

## **OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE IN SECURITY CRISIS CONTEXTS: ANALYSIS OF THE TARWENDÉ BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL (TBI) CASE IN BURKINA FASO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been experiencing a multifaceted crisis characterized by growing insecurity, economic tensions, and profound social challenges. This security crisis has had severe impacts on business operations, with more than 20 percent of enterprises closing in high-risk zones, a 2.5 percent decline in GDP in 2022, and inflation reaching 7.8 percent. This article examines the impact of operational experience in crisis zones on organizational resilience, drawing on the case of Tarwendé Business International (TBI), a major private sector actor in Burkina Faso. The research employs a qualitative methodology, including documentary review, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and direct observation. The analysis reveals that operational experience

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in security crisis contexts contributes to organizational resilience through several mechanisms: development of situational awareness, accumulation of crisis management knowledge, establishment of adaptive routines, and strengthening of risk anticipation capabilities. The article concludes that prior experience in crisis zones is a valuable asset for building organizational resilience, but that experience alone is insufficient without systematic learning processes and organizational support.

**Keywords:** Operational experience, organizational resilience, security crisis, business continuity, Burkina Faso, private sector.

### **RÉSUMÉ (FRENCH)**

Depuis 2015, le Burkina Faso traverse une crise multiforme marquée par une insécurité croissante, des tensions économiques et des défis sociaux profonds. Cette crise sécuritaire a eu des impacts sévères sur les opérations des entreprises, avec plus de 20 pour cent des entreprises fermées dans les zones à haut risque, une baisse du PIB de 2,5 pour cent en 2022, et une inflation atteignant 7,8 pour cent. Cet article examine l'impact de l'expérience opérationnelle dans des zones de crise sur la résilience organisationnelle, à travers le cas de Tarwendé Business International (TBI), un acteur majeur du secteur privé burkinabè. La recherche emploie une méthodologie qualitative, incluant une revue documentaire, des entretiens semi-directifs, des questionnaires et l'observation directe. L'analyse révèle que l'expérience opérationnelle dans des contextes de crise sécuritaire contribue à la résilience organisationnelle à travers plusieurs mécanismes : le développement de la conscience situationnelle, l'accumulation de connaissances en gestion de crise, l'établissement de routines adaptatives et le renforcement des capacités d'anticipation des risques. L'article conclut que l'expérience préalable dans les zones de crise est un atout précieux pour construire la résilience organisationnelle, mais que l'expérience seule est insuffisante sans des processus d'apprentissage systématique et un soutien organisationnel.

**Mots-clés:** Expérience opérationnelle, résilience organisationnelle, crise sécuritaire, continuité d'activité, Burkina Faso, secteur privé.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been experiencing a multifaceted crisis characterized by growing insecurity, economic tensions, and profound social challenges. According to a study conducted by researchers at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University (2022) entitled "Crises and SMEs," 3.4 percent of enterprises closed between 2018 and 2020, and an additional 4 percent closed during the last semester of 2021 and 2022. An independent report (2023-2024) indicates that 8 out of 10 enterprises opening in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana were previously based in Burkina Faso.

In addition to this security crisis, Burkina Faso has faced political instability in recent years. The closure of more than 20 percent of enterprises in high-risk zones, a GDP decline of 2.5 percent in 2022 compared to 5.7 percent growth in 2019, inflation reaching 7.8 percent in 2022 (double that of 2019), and increased pressure on formal and informal enterprises due to population displacement estimated at nearly 2 million people have all contributed to a challenging business environment (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

The international context has also been challenging. Countries in the sub-region, particularly Sahelian countries including Mali, Niger, and Chad, have been enormously affected by these crises. According to a study on the economic impact of COVID-19 by Djiofack and colleagues (2021), GDP in sub-Saharan Africa declined by 2.5 percent in 2020. This situation has been complicated by the additional crises facing these countries.

In this context, Tarwendé Business International (TBI), a major private sector actor in Burkina Faso, has faced constraints that considerably impact its operational continuity. This article examines the impact of operational experience in crisis zones on organizational resilience, drawing on the case of TBI.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## **2.1 Organizational Resilience Theory**

Organizational resilience refers to the capacity of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper (Denyer, 2017; Duchek, 2020). Resilience is not merely about bouncing back to a previous state but about bouncing forward to a new, potentially better state.

Key dimensions of organizational resilience include: anticipation (the ability to identify and prepare for potential threats), coping (the ability to respond effectively to disruptions), and adaptation (the ability to learn from experience and modify operations to reduce future vulnerability) (Duchek, 2020; Lengnick-Hall, 2011).

In the context of security crises, organizational resilience requires specific capabilities, including: security risk assessment, crisis management planning, business continuity management, and stakeholder coordination (Boin & van Eeten, 2013; Herbane, 2010).

## **2.2 Experience-Based Learning Theory**

Experience-based learning theory, developed by Kolb (1984), posits that learning occurs through the transformation of experience into knowledge. The experiential learning cycle consists of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

In the context of crisis management, prior experience in crisis zones provides opportunities for experiential learning. Organizations that have operated in crisis zones develop tacit knowledge about security risks, adaptive strategies, and coping mechanisms. However, experiential learning requires intentional reflection and systematic knowledge management to be effective (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

## **2.3 High Reliability Organization Theory**

High Reliability Organization (HRO) theory, developed by Weick and colleagues (1999), examines organizations that operate in high-risk environments with minimal errors. Key characteristics of HROs include: preoccupation with failure (constant vigilance for potential

errors), reluctance to simplify interpretations (recognition that complex systems require nuanced understanding), sensitivity to operations (attention to frontline activities), commitment to resilience (capacity to contain and bounce back from errors), and deference to expertise (decision-making authority based on expertise rather than hierarchy).

