An Organizational Change With Quarantined Members

Dorine Maurice Mattar

Abstract
This study tackles the extent to which employees’ attributions and acknowledgments of the innovation implementation’s urgency play a role in their acceptance and readiness behavior during a crisis. Moreover, it highlights the importance of support and knowledge sharing among organization members on social media, given that an organizational change is taking place during a crisis while everyone is being quarantined. Qualitative data are collected from semi-structured interviews as well as from the chats on the WhatsApp group created for this quick innovation implementation decision. Findings reveal that during a crisis, employees’ sensemaking of the organization’s innovation adoption is triggered by attribution to constructive intentionality. The urgency imposed boosts the contextual dimension of the readiness for change, which enhances organization members’ commitment to implement the change. Moreover, when everyone is quarantined, social media is found to be the only means for maintaining social relations, ensuring colleagues’ support and sharing knowledge; and consequently boosting members’ readiness. The value of this research lies in the topic addressed, and in the unusual context in which the innovation implementation took place.

Keywords
organizational change, innovation implementation, readiness to change, knowledge sharing, emergent behavior, social media

Introduction
With the spread of COVID-19, colleges struggle to adapt to possible health care emergencies, closures of campuses, and other problems that occur and develop daily. A crucial challenge facing them is the way instruction is offered when closure is essential and in-person classes are canceled. A substantial number moved to online classes as a short-term solution. A switch to online learning is extremely challenging, as the majority of the professors have never taught online, and still lack technological assistance, in addition to the fact that the appropriate infrastructure is missing in different countries, especially developing ones. Several critics have raised concerns as to whether requiring such a transition without the appropriate faculty members’ participation would breach their governance; other opponents questioned whether an online teaching methodology would penalize students who may not have access to the internet and to other digital resources. Nonetheless, several academic institutions used online learning to safeguard the students’ education following the pandemic, such a crucial health crisis. Thus, the quick move to the online teaching that has been imposed constitutes a drastic organizational change implemented when all organization members are quarantined. Up to the researcher’s knowledge, this could be the first organizational change that has been implemented with such peculiar conditions, which triggers the curiosity to assess its implications.

Longenecker and Fink (2001) argued that although many researchers enriched the literature about organizational change, yet many aspects remain untackled. Several scholars studied the cognitive aspect of employees’ readiness to change (Holt et al., 2007; Madsen et al., 2005), and others highlighted its affective, cognitive, and behavior aspects, viewed as a multidimensional construct (Abdul Rashid et al., 2004; Bouckenooghe & Devos, 2007). However, none had the chance to study organization members’ readiness to an innovation implementation during a crisis, and here lies the importance of this study. On the contrary, S. Park and Kim (2015) revealed that there is a lack of studies backing up, empirically as well as theoretically, the association between organizational change and knowledge sharing. Within the same context, Pemsel et al. (2014) argued that there is a lack of understanding of the knowledge exchange process; inducing researchers to highlight the way organization members participate in collective behavior (Acharya et al., 2018; Al Abbabi et al., 2017). The lack is also clear when it comes to the assessment of the direct effects of knowledge exchange

1Notre Dame University-Louaize, Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon

Corresponding Author:
Dorine Maurice Mattar, Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, Notre Dame University-Louaize, 72 Zouk Mosbeh, Lebanon. Email: dhaddad@ndu.edu.lb
and social media on a successful and an efficient change implementation (Aslam et al., 2018). Moreover, S. K. Singh et al. (2019) called for further studies aiming to reveal if the proactive helping behavior is a culture-specific phenomenon, and more specifically, if the knowledge helping process is specifically prevailing in the collectivistic cultures. Given that intra-team trust is more prevailing in collectivist cultures (Huff & Kelley, 2003), communication intensity (Dirks, 1999), and increasing information sharing (Gong et al., 2013) between team members are expected. And as the Lebanese culture is a collectivist one, this study and its results deemed required to boost the previous findings or to challenge them.

