

## LEADER FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE OF INTERVENTION AGENCIES IN RIVERS STATE

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between leader flexibility and resilience of intervention agencies in Rivers State. The study is designed as a correlational research study and adopted the quantitative methodology in its investigation. Data was generated from a population of 13 intervention agencies in Rivers State. The representatives for the study comprised 91 management staff of the 13 intervention agencies with data sourced using the structured questionnaire. Analysis on the direction and strength of the relationship also included the test for hypotheses all using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation coefficient. Findings revealed that all dimensions of leader flexibility contribute and significantly impact the outcomes of organisational resilience of the agencies; hence, all null hypotheses were therefore rejected. It was therefore concluded that by reinforcing leader flexibility these agencies can effectively address their resilience concerns. It was recommended that the leadership of the agencies structure their work arrangements, communication channels and allow for increased participation, focused on enhancing the flexible nature of leadership for improved outcomes of resilience of the intervention agencies.

**Keywords:** Flexibility leader, organisational resilience, situation awareness, vulnerabilities management, organisational agility

### INTRODUCTION

Most organisations today face a wide range of challenges and are constantly striving to remain relevant and survive the changes in their environment. Amongst these challenges are high employee turnover of specialized skilled labour, hyper competition, cybercrime and fluctuating macro-economic variables arising from the turbulent and dynamic business environment in which it operates; and this have made the business context and environment highly volatile (Denyer, 2017). These challenges have increased the unpredictability of the environment and have in recent years, led to the instability and the failure of organisations (Ateke, Zeb-Obipi, & Ekweozor, 2020).

Williams et al. (2017) highlight the different views in the literature about whether resilience is an organizational characteristic, an outcome, or a process (or a combination thereof). First,

there is the question whether resilience as a characteristic or capacity is fixed or “malleable”. Most scholars seem to agree that organizational resilience is not only about the inherent (static) ability of individuals or organizations to maintain their performance levels under challenging circumstances but also about the dynamic, emergent capacity to adapt, which develops over time as circumstances change (Wildavsky, 1988). Second, resilience as an outcome relates to the state of return following adversity.

Research on organisational resilience, is such that draws on the organisations disposition to change, however, Nabilah (2023) emphasized the centrality of the role of leadership, particularly adaptive leadership in stimulating change and effective adjustments to the realities of the environment. Nabilah (2023) described leader flexibility as important in driving change through relationships, especially collaborations with employees and stakeholders. Extant studies have scarcely examined this perspective of change, more so, the influence of leader flexibility on organisational resilience. Leader flexibility is also important when unusual events and external changes create an immediate crisis or an emerging threat or opportunity. Abrupt changes in the preferences or priorities of bosses, clients, or other users provide one source of uncertainty, and they may require quick revisions in plans and schedules.

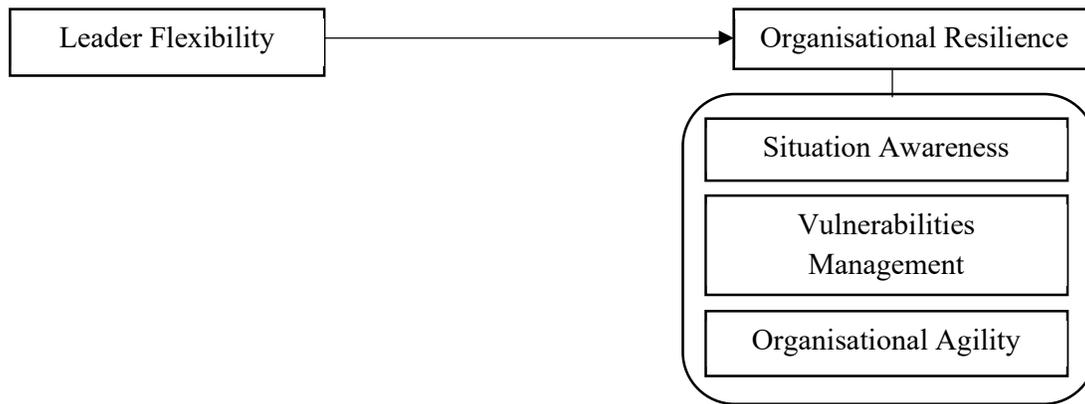
Leader flexibility is also essential when there are unusual events such as accidents, equipment breakdowns, supply shortages, a terrorist attack, or the effects of bad weather. Crisis management requires unusual actions and behaviours from leaders, and failure to respond in a decisive, appropriate way is often very visible (Ali, 2016). External changes that will affect the organization may be gradual rather than abrupt, but major changes may be needed to respond to new threats or opportunities. Even when there is more time for planning an appropriate strategy, adaptive leadership is important to ensure the organization will survive and prosper in the future (Northouse, 2019). Finally, when managers receive feedback about the effects of prior actions and decisions, there is an opportunity to evaluate effectiveness and determine if additional actions are required. An adaptive response is especially important when there is information that a prior decision or strategy is not working as expected and is likely to fail if adjustments are not made in a timely way.

