Organizational Resilience for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institutions

LEARNING MODULE FOR TVET MANAGERS
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Building and strengthening an organization’s resilience is part of the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team of a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institution. Familiarity with the definition of organizational resilience is essential for all members of this team so that they understand what needs to be explored and what actions need to be taken.

II. DEFINITION

The term ‘Organizational Resilience’ has become more familiar and relevant to organizations of all sizes since the impact of COVID 19 occurred globally. The latest definition of Organizational Resilience comes from BS 65000-2022 which a Code of Practice for developing and strengthening Organizational Resilience.

“Resilience is a strategic capability for an organization. It enables an organization to:
- prepare for and respond to disruption;
- adapt in a timely and appropriate manner; and
- thrive in a changing environment.

Organizational Resilience is not a result but is a constant journey that requires vigilance from all team members and goes beyond just looking after the day-to-day management of a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) organization. Note that there is a distinction drawn between Organizational Resilience and Operational Resilience.

A leadership team can self-assess the current position of their organization using two tools which will be reviewed in more detail in this document. The Organizational Resilience Framework, which provides a generic scope against which the organization’s resilience can be reviewed, is made up by the four categories depicted below.

Together the categories are made up of 16 elements, which can impact the resilience of an organization either as individual factors or as a combination of interrelated elements which is more usual. Those 16 elements are as follows:

**Leadership category**
- Strategic leadership
- Vision and purpose
- Financial aspects
- Reputational risk
- Resource management

**People category**
- Culture
- Awareness and training
- Alignment
- Community engagement – stakeholder management

**Process category**
- Governance and accountability
- Information and knowledge management
- Supply chain
- Business continuity

**Product category**
- Horizon scanning
- Innovation
- Adaptive capacity

Note that these are broad themes, but they provide the scope for any leadership team in any organization to review and assess their resilience. Supply chain maybe seen as less important to TVET organizations but changes in the supply chain (maybe the supply of trainers or materials) may have an impact on the organization.
III. UNDERSTANDING AN ORGANIZATION’S NARRATIVE

Even though it is easy to classify specific organizations according to sector or activity, every organization has its own unique characteristics and history. This means that each organization must recognize where it has strengths and weaknesses, and where potential opportunities and threats can exist. As a leadership team describes the organization, its past, where it is now and where its ambitions for the future, many of these factors will be identified. Some of the factors will be internal and within the control of the leadership or management team (generally operational resilience factors). However, some will be outside of the control of the team, and they must anticipate how they may need to respond to these factors. For convenience, these normally fall into the following themes. There are five external factors (capitals) to consider, as depicted below.

Let’s examine how this works in practice from a recent case study carried out at the Selam Technical Vocational College (STVC) in Ethiopia.

III.1 Selection of participants

Participants were selected based on the Organization chart for the college. The aim of the selection is to obtain input from anyone who has a strategic input into the direction the college may choose to take and from any senior managers who have functional responsibilities to implement and achieve the intended direction and results.

In large organizations the questionnaire may be included to ask for management level to be stated. This is useful if there is doubt about whether the organization is aligned in its thinking and behaviours. Note: this can only be done if there is a minimum of three per category or responses may become unwittingly attributable.

Note: it is important that the responses are confidential and non-attributable so that an authentic picture of the reality of the organization can be obtained.

III.2 Determining the order of interviews

The best result from this process is to start with middle management and then move upwards to the senior leaders. The reason for this is that the aim of the interviews is to find out what activities and decisions are being taken to build and develop the Organizational Resilience of the college. Strategic decision making is the responsibility of the Senior Leadership team and middle managers may not know the reasoning behind this decision making, so both alignment and communication by leadership can be assessed by selecting interviewees in the order suggested. If the Senior Leaders are interviewed first a natural bias will occur when middle managers are questioned and the interviewer must be aware of this possibility.
IV. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK QUESTIONNAIRE

Data was collected using a Survey Monkey questionnaire based on how they rate the 16 Organizational Resilience elements in their organization.

Question examples:

1. How do you rate the impact of Strategic Leadership on your organization’s resilience?
   Design note: use a slider design for respondents to rate between 1 and 100:

2. How do you rate the impact of Vision and Purpose on your organization’s resilience?

Etc…….

The final questions look at:

17. How do you rate the overall Organizational Resilience performance of Leadership in your organization?
18. How do you rate the overall Organizational Resilience performance of People in your organization?
19. How do you rate the overall Organizational Resilience performance of Process in your organization?
20. How do you rate the overall Organizational Resilience performance of Product in your organization?
21. How do you rate your organizations financial performance this year?
22. How do you rate your organizations financial performance next year?
23. How do you rate the organizational resilience maturity of your organization?