Thus, this study aims to highlight new developing organizational parameters that are rarely explored in an organizational change setting: an innovation implementation, taking place during a crisis, when all organization members are quarantined, and when the knowledge exchange process is being done online. Given the novelty of the present study’s situational factors (the COVID-19 pandemic and all what it entailed on the work and communication processes), there will be an interesting need to unveil their impact on the knowledge exchange process’ effectiveness, and consequently, answer, among others, S. K. Singh et al.’s (2019) call for revealing the situational factors that promote or restrict the knowledge sharing’s effectiveness, as well as the innovative communication process through which the collective learning takes place.

**Review of Literature**

**Crisis**

A crisis is “a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making critical decisions” (Rosenthal et al., 1989, p. 10). The crucial features of a crisis are the situation’s threat and inconceivability (Rosenthal et al., 2001). Realizing the existence of a grave, crucial, and sincere threat is assumed to be the “requisite feature of all crisis events” (Seeger et al., 2003, p. 8). In assessing the occurrence of a crisis, different variables are considered, including its length and size, the trigger, the locus of responsibility, and the emergency feedback (Heath & Millar, 2004). K. M. Davis and Gardner (2012) argue that the urgency and surprise features of the crisis make it a dynamic operation, disrupting the status quo.

Kiewe (1994) defined crisis rhetoric as “the discourse initiated by decision makers in an attempt to communicate to various constituents that a certain development is critical and to suggest a certain course of action to remedy the critical situation” (p. 17). K. M. Davis and Gardner (2012) argue that in using crisis rhetoric, a leader legitimizes the crisis, keeps followers well informed about the situations, asks for their help or support to the recommended plan of action, and inspires them to invest substantial efforts to accomplish the group’s mission or objectives.

Ricœur (1988) advocates that a crisis symbolizes the turning point of an epidemic, triggering a positive or a negative development, relating its original meaning to the Greek word krisis, which comes from krínein, meaning to decide and to incise. The crisis is when a decision is to be made; it is a thorough disruption of temporality leading to a loss of orientation which forces a decision allocating the flow of events into previously and later (Ronge, 2015; in Kornberger et al., 2019). Thus, a dysfunction with respect to the link between past experience and future anticipation results. Crisis triggers a thorough openness toward the future; being lost about one’s position within the universe; being unable to differentiate between friendship and rivalry; and being confused in front of the stable hierarchy of values that used to guide one’s preferences (Ricœur, 1988).

Kornberger et al. (2019) argue that the fundamental openness toward the future and the unpredictability of the present denote the origin of the word crisis, that is, to decide, and the emotional response to crisis is not fear, but existential angst, which has no identifiable object that could offer a control emanating from a well-rooted and well-known response. In such situation, Ricœur (1988) reported that engagement is the sole means through which to search for guidance for decision-making. Within the same context, Weick’s work on sensemaking in a crisis highlights the importance of interpretation, not choice (Weick, 1979). He believes that engaging in decision-making is indeed infrequent, and when done, action precedes decision-making, the latter being a rationalization of the former.

Now the question is how organization members will view a decision enacted by the organization in periods of crises, especially that such decision entails a major organizational change. Whether this change is viewed as temporary or not, it involves a radical modification of the traditional operational processes, and thus, members’ readiness and sense-making will impact their decisions to embrace and adopt the innovation imposed.

**Readiness for Change**

To remain aligned with the global changes, organizations continuously seek changes to challenge its traditional processes and boost its competitive advantage. Three different stages characterize an organizational change: adoption, readiness, and institutionalization (Holt et al., 2007). It is viewed as a cognitive process that is established on attitudes, intentions, and beliefs for change efforts (Armenakis et al., 1993), and a lack of preparation may lead to failure (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). Organization members’ readiness to change depicts their optimistic convictions about the organizational change and its associated benefits and implications on the organization itself and on themselves as well (Armenakis et al., 1993). The concept of readiness is comparable to the
concept of unfreezing highlighted by Lewin (1951). Organizational readiness for implementing change is defined as the extent to which employees are psychologically and behaviorally trained and empowered to assume and adopt an organizational change (Shea et al., 2014). Two subconstructs shape that readiness: “change commitment” and “change efficacy,” representing, respectively, the will or power to change, and the shared confidence in the organizational competence in adopting this change (Shea et al., 2014; Weiner, 2009; Weiner et al., 2009). However, problems are usually encountered when organizations attempt to incorporate complicated changes before an adequate number of its members demonstrate the required sense of readiness (Weiner, 2009).

