Dialogue, Debate, and Discussion

The Resilience Forum: A Lingering Conclusion

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The *Management Organization Review* 'Forum on Resilience' was kicked off by the
editors' perspective on the lingering new normal (Välikangas & Lewin, 2020).
We conclude the forum by reflecting on the persisting – perhaps hopeful,
perhaps disturbing – take-aways. Not surprisingly, some companies have demon-
strated resilience capabilities in quickly seizing opportunities even when faced with
what initially looked like the end of business. Such determined agility represented,
for example, improvising an emergent-opportunity-fitting strategy or it may have
been manifested by government action (e.g., China, New Zealand, and Finland).
Most famously, Zoom, the by-now ubiquitous video communications company,
benefited from being in the right place at the right time, but also effectively
dealt with issues such as 'zoom bombing', a security breach, including an upgrade
of its encryption. Such successful growth strategy requires being ready for an oppor-
tunity. But the backward-looking depiction of successes also highlights the absence of
a developed science of organization design underlying resilience and management
practices (Lewin & Välikangas, 2020). In addition, building cognitive and stake-
holder preparedness, as Zhang, Dong, and Yi (2020) and Liu and Yin (2020)
point out, may be important, as well as considering leadership implications discussed
by Giustiniano, Cunha, Simpson, Rego, and Clegg (2020) in the context of coping
with the paradoxes unleashed by resilience. Emergency management systems
become sorely tested (Cai & Ye, 2020). Do we have a new buzzword for uncertain
times (Cai, 2020) or something to learn from that will help in coping with future
crises or understanding the renaissance of resilience? Some themes rise above others.

THINK LIKE A SCIENTIST

Grandori (2020), in the first Resilience Forum, called for policymakers to think like
scientists. Shadid Jameel, CEO of the Welcome Trust, concurs: 'I think countries

that have done well have listened to science and countries that have done badly have not listened to science' (Pilling, 2020). Listening to, and understanding, science may be one of the challenges societies need to own, teaching students and citizens, and policymakers, to exercise thinking practices that allow for a conversation with scientists. Such a dialogue is particularly acute in the era of social media where confirmation bias reigns: there is 'evidence' with echo chambers for any argument, however flawed, somewhere on the internet. Look for it and the all-knowing search engine will find it. Moreover, the outpouring of extreme emotions and various conspiracies stoked by social media has been building across the world for some time. For societies to better cope with emergent grand challenges and sudden crises, we need to go beyond this witchcraft. Adding to the acrimony, the pandemic has been shredding any relative certainty people have of their place in society, which has been eroding by the unfolding geopolitical dynamics over the past decades. Cynicism is easy to fall back to.

Science competence is also crucial to avoid the kind of destructiveness that results from the intent to mislead and produce faked evidence, in particular in the statements of public authorities. Pomerantsev (2014), a journalist, recounts Russian propaganda strategies in an insightful documentation titled 'Nothing is true but everything is possible'. Beyond climate change, pandemics, and inequality, citizens' lack of trust in their government represents an even bigger threat as it will prevent coping with the crises, including building future preparedness. Zhou (2020), in an earlier Resilience Forum, discussed the suppressive role of communication in crisis management in China and its lessons for resilience (see also Mitchell, Yu, Liu, & Peel, 2020).

BATTLE INSTITUTIONAL DECAY

Societal preparedness requires competent institutions that take care of people's business. The *Financial Times*, in its analysis of the COVID-19 crisis taking hold (Hall et al., 2020; Kuchler & Edgecliff-Johnson, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2020), points to the importance of local and central government competence in early detection and determined preventative action, or lack thereof. Trust in institutions matters. Hand in heart: Would you take a vaccine that has been produced by 'Operation Warp Speed' without wanting to read the science behind it? The political pressures to approve a vaccine for the current pandemic are testing gold-standard institutions like the Federal Drug Agency in the US. It is more important than ever that the crucial public institutions that provide the foundation for democratic societies do not deteriorate and decay into incompetence, partisan agendas, and lack of concern for the trust that they must earn from the citizens they serve. Yet the crisis of legitimacy affecting capitalism, seen as out of balance in many liberal democracies, does not bode well for societal resilience (Henderson, 2020). Further, de-globalization tests the viability of international trade and outward foreign direct investments, including the survival of the multinational enterprise as China and the US are fast decoupling (see Li, 2020).

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF KNOWN CRISES

Even if we knew that there is a new pandemic coming, as we do, or that climate change will have severe implications for living conditions on earth, which is already evident, societies seem to be singularly unable to prepare for such catastrophic threats. The experience with the COVID-19 pandemic, some argue, suggests that decisive action is possible under grave enough urgency. Maybe so, but are we really better prepared, despite billions spent, for the next pandemic, probably around the corner as people keep pushing against nature around us? Perhaps a more realistic response would be to consider strategies for coping with sudden crises that come full force at a time that is always a surprise. Bergström (2018) notes that some Swedish cities require crisis self-sufficiency for 72 hours, after which officials would be able to mount rescue of their citizens. That is a rather short time to salvage a catastrophe, however.

CAN WE ACCELERATE SCIENCE?

Merck's CEO recently noted that 'you cannot rush science' (Stankiewicz, 2020). Yet amidst the urgencies of now, there may be cause for rethinking how science is done. Science may be the best chance we have in meeting our future. For sure, basic research takes its time and cannot, and should not, be clocked. Yet there are drivers, such as new technologies and tools, open science platforms and clouds, and data science that offer some hope for acceleration, according to the National Institute of Health in its COVID-19 strategy response (NIH, 2020). To expand research and enable diverse collaboration on artificial intelligence, Stanford University, for example, has introduced the National Research Cloud to bring the federal government, research universities, and private enterprise together (Etchemendy & Li, 2020). In the COVID-19 vaccine development, pre-publication platforms have increased knowledge sharing but also lifted the characteristic of academic research, in particular, the peer-review process. Could peer review, dependent on the dedication of peer researchers to serve science but on behalf of academic journals that are sometimes published for profit, be accelerated by eliminating the ethical dilemma between voluntarism and publisher business?

We wish to conclude the Forum on Resilience with a hopeful observation that inevitably crises attract a lot of attention, and humans have proven quite adaptable in many ways once again, for example in working virtually. Yet, as we congratulate ourselves for making it, while facing the next wave of the raging epidemic, our response capacity may not be enough. We need to be better prepared. A colleague in Denmark recently noted that it has been refreshing listening to medical doctors for policy guidance, instead of economists, for the past several months. Who should we be listening to next and how do we expand our capacity to hear, and evaluate, scientific advice? It is with science as it is with democracy: the worst system we

have, except all the others. But both can perhaps be strengthened to turn threats into opportunities (Välikangas, 2010) before they become either.

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