The results from this survey are aggregated using an Excel spreadsheet.

The average figures are now listed in the order of the 16 elements and a Radar chart produced using the chart function in Excel. In this example there are 12 participants.

An example spreadsheet is shown on the next page.
The axis is then altered to exaggerate the responses. In this case, the axis is changed to 40 to 100 as shown below:

The change in axis now illustrates where the potential strengths and weaknesses of the organization’s resilience narrative.

NOTE: this is not conclusive evidence but provides the starting point for one-to-one discussions.

The responses can also show the high and low responses from participants which is again a useful discussion point. Note: that individual responses are completely confidential, but the range can be used to promote further discussion. E.g., why is Innovation perceived as being so low by at least one person?

Note that the Categories have also been drawn on the chart. This enables the facilitator to talk about the impact of the overall Category as well as individual elements.

The narrative discussed will quickly focus in on specific elements of note. This helps the facilitator to identify where the organization will need to focus its attention.

Case study

The chart shows how participants perceive the organizational resilience capabilities of the organization. In the Leadership category – Vision and Purpose scores highly amongst participants with the lowest scores being recorded in Resource Management. It is interesting to note that Leadership strategy scores lower than the Vision and Purpose which could indicate that whilst participants are very clear about the Vision and Purpose which has been communicated well, they are less clear about how the Vision and Purpose could be achieved.

Moving clockwise around the chart, the People category, has lower scores for Culture and Alignment both elements that could potentially be impacted by uncertainty over Leadership strategy. The Process category has amongst the strongest scores for any of the categories which could imply that rules, procedures, and policies are used to manage situations and challenges.

The final category, the Product category records the lowest scores by category, with Horizon scanning, Innovation and Adaptive capacity all perceived to be weaker areas of Organizational Resilience performance. This category, together with the Leadership category provides the driving force for making the appropriate strategic changes happen. Once the Vision and Purpose has been established, making it happen must occur through the efforts people make to look for continuous improvement in the strategic direction the organization wishes to travel. As has been stated earlier, if there is a discrepancy between the Vision and Purpose and communication about Strategic Leadership it can cause uncertainty about the expected direction of travel. To use an analogy, it is like being not quite clear on the expected destination and how to achieve that destination, although the consensus is that the direction of travel is positive.

The chart also shows the differences in perception between the average, and highest and lowest responses recorded by participants. The greater the range between highest and lowest reveals where the greatest differences in perception are. Areas to note are Vision and Purpose, Resource Management, Culture, Alignment, Stakeholder Management, Innovation, and Adaptive Capacity.

The responses are all influenced by the narrative of the case study organization, and the one-to-one interviews enable the meaning and connection behind how participants have responded.
IV.1 The one-to-one interviews

The interviews normally last about 30 minutes and cover these areas:

1. Introduction to Organizational Resilience – explaining the definition.
2. Exploring the narrative of the college – using information from Organizational Resilience Framework to help guide the discussion. Must be enquiry led and not a tell style.
3. Explore what they perceive to be the challenges facing the organization.
4. Where do they see the organization/their department in the future? The responses to this reveal the level of thinking and planning that has gone into preparing for the direction the college wishes to go in.
5. Explore where the participant sees the organization on the Organizational Resilience Maturity framework (see below).

IV.2 Determining the organizational maturity of the organization

Organizational Resilience Maturity is divided into five phases and can be determined by reference to the amended Organizational Resilience Maturity Framework (Annex A):

1. PASSIVE
2. REACTIVE
3. MANAGED
4. ADAPTIVE
5. GENERATIVE

The Organizational Resilience Maturity Framework in Annex B shows the behavioural characteristics of an organization as it moves towards the Leading Practice phase. These behavioural characteristics are applied to the following key factors as applied to Organizational Resilience:

- Attitude
- Investment
- Involvement of people
- Culture
- Reporting
- Risk management
- Training
- Reputational risk
- Horizon scanning

Note: it is possible to do this exercise in a group session e.g., Leadership and Management team workshop. The questionnaires need to be done individually and responses kept non-attributable, however it is possible for teams to deliberate on the implications of the cultural and challenges of the organization.

IV.3 Case study example: the key challenges facing Selam Technical Vocational College (STVC)

The Organizational Resilience Framework can be used to help organize the challenges and demonstrate the inter-dependence and significance of the elements in determining how to overcome the challenges that have been identified. The starting point for this organization is to revisit the Vision and Purpose of the organization because the impact of rising costs of materials means that the organization has to move towards being self-sufficient rather than relying on donations. This will have an impact on the Culture of the organization so that is the next element listed. Note that the elements listed link in a cause-effect chain. In the case study, not all elements have to be addressed at the same time. The elements that are relevant to the strategic direction of the organization may choose to take.