Unfortunately, research bordering on the relationship between leader flexibility and organisational resilience is scant, particularly such addressing the unique experiences of state-owned intervention agencies, in Rivers State, Nigeria. This study as a departure from previous research interests, will investigate the relationship between leader flexibility and organisational resilience of State-owned intervention agencies in Rivers State. This is intended to not only highlight the unique challenges of these agencies, but to also enrich scholarship on the extent to which flexibility qualities in leadership, impact or influence the organisations capacity for sustained effectiveness and performance.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the relationship between leader flexibility and organisational resilience. The particular objectives are to:

- i. Examine the relationship between leader flexibility and situation awareness of intervention agencies in Rivers State
- ii. Determine the relationship between leader flexibility and vulnerabilities management of intervention agencies in Rivers State
- iii. Examine the relationship between leader flexibility and organisational agility of intervention agencies in Rivers State

## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework for leader flexibility and organisational resilience

**Source:** Researcher's Desk (2025) with the measures for organisational resilience are sourced from Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003).

## Research Questions

The research questions are put forward as follows:

- i. What is the relationship between leader flexibility and situation awareness of intervention agencies in Rivers State?
- ii. What is the relationship between leader flexibility and vulnerabilities management of intervention agencies in Rivers State?
- iii. What is the relationship between leader flexibility and organisational agility of intervention agencies in Rivers State?

## Hypotheses

A total of three null hypothetical statements is to be tested in this research. These are as follows:

- HO<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between flexibility and situation awareness of intervention agencies in Rivers State
- HO<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between flexibility and vulnerabilities management of intervention agencies in Rivers State
- HO<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between flexibility and organisational agility of intervention agencies in Rivers State

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Review

#### Organisational Learning Theory

The theoretical foundation for this study is the organisational learning theory, originally proposed by Argyris in 1977 and later adapted in research by Kurt and March ((Saadat &

Saadat, 2016) literature, initially, the term “OL” was employed by Kurt and March (Saadat & Saadat, 2016). However, Easterby-Smith, Crossan, and Nicolini (2000) use empirical analysis to explore the organisational learning. Whatever the case may be, the debate over whether OL are viewed as an alteration in perceptions or behaviour is declined considerably recently as a result of prevalent reception in recent literature that acquisition involves equally a shift in perception and a shift in bearing. Practically everyone agrees that learning entails both mental processes and actual behaviour. For Odor (2018), OL is a process occurring within the learning organisation. Since learning organisational culture has a direct impact on performance and innovativeness, this research argues that it can lead to long-term organisational prosperity.

The core element of learning is to take action. Knowledge management systems and statistics databases have been exploited in order to progress and use information composed by the organisation for the upgradation of the organisation" (Giesecke & McNeil, 2004). As a result, acquiring information but not putting it to use in daily actions does not imply learning. Also, according to Pentland, OL is the ability of an organisation to operate proficiently (Pentland, 1992). A number of academics assessed an organisation's product or service features or patent stock to measure knowledge (Alcacer & Gittelman, 2006). Better knowledge and understanding improve actions in organisations through the process of organisational learning.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Leader Flexibility**

A flexible leader is open-minded and responsive to new ideas and perspectives, in addition to being adaptable. They recognize that different team members bring different skills and experiences to the table, and they value varied points of view (Northouse, 2019). This enables them to make informed judgments that take into account many factors, resulting in better outcomes for the team (Dugan, 2017; Heifetz et al., 2009). A flexible leader is also not hesitant to delegate duties and encourage team members to take responsibility of their work. They have faith in their team's ability and provide them the autonomy and support they require to achieve. This not only promotes individual confidence and morale, but it also fosters a sense of teamwork inside the organization.

