STAYING ALIVE: EXPLORING ADAPTIVE CAPABILITIES

Melanie Hinterplattner, University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Wehrgrabengasse 1-3, 4400 Steyr, Austria, phone: 0043 5 0804 33200, melanie.hinterplattner@fh-steyr.at.

Stanley Fawcett, University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Wehrgrabengasse 1-3, 4400 Steyr, Austria.

Markus Gerschberger, Josef Ressel Center for Real-time Value Network Visibilty at University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Wehrgrabengasse 1-3, 4400 Steyr, Austria.

ABSTRACT

Twenty Twenty's Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for rapid response in a discontinuous, disruptive environment. Hesitant and/or misguided responses have increased the costs Covid-19 has imposed on society, both in terms of lives lost and economic damage. Research that discerns why so many decision makers were paralyzed by the onset of Covid-19 is timely and relevant. This study evaluates why a few companies were able to respond quickly and effectively, while others were not. Specifically, we ask, "What does a rapid adaptation response capability—one that can help a company survive now and evolve to thrive in a new normal—look like?" We rely on evolution theory, systems design, and the capability development literature and take an inductive, case-based approach to gain insight into how organizational DNA evolves to enable or hinder rapid adaptation. This study contributes to theory and practice in two important ways. First, we find, and document, that the organizational DNA of the fastest adapters is different from that of merely fast-response companies. Second, we develop a systems diagram to explicate the dynamics of a rapid adaptation capability. Ultimately, we identify specific roles managers must perform to genetically modify their organizations to achieve a rapid adaptation capability. Overall, findings suggest that organizational DNA is critical to surviving and thriving in what appears to be a pandemic-prone environment. Given we are likely to see future pandemics, it is essential that organizations start the process of evolving their DNA.