Backer (1995) argued that readiness is a state of mind about the need. Readiness for change is not a fixed element of individuals . . . It may vary due to changing external or internal circumstance, the type of change being introduced, or the characteristics of potential adopters and change agents. Thus, interventions to enhance readiness are possible. (pp. 22–23)

In the context of this study, the interventions might originate from forces beyond the control of both the employer and the employee. The crisis itself imposed the implementation of an innovation in the teaching methodology, and consequently the crisis itself might be shaping employees’ readiness to accept such change.

**Innovation Implementation and Change Acceptance During a Crisis**

Innovation is “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 2003, p. 12). An innovation implementation at the workplace challenges the organization members, imposes new work methodologies and processes, requires updated skills; all of which put employees under a great pressure and force them to change their work routines. Scholars developed different theoretical models to describe employee perceptions and behavior toward innovation. For instance, the technology acceptance model proposes that individual cognitive evaluations, such as perceived usefulness and ease of usage, are positively related to innovation use (F. D. Davis, 1989).

Within the same context, the theory of planned behavior pinpoints that the perceived behavioral control governs significantly the intention and behavior in relation to innovation (Ajzen, 1991). Linked to the coping theory, Beaaudry and Pinsonneault (2005) argue that innovation use depends on the cognitive appraisal of innovations as a threat or an opportunity. The emphasis in these theoretical models has mainly been sketched on employees’ expectations of the innovation’s cost and benefit, with these expectations shaping later performance, whereas Choi et al. (2019) explored the implementation of an innovation by emphasizing on the attribution role. Expectation denotes the potential outcomes or the projections of an event’s outcomes, whereas attribution refers to the assumed cause of an outcome or the understanding of an event’s outcome (Seifert, 2004). Being a crucial cognitive procedure, attributions are assumed to be an essential mechanism of sensemaking, affecting emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral responses, in addition to expectations (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Martinko & Gardner, 1982; Weiner, 1985). Based on the attribution of intentionality model (Ferris et al., 1995), Choi et al. (2019) acknowledged two types of employee attributions of an organization’s perceived intentionality in innovation implementation. They are attributions to constructive and deceptive intentionality.

In the context of innovation implementation, attributions to intentionality trigger employees’ sensemaking of the organization’s innovation adoption. Thus, organization members would attribute an innovation adoption decision, made by higher authorities, to either positive or negative intentions, labeled “constructive intentionality” or “deceptive intentionality,” respectively (Choi et al., 2019). Attribution to constructive intentionality refers to the members’ rational analysis that their company has implemented a change with a genuine and an honest intent to accomplish beneficial results, such as organizational growth and the well-being of its stakeholders, and its employees specifically. However, attribution to deceptive intentionality reflects the organization members’ thinking that their employer has implemented a change with a self-serving purpose and manipulative intents, embracing the misuse of employees and tightening control measures, as well as fortifying the political power or simply, remaining trendy. While independent, these attributions are not mutually exclusive (Choi et al., 2019).

Moreover, Stam and Stanton (2010) argue that the emotional experiences surrounding the events that lead to and follow the deployment of the new technology undoubtedly shape employees’ responses to such technology and its implementation process. They based their research on the regulatory focus theory that may impact the salience (a striking point or feature) and effect of some incidents within the technology change process. This theory analyzes motivation and emotion as they relate to two sets of universal needs that people have: growth needs and security needs (Higgins, 1997). It distinguishes between conditions that can generate positive emotions as a result of gains (i.e., the fulfillment of growth needs) and conditions that can create negative emotions resulting from losses (i.e., through failure to satisfy security needs). In any particular context, a person undertakes one of two motivational orientations: promotion focus, concerning with the achievement of a desirable target, or prevention focus, which is about preventing negative outcomes. The experience of emotion as a feedback to environmental conditions differs depending upon one’s regulatory focus, which involves two components: the first is a stable individual difference component and the second is a situational one. Existing and dominant circumstances change.
one’s regulatory focus depending on how one considers a situation’s probable outcome as beneficial or harmful.

