COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND DISASTERS: THE ROLE OF CORPORATE COMPETITIVENESS AND ADAPTABILITY

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Abstract:
It is already a proven fact that companies play a major role in shaping the modern world, overall companies have proven a great experience in dealing with a fast-paced world that is in constant change. The unique experience, competitive nature and adaptability can and have provided proof that private companies can and should become more involved in plans to build community resilience. We all know that crises and disasters inflict perturbations on human society and its development and in many years it takes years, even decades to mend the effects on a societal level, while entire lives, hopes, and dreams get lost forever. Corporations play a major role in shaping our world through the economic, social, technological, and behavioral impact that they have on those who are touched either directly by their products and services or indirectly by the social and economic changes those products and services bring about.

Key words: corporate communication; community resilience; corporate social responsibility; corporate competitiveness; KPI; emergency preparedness; disaster response; disaster relief; emergency; innovation; corporate governance

1.Introduction

Community resilience represents the ability that a community has to use systems, organizations, and available resources to withstand, respond, and recover from crises, disasters, and other risks and adverse situations.

Community resilience plays an important role in our world as our future as a civilization is not a given, it is the result of our way of dealing with the situations we are facing and the ability to identify the risks in advance. Community resilience depends on the way we manage integrating resources and know-how from governmental, non-profit, and for-profit sectors to maximize infrastructure protection, and economic output and increase social and economic resilience.[1]

It is known that there are multiple threats to our world and they are going to continue existing even if we work on reducing them this is why it is vital to increase community resilience by having adequate preparedness plans and developing effective responses by identifying all resources and know-how that can increase overall resilience.

Community resilience can be assessed through a series of tools and improved, but we do have to be aware that even these assessment tools have to constantly improve to have a better picture of the risks we have to face and the measures needed to increase resilience.[2]

2.The role of corporate competitiveness and adaptability

Competitiveness and adaptability are important traits to ensure that businesses grow on a constant basis while fulfilling the needs of customers, following legislation, and working both on expansion and resilience in the marketplace. Because of this businesses tend to acquire and develop know-how and processes on how to constantly improve, evolve, and innovate by creating new products and technologies, but also collaborate with competitors and keep in touch constantly with the customers and adapt by using feedback.[3]

Research on community resilience usually was focused on government institutions, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations, but we all have seen the major contributions that private companies and corporations have had in shaping the world today and we can only acknowledge the fact that their role will only increase in the years to come.

Let's remember that we live in a world in which most communications are done through applications developed and owned by private companies, on devices developed and produced by private companies using networks owned by private companies. [4] We live in a world where satellites are being launched at a higher rate by private companies than by governments and there is basically no field of human endeavor in which you cannot find companies that compete for their share in the market. [5]

There are more than 4500 artificial satellites in orbit, out of those, 1655 are owned by a single company, most of the rest being owned by other companies,[6] Considering the scope, adaptive structures, and capabilities of both organizational and impact the society we do have to take a close look at the role of companies in our future as they have a proven track record of business continuity, adaptability, clear key performance indicators, and strategies to use feedback both from external and internal sources to adapt and improve constantly.

We also have to understand that companies always consider the financial, legal, and organizational consequences of their environment and the measures that they adopt at a scope that often surpasses the way government organizations work and strategize. This is mainly because of their need to remain competitive in a smaller world as we are now more connected than ever before companies must consider the legislation of multiple countries and often deal with multiple state agencies and institutions that may be quite different although they deal with the same overall domain.

Competitiveness is a multidimensional concept that refers to different levels: national, regional, industrial or individual. It is also connected to sustainability and risk as you cannot be competitive if you do not develop the ability to identify risks and ways of dealing with them. Companies need to be adaptable and able to rise to the challenge to ensure competitiveness and sustainability in the face of environmental, legal, financial, behavioral, or state-related risks.[7]

Because of this, we have to start thinking of the corporate environment as part of the solution and learn from corporate experience, adaptability, and even competitive nature as competition is a crucial part of improvement.

