

Wayfinding Through Crisis: A Practice-Based Perspective on the Emergence of Organizational Resilience Strategies

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores how executives develop strategies that enhance organizational resilience during unexpected crises. While prior research acknowledges that executives actively seek solutions in times of crisis, little is known about the specific practices through which new strategies emerge. The study investigates the role of wayfinding practices—intentional, adaptive navigation efforts—in the emergence of resilience strategies within organizations.

Methodology: The study adopts a qualitative, multiple-case study design, drawing on eighteen semi-structured interviews conducted across fifteen firms in the Norwegian Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industry during the COVID-19 crisis. Data were analyzed abductively to develop a conceptual framework linking wayfinding practices to strategic emergence.

Findings: The analysis identifies three distinct wayfinding practices—envisioning, rationalizing, and empathizing—that executives employed in response to crisis conditions. These practices support nine sets of specific approaches that executives used to anticipate, assess, and navigate crisis-induced uncertainty. The study shows how such practices contribute to the formation of adaptive, aligning, and recovery-oriented strategies, thereby fostering organizational resilience.

Research limitations/implications: The study focuses on a single national context and industry during a specific crisis, which may limit generalizability. Future research could examine wayfinding practices across different sectors or cultural settings and during other types of crises.

Originality/Value: This research offers a novel practice-based perspective on organizational resilience, introducing wayfinding as a central concept. It provides a fine-grained understanding of how executives enact resilience through situated practices, thus contributing to both resilience and strategy-as-practice literatures.

Keywords: Organizational resilience, wayfinding practices, AEC industry, COVID-19, crisis, multiple-case study