### **Organisational resilience**

Organisations are currently operating in an environment of unprecedented risk and uncertainty linked to economic turbulence, geopolitical turmoil, looming climate change, and global health crises. While many organizations suffer setbacks when confronted with adversity, some seem to be more successful than others in responding to unexpected or extreme events. These companies appear to have found ways to rebound and emerge stronger, a phenomenon described in the literature as “resilience”. Organizational resilience is an increasingly popular theme in both academic research and business practice. In addition, several professional bodies have issued standards and guidelines covering principles and activities for enhancing organizational resilience (ISO, 2017).

**Situation awareness:** Situational awareness is the capacity to gather, process, and analyse information about significant events. Situational awareness, in its simplest form, is the capacity to be aware of what is happening in the immediate surroundings, how things change over time, and how to be relevant in any given setting (Dekker, 2011). This measure of organizational resilience describes the extent to which the organization is conscious or cognizant of the factors and conditions that shape their environment or context of operations (Dekker, 2011). A fundamental approach to increasing an organisation’s situation awareness is by encouraging some experience of pseudo-crisis situations through the use of scenario exercises.

**Vulnerabilities management:** Ahiauzu and Jaja (2015) stated that the management of keystone vulnerability refers to the operational and managerial aspects of an organization that could affect the organization negatively in instantaneous or insidious crisis situations. Vulnerability management describes the level to which an organization concentrates on identifying and managing specific parts or features in its operations that might be considered susceptible or vulnerable under pressure, change, or competition (Folke, 2006). In this vein, the organization focuses on addressing its shortcomings through the resource reinforcement and support actions. Bhamra et al (2011) observed that vulnerability management can also be carried out or expressed in the organizations partnerships and its capacity to leverage on its networks in bridging its functional or operational vulnerabilities.

**Organisational agility:** Organizational agility refers to firm's ability to sense opportunities and threats and respond by assembling the needed organizational resources with rapidity (Wamba, Akter & Guthrie, 2020). Agility, as a business concept, was coined in a manufacturing context – particularly in relation to flexible manufacturing systems (Del Giudice, et al. 2021). Agile organization has the ability to survive and prosper in a competitive environment of continuous and unpredictable change by reacting quickly and effectively to changing markets, driven by customer-defined products and services. An agile system has capabilities (hard and soft technologies, human resources, educated management, and information) to meet the rapidly changing needs of the marketplace (speed, flexibility, customers, competitors, suppliers, infrastructure, and responsiveness) (Schirmacher & Schoop, 2018).

### **Empirical Review**

Davahli, Karwowski, Sonnoz and Apostolipalos (2020) carried out a systematic review to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry. They observed that the hospitality industry was affected in the areas of job loss, revenue loss, decrease in market demand, employment issues of their workers travel behaviour and COVID-19 spreading patterns. They found out that the way government and corporate bodies respond to the pandemic will go a long way to influence the health and safety of its workers. They suggested the invention and application of new technology and equipment in the tourist industry to protect their guests and workers alike.

Ameji, Taiga and Amade (2020) study on effect of Covid-19 pandemic on small medium scale enterprises in Lokoja used a sample of 100 respondents who are business owners selected using simple random sampling. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Their study revealed that the income of some dwindle during the pandemic due to increase in prices of materials, low demand for goods and services leading to the layoff of some of their staff. The study recommends the use of zero interest loan, grants, tax reduction for SMEs owners so as to cushion the effect of the pandemic on them.

Emejale, Agbasi and Nosike (2020) carried out a study on how strategic agility can reduce the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on small medium enterprises. They adopted survey research design. Their population for the study was 1500 while sample size was 306 business owners chosen using Krejcie and Morgan formula. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using simple regression technique. The findings of the study revealed that policy of strategic foresight will help companies to be conversant with happenings in their external environment so as to be prepared for any crisis or adversity.

Omar et al. (2020) also studied the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on the survival strategies of firms in Malaysia. They established that pre-crisis resilience strategies prepared the firms

for Covid disruptions through asset acquisition and working capital rationing. The study also demonstrated that firms reconfigured their cash flows. The study showed that resource flexibility was associated with organizational resilience. Furthermore, resource slack cushioned firms from Covid lockdown shocks. Sutanto and Sudarsono (2018) empirically analyzed 43 listed Indonesian banks and found that capital adequacy ratio, branch network, and brand value are significantly related to bank competitiveness, measured by return on asset and equity. The results suggested that slack resources, physical resources, and intangible resources influenced firm sustainability. These studies, while not exhaustive, accord salience to select resources and underscore the implications of their orchestration.