During a crisis, employees’ sensemaking of the organization’s innovation adoption is triggered by attribution to constructive intentionality. Such attributions would engender distinct behavioral reactions to such innovation, given that such drastic shift in the teaching methodology is intended to safeguard all stakeholders’ well-being and to sincerely achieve desirable financial and educational outcomes to all parties involved. Moreover, the urgency boosts the contextual dimension of the readiness for change, which enhances organization members’ commitment to implement the change. In addition, drawing on the regulatory focus theory, the author argues that the organization members’ response to the new technology implementation is positive, resulting from the avoidance of a possible loss, a salary, or a potential job loss, specifically.

Based on the above argument, the researcher formulates the following proposition:

**During a crisis, employees’ readiness behavior for an innovation implementation is boosted by attributions to constructive intentionality; acknowledgments of the innovation implementation’s urgency, triggered by a prevention focus; as well as by other emotional and contextual factors emanating from the crisis’ imposed conditions.**

### Social Relationships and Knowledge Sharing During Innovation Implementation

Scholars have always been curious to reveal the relationships between readiness for change and a different numbers of organizational variables. Among these variables are the individual contribution to the change effort, active-passive job, job change self-efficacy, job demands, and the autonomy in the decision-making process (Cunningham et al., 2002); job satisfaction and effective job performance (McNabb & Sepic, 1995); and work-related knowledge and skills, social relations in the workplace, organizational culture, and management–leadership relationships (Hanpachern et al., 1998). Madsen et al. (2005) revealed that the social relationships among employees at work are linked to their readiness for organizational change. The positive feelings, attitudes, and perceptions shared among colleagues and supervisors at the workplace smooth the individuals’ willingness and openness for organizational change, their involvement, and boosted support. Hanpachern (1997) reported the significant association between social relationships and readiness for change and organizational culture. Within the same context, Eby et al. (2000) highlighted the importance of the perceived organizational support and trust in peers, to readiness for change. Cunningham et al. (2002) stated, “supportive colleagues may play a more important role in employee efforts to cope with the stress of organizational change” (p. 387).

Madsen et al. (2005) revealed that social support and interaction constitute crucial elements making up a positive organizational culture that enhance organizational readiness for change. Such social relationship plays a double role: one is for support and the second is for knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is the process of sharing expertise, skills, or information among employees inside organizations, as well as outside, that is, among people and friends in communities (Michael, 2007; S. Park & Kim, 2015). The idea has been derived from the cost-effective theory and the social exchange one (Bock & Kim, 2002). Under the cost-effective theory, knowledge sharing is taking place anytime employees believe that such sharing will reward them financially. Under the social exchange theory, employees are assumed to share their knowledge to satisfy their self-esteem need and receive some kind of appreciation from their leader and peers. While knowledge exchanges may occur with voluntary and involuntary participation of knowledge possessors (AlShaima et al., 2016; Sedighi et al., 2016), S. K. Singh et al. (2019) argue that knowledge sharing and knowledge helping are found to be the significant links through which human capital (capability) and psychosocial capital (motivation and efficacy) radically forecast prosocial knowledge effectiveness. They pointed to the fact that human capital, through knowledge sharing, influences team learning, and the psychosocial capital, through knowledge helping, influences team leadership. Thus, knowledge helping provides a crucial meaning for the self and the others (Sedighi et al., 2016). While knowledge sharing is a routine and formal task that lies within the in-role scope, knowledge helping necessitates prosocial efforts (Grant & Ashford, 2008), considered extra-roles and being informal in nature.

Lately, the use of social media has made information easy to exchange and knowledge easy to spread among target audiences, being done at a rapid pace and in the right direction (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012). Whether it is through Facebook, WhatsApp groups, YouTube, Viber, or Twitter, employees are using these tools to share information about and views with respect to organizational change, policies, and other work-related issues, among others (Aslam et al., 2018). Playing a key role in sharing sound information through creating effective communication (Jue et al., 2009), the social media makes it more convenient to fulfill Kotter’s expectations with respect to the importance of frequent and sound communication during transformational change (Dey, 2013). Research revealed that the lack of effective and fruitful communication have led to the failure of many change initiatives (Kotter, 2007; Russ, 2007; Sirkin et al., 2005). Indeed, the importance of social media becomes extremely crucial during quarantine times, when a crisis has imposed an absolute lockdown. Thus, social media becomes the only means for maintaining the social relations and the colleagues’ support in particular; as well as for information sharing and knowledge helping, specifically. Such knowledge exchange,
although done in a very casual and informal manner, boosts members’ readiness and secures the smooth implementation of the innovation.