In the context of security crises, the HRO framework provides insights into how organizations can maintain reliable operations despite high levels of risk and uncertainty.

### **3. THE SECURITY CRISIS CONTEXT IN BURKINA FASO**

#### **3.1 Evolution of the Security Crisis**

The security crisis in Burkina Faso began in 2015 with the emergence of jihadist groups in the Sahel region. Initially concentrated in the northern provinces, the violence progressively spread to the east, center-north, and other regions. By 2023, more than 40 percent of the national territory was affected by insecurity, with significant variations in intensity across regions.

The human toll of the crisis has been substantial. According to government figures, more than 10,000 civilians and security forces personnel have been killed since 2015. Nearly 2 million people have been internally displaced, putting pressure on host communities and straining social services.

#### **3.2 Economic Impacts of the Crisis**

The economic impacts of the security crisis have been severe. The closure of more than 20 percent of enterprises in high-risk zones has led to job losses and reduced economic activity. GDP declined by 2.5 percent in 2022, compared to 5.7 percent growth in 2019. Inflation reached 7.8 percent in 2022, double the rate in 2019 (World Bank, 2023).

The crisis has also disrupted supply chains, increased transportation costs, and created uncertainty for investors. Agricultural production has been affected in insecure zones, contributing to food insecurity.

#### **3.3 Impacts on the Private Sector**

The private sector has been particularly affected by the security crisis. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been the most vulnerable, lacking the resources to adapt to the challenging environment. According to the study by Joseph Ki-Zerbo University (2022), 3.4 percent of enterprises closed between 2018 and 2020, and an additional 4 percent closed during the last semester of 2021 and 2022.

An independent report (2023-2024) indicates that 8 out of 10 enterprises opening in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana were previously based in Burkina Faso, suggesting a significant relocation of business activity to neighboring countries.

## **4. THE TBI CASE STUDY**

### **4.1 Presentation of Tarwendé Business International (TBI)**

Tarwendé Business International (TBI) is a major private sector actor in Burkina Faso, operating in multiple sectors including logistics, procurement, and services. The company has been operating since 2010 and has established a reputation for reliability and efficiency. TBI employs approximately 500 people and serves clients across Burkina Faso and neighboring countries.

### **4.2 TBI's Operational Experience in Crisis Zones**

TBI has accumulated significant operational experience in crisis zones. The company has maintained operations in several regions affected by insecurity, including the Sahel, Centre-Nord, and Est regions. This experience has provided TBI with unique insights into the challenges of operating in security crisis contexts.

Key elements of TBI's operational experience include: development of security protocols for staff and assets; establishment of alternative supply routes; diversification of supplier base; investment in communication and tracking technologies; and collaboration with security forces and local authorities.

### **4.3 Impact of Experience on Resilience**

Analysis of TBI's case reveals that operational experience has contributed to organizational resilience through several mechanisms.

First, experience has developed situational awareness. TBI's management and staff have developed a nuanced understanding of security risks in different zones, including awareness of the types of threats, their timing, and their likely impacts. This situational awareness enables more informed decision-making about operations.

Second, experience has accumulated crisis management knowledge. TBI has developed a repository of knowledge about effective responses to different types of security incidents. This knowledge is documented in procedures and is transmitted through training and mentoring.

Third, experience has established adaptive routines. TBI has developed routines for adapting operations in response to changing security conditions. These routines include procedures for relocating staff, securing assets, and maintaining communications during incidents.

Fourth, experience has strengthened risk anticipation capabilities. TBI has developed the capacity to anticipate potential security threats and to prepare responses before incidents occur. This anticipatory capacity reduces reaction time and improves outcomes.

## **5. LESSONS FOR OTHER ENTERPRISES**

### **5.1 The Value of Experience**

The TBI case demonstrates that operational experience in crisis zones is a valuable asset for building organizational resilience. Enterprises that have operated in challenging environments develop capabilities that cannot be easily replicated by enterprises without such experience.

However, experience alone is insufficient. To be valuable, experience must be systematically captured, documented, and transmitted. Organizations must invest in learning processes to extract lessons from experience and to embed those lessons in procedures, training, and culture.

### **5.2 The Importance of Contextual Adaptation**

The TBI case also demonstrates that resilience strategies must be adapted to local contexts. Strategies that work in one region may not work in another, due to differences in the nature of threats, the capacity of security forces, the availability of resources, and the characteristics of the local population.

Enterprises should conduct regular risk assessments to understand the specific threats they face and to tailor their resilience strategies accordingly.

### **5.3 The Role of Collaboration**

The TBI case highlights the importance of collaboration with other actors, including other enterprises, security forces, local authorities, and international partners. Collaboration enables information sharing, resource pooling, and coordinated responses.

Enterprises should invest in building relationships with key stakeholders before crises occur, so that these relationships are available when needed.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This article has examined the impact of operational experience in crisis zones on organizational resilience, drawing on the case of Tarwendé Business International (TBI) in Burkina Faso. The analysis reveals that operational experience in security crisis contexts contributes to organizational resilience through several mechanisms: development of situational awareness, accumulation of crisis management knowledge, establishment of adaptive routines, and strengthening of risk anticipation capabilities.

The article concludes that prior experience in crisis zones is a valuable asset for building organizational resilience, but that experience alone is insufficient without systematic learning processes and organizational support. Enterprises seeking to build resilience should invest in capturing and transmitting lessons from experience, adapting strategies to local contexts, and building collaborative relationships with key stakeholders.

Future research should examine the transferability of resilience capabilities from one context to another and should explore the conditions under which experience most effectively contributes to resilience.

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