1. VISION AND PURPOSE

The original (and successful) vision and purpose of the Selam Children’s Village led to the vision and purpose of the Selam Technical Vocational College (STVC). The project was built on the passion to support disadvantaged children and to enable them to become self-reliant. The two visions and purposes whilst aligned as the projects evolved have come under pressure as material costs affecting STVC have started to escalate. To provide practical hands-on training to students, donations have enabled direct fees to the students to be kept down to around 40% of the total costs, in some cases. The programs currently aim to have approximately 70/30 split between hands-on practice and theory.

Changing from a donation dominated organization (especially STVC) towards an organization that is able to be self-sufficient means that the programs need to operate at least to cover their break even position. It also means that any profits can be re-invested into STVC to replace older machinery and update machines to more advanced machines found in the workplace. Developing ‘hard skills’ will be beneficial to those with low capital availability but wish to be self-employed and this is why the vision and purpose statements may need to be revised.
2. CULTURE

The culture of the organization is important because in order to meet the challenges that have been identified in the Vision and Culture, the organization has to recognize that there is a need to change aspects of the organization from a donations based culture where shortfalls are met by the donors towards STVC becoming a more commercially focused organization where revenues must at least cover costs and there is a drive for income generation beyond just fee-paying students. This transition is not an easy matter, and it requires a mindset change about purpose which may be difficult for some to adjust to or align with. There is an interest to make STVC financially self-sufficient but in practice this may not be the case.

3. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Most staff interviewed were aware of the increasing costs of resources which included material costs and the relative costs of labour for trainers compared to the market rate. They were aware of the college's need to generate income but this was not aligned with their personal reasons for being in the training profession. Income generation, from their perspective, was largely determined by the number of participants that were enrolled by the college and their role was to train them. Indeed, there was evidence that when training was not possible (see Business Continuity) some staff took the opportunity (endorsed by the college) to work for other organizations at the same time as STVC, as though they were self-employed contractors. In addition, some trainees also went to these alternative institutions to work with the trainers. This conflict of interest has been rectified which links closely with Governance and Accountability and demonstrates why monitoring and control of activities associated with the college are so important.

The organization structure has not been updated since 2020 and several vacancies exist that have probably not been filled because of the impact of COVID19 and the revised governmental education policy which has caused significant downtime.

The organization needs to be structured to reflect the commercial focus on generating income. It is not expected that the responsibility for generating income should fall upon the trainers.

4. REPUTATIONAL RISK

Building a strong reputation for STVC is very important to attracting students who wish to come to the college and the reputation is supported by: Subsidized fees, high pass rates and high-quality practical training that leads to employment and which is endorsed by the companies that employ the college graduates. This is a key strength of the STVC but note that if the subsidized fees are withdrawn and there is a fall in the attitude, behaviour and skills of students entering employment (as is being reported in some instances informally by companies) this reputational advantage can quickly be lost.

5. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The most significant challenge that was raised by participants was their concern about the financial aspects of STVC and this is key to unlocking the potential of the college in the future and avoiding what may cause an existential threat. Whilst it is lower down the list than might be expected, it is impacted by the elements in the list above. The challenge is that the college provides for the most disadvantaged in society and are simply not able to afford the full cost fees (hence the support of donors).

STVC has been granted permission to generate income streams via TRIAE (tool and agricultural equipment manufacturer) and ROFAM (food preparation, dairy, restaurant and sales) and both have contributed their profits to support the orphanage over time, but this is becoming increasingly more challenging as material costs rise.

Large numbers of students are on co-operative apprenticeship schemes developed with more than 80 companies.

6. BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Apart from the impact of COVID 19 on STVC, the change of Government policy towards education entry requirements to TVET schemes (moving from grade 10 to grade 12) had a significant impact on the attendance and utilization of assets at the college. At the time of observation, the metal working sheds, and electrical sheds were completely empty, and were awaiting students for the first time in two years. From an organizational resilience perspective this was a missed opportunity (although COVID 19 restrictions may have also impacted this) and indicates a reactive rather than a pro-active state of preparedness to business continuity. In a commercial setting, an understanding of the cost of downtime is critical, as this could have a significant impact on the profitability of a manufacturing plant and illustrates the difference between a donations based operation and one that has to earn money to stay viable.

7. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The decision to focus on making the STVC self-sufficient must be driven by the Board, through the Executive. There may be ideological issues that have to be discussed and aligned if this is to happen in practice. Running a commercially focused organization requires tight planning, monitoring and control, in combination with clearly defined responsibilities and accountabilities.

In the case study, most participants indicated that Financial Aspects were a challenge and appreciated what the challenge was. However, the root cause means that the Leadership team have to review and decide how to approach commercial activities using the assets they have and given the limitations caused by increasing costs, old machinery, and changes in government educational policy. The participants, who were not in the Leadership team did not see that the Financial Aspects of the college were their responsibility, other than providing high quality programmes.
V. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are listed the key recommendations for the case study organization. Detail has been included in the higher level recommendations i.e. those that lead to strengthening Organizational Resilience by improvements that lead to Good Practice. The remaining list does not show the operational detail that was recommended as this is confidential to the organization and needs consideration by the leadership team.

1. Develop, implement, and embed organizational resilience thinking into leadership and management practices

- It is essential that Organizational Resilience thinking becomes embedded in the Leadership team’s activities. Utilize Organizational Resilience Maturity Framework to implement good practice into the organization. This requires a more proactive approach to horizon scanning and preparing for changes that could impact the organization. E.g., what happens if the Government’s education policy were to change again? How could STVC make up the shortfall in income from empty workshops?

- Identify potential challenges on a systematic basis and use the Organizational Resilience Framework to identify which combinations of elements are involved in mitigating or preparing to address the challenge.

- Periodically assess the resilience of the business model. Donation supported to commercial business model to evaluate long term viability.

2. Identify and assess challenges early

- Create a Risk Register to log the challenges identified by the leadership team and score the Likelihood and Severity of Impact (scores 1-9). Decide tolerance of risk for each item over a defined score and develop plans to mitigate, reduce, avoid, or stop the risk happening. Monitor and control the risk over time.

- Train and encourage staff to recognize and report risks in their departments through proactive and continuous horizon scanning to provide early warning of impending problems before they occur, and which could impact the normal activities of the college.

- Review these risks on a regular basis and embed as part of management activity.

3. Develop a strategic plan that has a commercial focus

- Revise Mission Statement of STVC to reflect commercial operations – this is a purpose change from a donation supported operation to a commercially focused operation.

- There is currently a big gap between the end of the last five-year strategic plan and the commercial aspects of STVC. This gap needs to be closed in the next five-year strategic plan which is currently being prepared.

- Communicate the strategic plan to all employees – this will involve an Identity, and Attitude and Belief change.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The final decisions in this process are left to the Board and Senior Leadership team to discuss and decide. The process using the Organizational Resilience Framework, the Organizational Resilience Maturity tool, and one to one discussion can provide a valuable insight into how to develop the organizational resilience of the organization and helps underpin future direction and performance so that the organization is well prepared to meet its challenges and thrive in the future.

The process needs to be handled sensitively, especially if there are challenging situations, the teams are not aligned or communication is poor. The aim is for the leadership team to really understand and explore what is of concern to the organization that may impact their performance and decide how to organize the leadership team to achieve the results they decide are necessary and decide who is accountable and responsible for these.
A.1 ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE. MATURITY MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below good practice</th>
<th>Good practice</th>
<th>Leading practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Managed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Attitude
- Excessive optimism – the potential for disruption is denied, ignored, or trivialized
- Resilience is only considered important after a disruptive event
- Focused on the impact of the organization's internal objectives
- Thresholds of what impact is tolerable/acceptable are defined

## Investment
- No investment in resilience
- Minimal investment in resilience
- Investment in resilience is proportional to the organization's appetite for risks
- Investment is sufficient to keep impact within thresholds

## Involvement
- People who raise issues are regarded as pessimists
- Focused on meeting compliance requirements
- Focused on commonly known risks
- Involvement of people at all levels, with accountability and leadership commitment

## Culture
- The organization has a blame culture
- Confidential/anonymity systems for report of issues established and communicated
- People are empowered to use their experience, expertise, and teamwork to resolve issues
- Psychological safety encourages speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes

## Reporting
- Reporting on resilience is ad hoc
- Regular reporting on resilience by top management
- Ongoing monitoring and review of essential outcomes
- Broad participation of employees, functions, stakeholders driving continual improvement, innovation, and renewal

## Risk Management
- Risk management is an annual exercise and not used as a live-working document
- Risk registers reviewed on a regular basis (quarterly, annually)
- Risks reviewed on a regular basis and embedded as part of management activity
- Periodic assessment of the resilience of the business model

## Training
- Minimal training on resilience
- Extensive compliance-based training
- High level of integrated training using challenging situations and scenarios
- Resilience is embedded into planning, budgeting, performance management and rewards systems