Based on the above argument, the researcher formulates the following proposition:

*During a crisis, support and knowledge sharing among organization members on social media boosts their readiness to an innovation implementation process.*

**Research Methodology**

This research adopts the inductive reasoning, as it assesses the implications and the evidence in an attempt to find an advantageous argument to better grasp the organization members’ readiness and consequently draw a conclusion. The researcher collects particular statements in the data gathered by looking for clear trends in specific interactions, and accordingly advances general statements to test the formulated propositions (Trochim, 2000).

Due to the vital role of case studies in organizational changes researches, a mixed methods research is highlighted here, with an emphasis on construction of contextualism (Orlikowski & Yates, 2006; Pare & Elam, 2002; Yin, 2003) using qualitative interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2004) and WhatsApp chats among group members (Mattar, 2019). Indeed, the popularity of mixed methods is increasing (Kaarst-Brown & Guzman, 2008), attributing its strengths to better assess complex subject matter with more depth and credibility. Thus, anytime a comprehensive assessment of the findings is required, triangular approaches are found to be appropriate and deemed necessary (Cohen & Manion, 1994). In the analysis of the different methods’ output, triangulation adds some depth to the analysis and potentially increases the validity of the data and consequently the analysis made of them (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). By using many methods at the same time, the weaknesses of any one process may be overcome by those of others (Seale, 1999).

The participants in this study are the faculty members of a single Faculty in a Lebanese university adopting the American system of education. The WhatsApp group that was initiated for the purpose of the innovation implementation consists of 64 members, including one director, three administrative assistants, one computer lab assistant, with the remaining number being allocated among both, full-time and part-time faculty members. Moreover, to gain deeper insights into the topic under investigation, a semi-structured interview was conducted, online, with 10 randomly selected faculty members. The researcher shared with the participants the study’s aim and acquired their consent for the publication of their messages and accordingly gained access to their WhatsApp’s chats history, specifically for a 12-day period, including those few days that preceded the official implementation (i.e., the day the online classes embarked) and that included the training sessions held by the IT department. Indeed, the first Corona case in Lebanon was revealed on February 20, 2020. On February 29, the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education took the decision to close all schools and universities. The WebEx training session was held on March 5, 2020, and the online classes embarked on Monday March 9. The researcher safeguarded the anonymity of the participants.

Thus, in this research, the qualitative data are collected from semi-structured interviews as well as from a social networking tool: WhatsApp. Afterward, content analysis is assumed, being defined as “a multi-purpose research method developed specifically for investigating a broad spectrum of problems in which the content of communication serves as a basis of inference, from word counts (Travers, 1969) to categorization” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 164). Content analysis, to depict the patterns, style, and trends in communication content, is used by analyzing the interviews data as well as the conversations that took place on the WhatsApp group. The author was particularly looking for attitudes, beliefs, and emotional reactions that were explicitly expressed by the participants or even indirectly shared. Then, the isolated messages are rechecked to form a set of categories portraying members’ readiness. The content of each message exchanged, colleagues’ responses, voice messages, and voice tone in addition to the emojis used are highlighted and addressed too. The same is done for the qualitative data collected from interviews.

The researcher stressed on the importance of this relatively new method for data collection (i.e., WhatsApp) as it uncovers the accurate feelings of the participants at the time the critical event was taking place, without knowing that their messages will be later on analyzed and their words thoroughly studied; in addition to the absence of a data collection agent which might be an obstacle for genuine responses for the questions raised to participants. (Mattar, 2019, p. 631)

The participants never assumed that what they exchanged via WhatsApp will be at a later stage used by an outsider (the researcher), and here lies the genuineness of the attitude in what has been communicated, and consequently unbiased conversations are safeguarded, thus enabling the researcher to seize the real picture at its real time. Furthermore, she had to consider a data analysis technique that engages reading and judgment, and thus, the content analysis has been assumed (Cohen et al., 2000).

