When COVID-19 emerged as a global health crisis, organizations worldwide followed the state-regulated social distancing guidelines, which led to the use of working from home. The introduction of measures to keep employees focused on their job tasks has become a common practice. The present study investigated organization-initiated support interventions introduced during the state-regulated lockdown and whether these interventions affected employees' resilience. First, it is worthy to investigate organization-initiated support interventions introduced during the pandemic. It provides valuable information about the sort of interventions important during that difficult time period. We identified four organization-initiated support interventions as shown in Tables 1 and 4 as well as Figure 1. Second, the mean values shown in Table 2 suggests that the level of employee resilience during the lockdown is considerably high (mean=5.94, on a 7-point scale). With regard to the effect of organization-initiated support interventions on resilience, all the interventions identified in the present study have significant effect on resilience development. When employees are high in resilience, they may have a greater capacity to perform their job tasks and are better suited to adapt to adverse conditions. The present study is novel since the investigation was on individuals who fulltime performed their job tasks as working from home employees during the lockdown for the pandemic. Hence, the findings provide valuable insights on the effectiveness of organization-initiated support interventions which were designed in response to an unpredictable and unprecedented event. When working from home is predicted to continue in the future as a preferred organization practice, knowing the effectiveness of organization-initiated support interventions is useful to make decisions on which interventions to invest in the future. On the whole, the findings contribute to the extant literature in the domains of resilience, organization-initiated support interventions, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide implications for practice.

When considering limitations, the study sample was selected using convenience and snowball techniques. Still, the study adhered to stipulated guidelines in selecting the sample, which were detailed in the section on methodology. Further, since the data were collected during the COVID-19

pandemic, the methods used were email and social media. Furthermore, the scope of the present study was organization-initiated support interventions. There can be several self-initiated interventions adopted by individuals which were not captured since these were beyond the scope of the present study. Future research could broaden the interventions to incorporate such interventions. In addition, individuals' socio-demographic factors could moderate their capacity to develop resilience. Future research could investigate moderating effects of these characteristics.

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