## Reputational Risk
- The organization does not anticipate or address major changes within the context that the organization operates
- Motivated by concern over negative publicity
- Driven by a specialist technical team
- Stress testing of resilience using severe and plausible scenarios

## Horizon Scanning
- Actions taken to prevent repetition of disruption
- Post event exploratory review focusing of root cause and fixing problems
- Proactive continuous scanning and early warning of impending problems before they occur
- Organizational resilience objectives integrated into management systems

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A.2 SELAM TVC PILOT RESPONSES. FEBRUARY 2023

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A.3 TVET INSTITUTION ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE LEARNING MODULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Who</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PART A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Determine current Organizational Resilience perspective using Organizational Resilience Framework to explore how well leadership team and management team perceive current performance against each of the 16 Organizational Resilience elements.</td>
<td>The results of the scores between 1-100 (where 1 = poor and 10 = excellent) are confidential and aggregated to produce a whole team perspective.</td>
<td>Questionnaire responses transferred to Excel spreadsheet, and average calculated by element.</td>
<td>facilitator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| PART B   |         |        |     |
| 2 Aggregate scores from Organizational Resilience Framework questionnaire in Excel to produce radar chart. The order of the elements in Excel listing enables the radar chart to be divided into 4 categories - Leadership, People, Process and Product. | Radar chart produced showing aggregated scores for each element and divided into 4 categories by inserting lines onto radar chart to distinguish elements in Leadership, People, Process and Product categories. (See Annex B) | Radar chart in Excel | facilitator |

| PART C   |         |        |     |
| 3 Review radar chart and identify which elements are scored highest and lowest by element. Note if any of the 4 categories have lower scores. | Make a note of the higher and lower scoring elements. This provides a preliminary understanding of which elements are influencing or impacting the current or future perspective of the organization's narrative. NB: This is not conclusive evidence but provides a starting point for discussions with the leadership team. | Note higher and lower scores to help focus discussions. Elements tend to work collectively in cause-effect chain. | facilitator |

| PART D   |         |        |     |
| 4 Determine Organizational Resilience Maturity using the Organizational Resilience Maturity Framework. | The level of Organizational Resilience Maturity (1-5) against these key factors which contains descriptors of necessary behaviours for each level. (Annex A) | Identify which behaviours can be identified with the appropriate maturity level (1-5). | facilitator |

| PART E   |         |        |     |
| 5 Hold one-to-one interviews with selected participants. Aim to start the interviews with middle ranking managers and then move upwards to senior leaders as it allows planning and decision making to be discussed. | The first part of the interview is to explore the narrative of the organization from the individual perspectives of the participants. These interviews must be confidential and non-attributable. The interview explores how the individual perceives the organization and the interviewee can use the higher and lower scored elements found using the Organizational Resilience Framework questionnaire (see Point 3) as prompts for discussion. | Interviewer or facilitator to summarize key findings. | facilitator |

| 6 Verify how the narrative fits with the elements that have been selected as high and low scores. | The information from the questionnaire and the interviews is now synthesized to understand the narrative of where the organization has come from, where it is now and where it is perceived it would like to be in the future. | | facilitator |

| 7 Review overall findings and analysis | The findings need to be grouped from Organizational Resilience (big picture). And the analysis of Organizational Resilience Maturity down to detail. | | facilitator |

| 8 Determine appropriate and timely strategic choices that protect or build the organizational resilience of the organization. | This process enables the most appropriate and timely actions to be decided upon based on the leadership team’s analysis and assessment of the factors that could potentially affect the overall performance of the organization. | | facilitator |

| 9 Set clearly defined SMART objectives in the strategic plan. | These are high level objectives which are then defined by the management team who are responsible and accountable for achieving them. | | facilitator |

| 10 Ensure that management and reporting systems systematically refer to the objectives set. | The strategic plan and corresponding management objectives must be part of a working document that is referred to regularly and action taken to improve negative variances and share positive variances. | | Leadership team |

| 11 Encourage teams to horizon scan for issues or challenges that could affect the department or the overall performance of the organization. | Challenges or opportunities need to be reported at the earliest opportunity so that the leadership team has foresight of the challenge and can decide how to respond. | | Management team |

| 12 Review the Organizational Resilience performance on a regular basis (quarterly) to ensure that elements are being attended to as necessary. | A regular review process will quickly identify which elements are central to the challenges the organization is facing. They are very dynamic and can change quickly e.g., reputational risk can be impacted very quickly through social media. There is no end point, it is a continuous journey that requires vigilance from the leadership team. | | Leadership and management team |

Activity

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