The WhatsApp conversations and the qualitative data collected from interviews were transcribed while preserving the participants’ anonymity. The data were reduced and then categorized, grouping similar information emanating from different sources under a single category (Kvale, 1996). Then, the information within each category was compared and contrasted until one conclusion was outlined with respect to that category and gradually being able to examine the research propositions set. Throughout the transcribing, coding, and analysis processes, the researcher ensured to reveal the members’ own personal view about the situation...
with the hope of lessening the financial burden on their Saturdays, students wanted to take benefits of the situation souses to make-up for the lost sessions, whether in extending Although the Lebanese universities took the proper measures that the credit hours were not delivered as they should have seen tough at the beginning. Furthermore, the consistency in labeling the situation and controlling subsequent behavioral reactions (Choi et al., 2019). In this study, attributions underlying the adoption of an innovation play a crucial role in assessing and fully understanding the reasons behind the implementation of such innovation, employees attempt to label and assign meaning to these circumstances (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; C. L. Park, 2010). As a fundamental trigger of sensemaking, “attributions of intentionality” underlying the adoption of an innovation play a crucial role in labeling the situation and controlling subsequent behavioral reactions (Choi et al., 2019). In this study, attributions to constructive intentionality have an incremental value in explaining employees’ readiness to start with their online classes, although this innovation implementation might seem tough at the beginning. Furthermore, the consistency in the decision across all educational sectors in Lebanon and abroad made organization members understand that their organization’s intention behind such implementation is sincere as it is not meant to harm or challenge any member, but on the contrary to secure a fruitful process and a relatively happy ending. This was clearly revealed in the discussion held among group members when they shifted their conversation to the different platforms used by other Lebanese universities and schools, and the efficiency of each. This university is using Skype for Business, that university is using Microsoft Teams, that school is using Zoom, and so on. The researcher’s attention was attracted by how the discussion has moved, quickly, to the assessment of the tools adopted for the innovation implementation and how members wanted to take maximum advantage of such innovation to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the online teaching/learning process. This finding supports many scholars who argue that when employees’ trust that the organization’s intentions are honest, their sense of control, satisfaction, and organizational commitment are boosted, thus encouraging proactive and extra-role behavior (Bala & Venkatesh, 2016; Dalal, 2005).
Moreover, in this research, the concept of regulatory focus explains the individuals’ positive response to a technologically induced change, given that the experience of emotion in response to environmental conditions differs depending upon one’s regulatory focus, with a major situational component. Dominant circumstances modify one’s regulatory focus depending upon whether one sees the likely result of a situation as a gain or a loss (Stam & Stanton, 2010). In this research, individuals seem to be motivationally oriented by the prevention focus, which concerns mainly with the avoidance of unpleasant outcomes: the potential extension of the Spring semester, the probable loss of a summer vacation, and the loss of a job and a salary, specifically. The majority of participants revealed their worries of not earning regular salaries. One interviewee revealed,

The Lebanese political and economic situation has been dramatic since October. We spent the last few months waiting for the monthly pay slip to check if there are reductions. And look now, Corona came to put us on a higher risk!

Another interviewee said, “Lebanese wages and salaries have undergone major cut offs in different industries of the private sector, and I will not be surprised if our organization will do the same.” Moreover, a relatively major part of the WhatsApp chats addressed the pay concern and the different rumors about other universities reducing salaries. Thus, organization members seemed to be motivated by any mean that secures their financial resources and prevents all kinds of possible harm. Moreover, the author believes that the prevention focus has led to the promotion focus, which is to implement the innovation and proceed with the online teaching, fortifying their computer skills and consequently boosting their growth needs. As Aldahdouh et al. (2020) argued that technology serves scholars in their professional development and progress through three important aspects: knowledge giving, knowledge acquiring, and research. This was clearly stated by different participants. One interviewee said, “I am so proud of myself now. These online classes forced me to upgrade my tech literacy over a weekend!” Another participant revealed, “I was not even used to check my email, and look now, I am navigating easily the platform. I feel a great level of personal fulfillment.” Indeed, research supports the importance of technology on faculty’s professional development (T. Anderson, 2019; Donelan, 2016; Lupton, 2014; S. Manca & Ranieri, 2017) and argues that failing to keep pace with technology leads to professional death (Gillard et al., 2008). For instance, Donelan (2016) disclosed that as the level of activity on social media and other technological means increase, the perceptions of positive outcomes such as career progression increase.