Vanacker et al. (2017) studied the nexus between slack resources, organizational success, and the institutional characteristics using longitudinal data from private corporate in several European countries. They found that financial slack enhances a firm's performance at a decreasing rate, while human resource slack lowers performance at a decreasing rate. The study has focused on dynamic resource orchestration framework by spotlighting slack resources and revealed that not all resources contribute positively to firm resilience.

Nessrin et. al (2023) conducted an investigation on Organizational Resilience of Higher Education Institutions. By investigating and developing a theoretical model on the organisational skills that make up organisational resilience, the current work seeks to advance this exciting field of study. Thirteen CEOs from reputable universities were interviewed using a qualitative phenomenological research design. The material was then subjected to a thematic analysis. The results offered a thorough understanding of the situation facing UAE universities at this early stage of crisis adaption. The concept of organisational resilience was developed as a process consisting of two main moderators (crisis leadership traits and employee resilience), five important antecedents (knowledge, resources availability, social resources, power relationships, and innovative culture), and three sequential stages (anticipation, coping, and adaptation). Significant conclusions about the required crisis leadership philosophies were also found.

Ahiauzu (2015) examined the association between process innovation and organizational resilience. Using a survey study design in generating data from the target Public Universities situated in south-south Nigeria, the associations were analysed in three stages; the demographic analysis in which charts and frequency distributions were used to illustrate the sample characteristics of the study, the univariate in which mean scores and standard deviations were used in descriptively assessing the nature of each variable and the bivariate in which the spearman's rank order correlation statistical tool was used in the test for all hypothesized associations. The findings demonstrated a strong correlation between process innovation and the situation awareness, keystone vulnerability, and adaptive capacity metrics of organisational resilience. Based on the aforementioned findings, it was advised that in order for organisations to continue to be resilient in the midst of constantly shifting socioeconomic dynamics, it is critical that they identify, embrace, and make effective use of the new approaches and tactics that are accessible.

### **The relationship between leader flexibility and organisational resilience**

Dynamic leadership emerges from the junction of resilience and flexibility in today's quickly changing business environment. Because change is the only constant, leaders must adapt

quickly and efficiently. Leaders who exemplify resilience and flexibility not only help their firms weather turbulence successfully, but they also set a compelling example, promoting an organizational culture of agility and resilience. Setbacks and obstacles are unavoidable for these leaders, but they see them as chances for growth and learning. They recover swiftly from failures and setbacks, and they urge their people to do the same. They are also open to new ideas and perspectives and are willing to shift direction when necessary.

These leaders can organize their teams and stakeholders toward a shared purpose by prioritizing good communication, ensuring the organization runs smoothly and efficiently. These leaders may identify areas for development and implement essential changes by soliciting feedback and suggestions from their employees and other stakeholders on a regular basis. This improves not only employee morale and engagement, but also the organization's reputation and credibility in the industry. Furthermore, these leaders recognize the value of open communication in resolving disagreements and immediately addressing issues, resulting in a peaceful work atmosphere that fosters creativity and progress. Finally, their dedication to efficient communication enables the firm to survive and adapt to today's volatile business market. It is therefore the position of this study that research is extended to identify the nature of the relationship between navigation of new environment and organisational resilience.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is structured in line with assessment a broad range of organizations, measuring and assessing qualities and relationships between variables that are reflected in these organizations. Its focus is not just to describe the related properties and attributes of these organizations, but to examine the extent to which relations exist and can be predicted. For this reason, this research adopted the correlational research design (Creswell, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005). The accessible population for this study are 13 agencies registered, recognised and authorised by the Rivers State Government to address related gaps in health and social welfare and development in the State. With the census sampling method adopted, representatives were sourced from each of these agencies, but only from the management or leadership cadre. With 7 management staff from each agency, a total of 91 sample elements from the 13 agencies participated in the study. The instrument for primary data collection was the structured questionnaire. For this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was adopted in assessing the internal (intra-rater) consistency of the data, and the extent to which measurements agree on a particular construct. A reliability threshold of  $\alpha > 0.70$  in line with Nunnally's 1978 proposed position on good reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Sarantakos, 2005). Analysis on the direction and strength of the relationship also included the test for hypotheses all using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation coefficient.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**Bi-variate Analysis**

Table 1: Summary for the variables of the study

		Situation Awareness	Vulnerabilities Management	Organisational Agility	Leader Flexibility
N	Valid	88	88	88	88
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.0833	3.0530	3.1629	2.3295
Std. Deviation		1.26274	1.15789	1.25640	.76229
Skewness		-.027	-.051	.051	1.306
Std. Error of Skewness		.257	.257	.257	.257
Kurtosis		-2.010	-1.901	-1.924	1.129
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.508	.508	.508	.508

Source: Survey Data, 2025

The result for the summary for the measures of organisational resilience is presented in table 1, revealed that there is evidence of behaviour and actions that reflect all three measures comprising situation awareness (x = 3.0833), vulnerabilities management (x = 3.0530) and organisational agility (x = 3.1629). Evidence from the analysis demonstrates that these are experienced and manifest within the intervention agencies in Rivers State. Furthermore, the data distribution for leader flexibility is also revealed to be substantial where x = 2.3295 but moderate.