Corporations have proven on a consistent basis that the way they use key performance indicators for strategic and operational improvement makes decisions based on analysis and focus on issues to handle them in desired time frames.[8]

There are many ways in which risks and emergencies can turn into major disasters that challenge communities because their full extent is hard or impossible to predict, they have a dynamic nature, and the effects impact communities in social, political, economic, environmental, and psychological aspects that are also hard to identify and deal with.   Because   of   this

communication plays a major role in the four phases of disaster management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.[9]

Communication is one of the essential parts of emergency management both before and during such an event, as it can prepare communities and also inform, direct and coordinate the efforts of relief and recovery.[10]

Because companies conduct constant internal surveys on workplace effectiveness it was identified that communication is ranked in the top three issues that need to be constantly worked on. Communication is important as it means not only sharing a message but also reaching a shared understanding.[11]

Involving corporations more in community resilience programs can transfer valuable experience and skill sets on improving communication, management, team organization, and many other things that can increase overall effectiveness or community resilience and response implementation.[12]

Over the years we can observe an organic growth of corporate engagement in natural disaster response and relief has grown in scale and diversity through partnerships with traditional actors and between themselves thus being able to be involved in on-the-ground interventions having an enhanced operational capability, better coordination and strategic thinking in dealing with disaster preparedness and response.[13]

Corporations with strong brand reputation, strategy, and corporate culture have a competitive advantage, this is why multi-nationals that have this connection realized have strong internal cultures and employee retention while also having good morale.[14]

Working on developing exchange programs to transfer know-how and skills between corporate, non-governmental, and governmental institutions will create more opportunities and unlock more resources for greater and faster action in the areas affected to ensure recovery and restore consumer markets and product supply chains.[15]

It is imperative to find ways to have public and private rescue efforts coordinate more closely with clear and optimal use of as many available resources as possible to ensure economic and social growth.

The number of catastrophic acts of nature and disasters has increased in recent years happening on a more frequent basis and causing more destruction and loss. The increase in inflation also resulted in an increase in the cost to deal with relief and recovery, we also see a rising in the number of those affected by disasters. All these simultaneous changes in the nature and effects of disasters have surpassed the traditional sources of funding and intervention for disaster recovery, from governments, nonprofits, and NGOs that could not keep pace, so further resources are needed. Corporations became more involved and stepped in and increased their role, according to data in 200 fewer than one-third of the world's 3000 largest companies donated to disaster relief, but by 2015, the share surpassed 90%, with an increase of tenfold of the average donation.[16]

The fast-paced changes and expansion of risks and disasters for our communities require an adequate response that requires an expansion in resources, technologies, and skill set to increase community resilience and development.

Working on increasing community resilience is vital as our modern society has seen an increase in the causes of disasters and the risks that threaten the well-being of social and community development.

We need to promote and develop individual and community preparedness as resources for increasing response effectiveness and we need to be able to supplement government capabilities with support, resources, and expertise from companies, NGOs, and faith-based organizations as they can inform, train and prepare communities on a personal level in a coordinated effort. We need to acknowledge to shift the paradigm of relying exclusively on states and international organizations and put the focus on an engaged and coordinated effort between different types of actors.[17]

On an international level, we had some incredible support offered by private companies like the 800 million assistance package offered by Alphabet to support small and medium businesses[18] or the 250 million offered by Airbnb to support their hosts[19] during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Romania has seen in recent years some examples of this kind of sustained efforts and collaboration after The Colectiv Club disaster companies and NGOs offered assistance, during the Covid-19 pandemic over 60.000 calls were responded to by volunteers [20] as well the Ukrainian crisis has also shown a major outpour of support from the Romanian companies, NGO's and individuals the Facebook group "Uniți pentru Ucraina" that is used to coordinate a large part of non-governmental assistance has over 160.000 members.[21]

There is also the technical part of resilience and Romania already has some experience in this as well. In 2017, implemented Ro-Alert, a Cell Broadcast message system to alert and inform the population for which the private communications companies have a major responsibility in assuring the maintenance and interoperability with government systems.[22]

Innovation and implementation of new technologies are also a major part of the ability to respond and increase resilience and companies are some of the biggest innovators of our world – if we look between 2003-2022, during we have the first smartphones, new social media platforms, the rise of electric vehicles, higher internet speed, better mobile devices and gadgets, life-enhancing advances, as well major technological advances and their impact on the social aspects of life.[24]

Even though we don't want to face adversity or disasters it does happen, this is why we need to prepare our communities and all the actors that comprise them and their comparative advantages to increase the overall capability. We all know that companies often go above and beyond when it comes to proactive planning because they have to always optimize resources and maximize the return on investment.

Business continuity is a major part of company strategy and it works to ensure that businesses have processes and that the right support is allocated in case any negative event that might cause adverse effects do occur.[25]

While not all companies have the same capabilities to deal with the risk we know that at least when it comes to major companies they have developed strategies for disaster recovery. Some making sharing this information and stressing the importance for other companies to develop this area more, as unchecked vulnerabilities find a way of coming to the fore.[26]

Some companies make resilience part of their core value and part of their brand to develop defense mechanisms meant to protect data, people, and assets as they understand that expansion and transformation also need further steps to secure their services from any adverse impact on their operations and revenue stream.

Although it may be impossible to prepare for every single potential problem solid strategies to increase resilience and disaster recovery can help reduce disruptive events and ensure business continuity. [27]

Risk is a fact and even if you are prepared and ready to expect the unexpected you can still be surprised by events, but with clear plans, processes, and people in place, it is possible to be more resilient.[28]

Disaster recovery plans need to be thoroughly documented and tested especially in today's age with the increase of threats.[29] We can observe that companies understand their duty of ensuring their clients and partners that operational security is a priority for them and take constant steps to increase their own resilience.

We can clearly see a positive trend when companies that are competitors discuss the importance of resilience of cooperation and the need to increase preparedness and response capabilities in front of disasters.

2.1 The need to increase cooperation and develop coordination tools

The fact that we've seen the increased role of corporations in disaster relief and response and that they have specific comparative advantages and resources that can improve the process is not enough if we don't understand the need for cooperation and coordination.

Once we understand that cooperation and coordination between different types of actors such as governmental forces, companies, nonprofits and NGOs, and individuals that want and have the skills to assist, it becomes clear that we need the structural means to ensure cooperation and coordination is possible.

As the most important disaster response provider of relief and response it is clear that the government should have the role of organizing the means through which coordinated efforts become not only possible but also efficient and clear. As disaster response is very complex the importance of clear coordinated efforts is an indisputable fact.

Some countries have a special governmental organization that fulfills this role of being able to assist individuals and other kinds of actors to work together in a coordinated way to maximize preparedness and response capability. In the US such a model is AmeriCorps from which we can learn some good lessons of good practice. The organization has courses, training, and exercises thus increasing the ability of the involved actors to act efficiently in a coordinated way if the need arises.

The existence of an organization that works in increasing cooperation and coordination using modern ways of communication, courses as well as creating a round table where skill sets and know-how can be exchanged would be a massive benefit as it would create a clear established structure, efforts could be coordinated better and those involved will be trained on leading such efforts while there will also be a structure and procedures set in place.

Having clear a clear structure and procedures have been proven to increase efficiency in virtually all aspects of human society, so it is only a logical step that states would start working on such an organization before the next major disaster, not during it.

Establishing a kind of organization could also facilitate better analysis, research, and preparedness by having information and input from multiple actors from varied sectors that could create a better understanding of risks and available resources to tackle them and also create a better overall strategy and support structure.

Developing an umbrella organizational structure that can bring together voluntarily multiple actors that can share knowledge and resources thus facilitating a better overall response and higher research analysis capabilities and transparency, as well it ensures a more democratic decision making process.

3.Conclusion

Community resilience is an important component that stakeholders have to keep in mind and the ability to assess threats efficiently and prepare communities to deal with them increases if new actors get involved and engaged in working more on developing disaster recovery plans.

Assessing threats and optimizing coordination and cooperation are fundamental components in, preparing communities and developing ways to increase their resiliency in the wake of disasters. Developing an institutional framework to facilitate cooperation and coordination is crucial to improve the integration of multiple actors in the recovery and intervention process.

Having clear strategies and preparing communities and different types of actors to be better coordinated and engaged can considerably improve resiliency by making sure everyone can have a clear understanding of possible risks and develop adequate strategies and procedures.

Another important component is the constant exchange and dissemination of know-how and regular exercises and simulations because by doing this the involved actors become better prepared to interact and deal with challenges when they arise.

Dissemination of information can be realized by developing guides and procedures that are known to everyone and thus cooperation becomes easier as there is less pressure to organize during or in the immediate aftermath of an event. This is involving corporations and other actors and creating a structure that can facilitate and expand coordination, cooperation and know-how can lead to safer lives and far more resilient communities.

Community resilience strategies must also increase the transparency of the decision-making process and the resources used as well as the balance between expertise and community democratic input. It is important to understand that strategies that strive to build community resilience must do that while respecting and paying attention to feedback from those communities.

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