**Flexibility and the measures of organisational resilience**

The test for the significance of the relationship between leader flexibility and the measures of organisational resilience (situation awareness, vulnerabilities management and organisational agility) is addressed in this section.

Table 2: Flexibility and the measures of organisational resilience

		Flexibility	Situation Awareness	Vulnerabilities Management	Organisational Agility
Spearman's rho Flexibility	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.529**	.624**	.611**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	88	88	88	88
Situation Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	.529**	1.000	.814**	.807**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	88	88	88	88
Vulnerabilities Management	Correlation Coefficient	.624**	.814**	1.000	.795**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	88	88	88	88
Organisational Agility	Correlation Coefficient	.611**	.807**	.795**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	88	88	88	88

Source: Survey Data, 2025

Result from the analysis shows that flexibility is an antecedent of all three measures of organisational resilience. This is as the outcome of the tests show that flexibility, significantly but moderately influences situation awareness ( $Rho = 0.529$  and  $P = 0.000$ ), highly influences vulnerabilities management ( $Rho = 0.624$  and  $P = 0.000$ ) and highly influences organisational agility ( $Rho = 0.611$  and  $P = 0.000$ ). The test shows that flexibility contributes significantly to the resilience of intervention agencies in Rivers State, enhancing the organisations capacity to thrive and cope effectively and efficiently during occasions of change or turbulence. Thus, following the outcome of the analysis, and the evidence of significance in the relationship between flexibility and the measures of organisational resilience, the three related hypotheses are rejected and the findings stated as follows:

- i. There is a significant relationship between flexibility and situation awareness of intervention agencies in Rivers State
- ii. There is a significant relationship between flexibility and vulnerabilities management of intervention agencies in Rivers State
- iii. There is a significant relationship between flexibility and organisational agility of intervention agencies in Rivers State

### **Discussion of Findings**

The relationship between leader flexibility and the measures of organisational resilience (situation awareness, vulnerabilities management and organisational agility), are revealed to be significant and positive in all three instances. The finding presents flexibility as important in necessitating the required level or capacity for recovery from change events. Its impact on situation awareness demonstrates the extent to which decision-making and leadership approaches can be structured or patterned to drive learning and knowledge development about the environment or context of the organisation. The findings corroborate earlier assertions (Northouse, 2019; Ali, 2016; Dugan, 2017) on the significance of flexibility in leadership in accommodating contingencies and in spearheading efficiency and effectiveness, in environment or markets that are highly dynamic and turbulent; ensuring that the organisation is able to adapt and thrive within such environment.

The findings of this research reiterate the position of scholars like Heifetz and Linsky (2002) on the need for governance and administrative facets to be reflective of the particular concerns of their stakeholders and business context. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), the business environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is highly unpredictable given the speed of information technology, the pace of innovation, and the imposing nature of globalisation on the operations and behaviour of local or indigenous organisations. Flexibility in leadership conditions the organisations behaviour and interaction with its environment, such that systems are easily and seamlessly reconfigured and realigned with the emerging concerns of interests of the organisation within its environment. Through the malleability of operations and processes, such that mirror the flexibility of the leadership, organisations can drive their goals. This is as demonstrated in the outcome of this research, affirming to the evidence that flexibility is central to the resilience of intervention agencies in Rivers State.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study affirms to the role of leader flexibility in facilitating outcomes such as situational awareness, vulnerabilities management and organisational agility for the intervention agencies in Rivers State. Following the position of this research on the relationship between leader flexibility and the resilience of intervention agencies in Rivers State, it is recommended that the leadership flexibility in intervention agencies in Rivers State is further enhanced through the availing of multiple but consistent communication channels and the restructuring of

functional frameworks that ensure leaders ability to draw on various utilities, resources and competencies within the agencies, ensuring their timely and effective adjustment to the needs of their workers and the organisation.

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