On another dimension, the COVID-19 crisis and the panic that it entailed, putting people’s lives at risk, lessened the possible negative impact of an innovation implementation at the workplace. As Davidson (2006) argued that the individual’s state of mind when the incident takes place offers a variety of filters that construct the nature of the events in accordance with the individual’s objectives and thoughts. One interviewee revealed, “with the daily increase in the toll of death worldwide, I am shy to say that I am worried from the adoption of a new teaching means.” Another one put it differently: “I should be scared from Corona and not from WebEx!” It is clear how their worries emanating from a life-threatening virus made all other kinds and sources of fear less stressful. Developments by organizational theorists such as Weiss (2002) and Brockner and Higgins (2001) suggest that emotions play important roles in influencing employees’ attitudes and behavior. This has been demonstrated with the qualitative data collected in this study. Moreover, this research supports Backer (1995) who argued that interventions to enhance readiness are possible. Although the interventions here were not directly adopted by the organization itself, the contextual factors imposed by the crisis did the required job. The mandatory and complete lockdown at homes enabled organization members to have all the time needed to get acquainted with the use of this innovation. One interviewee revealed, “I am enjoying experiencing a new platform. Would you imagine yourself being quarantined without a single activity at hand!” With no single activity allowed outside house premises, faculty members had plenty of time checking on the implementation process of this new methodology, something that is not taken for granted under normal circumstances. It was clearly said by another interviewee: “Being quarantined, I am spending my days eating and discovering WebEx. While the first activity is really damaging, the second one is extremely beneficial. I learned a new platform and I had plenty of time doing this.” Although the crisis in the context of this study forced organization members to adopt a change in an extremely short period of time, however, some favorable conditions eased its implementation, including spare time for training one’s self, peer’s support and knowledge sharing.

During a crisis, support and knowledge sharing among organization members on social media boosts their readiness to an innovation implementation process.

Different aspects of the organizational culture, mainly the inter-professional relations as well as the supportive leadership, tend to promote positive attitudes toward change (Ingersoll et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2005). Madsen et al. (2005) revealed that social support and interaction are important elements constituting a positive organizational culture that leads to increased organizational readiness for change. Within the same context, L. Anderson (2018) revealed the crucial role that community support plays in assisting leaders and other members to cope with the crisis and the stress it creates. This issue has been well noted and documented in the current study. One interviewee revealed, “I was charging my phone three times a day. The number of messages sent and received on this group is countless!!” The WhatsApp chats revealed that they even shared some joke to alleviate stress. Many examples illustrate and support this argument.
It was shown when one group member shared the news of the first Lebanese who passed away from the COVID-19 virus, his age, his profession, being a teacher, how he was contaminated, and so on. Another group member replied by saying that he did not pass away from Corona, but from the WebEx that his administration asked him to use while delivering his online courses! And then the laughing face emoji started to flow from all the WhatsApp group members. Although the whole situation and all what the crisis has entailed constitute a worldwide tragedy, members were trying to lessen the toughness of the situation by supporting each others and raising their colleagues’ morale by a joke from here and a funny experience from there to smoothen their readiness to the innovation implementation. Another example is when one member raised a funny concern by saying, “How does a member in the virtual class excuse him when he wants to go to the restroom?” A colleague replies: “by clicking on the recycling bin!” followed by three laughing emojis. Indeed, they were challenging, sarcastically, the virtual teaching process that they are obliged to consider. They were doing this with a joke. Another situation that triggered members’ laugh is when one member shared something funny he encountered: “Between the two consecutive sessions that I had today, I forgot to mute my microphone and log out. I started singing the Scorpions’ song ‘Still loving you’ with all its high musical notes!!’” He continued by saying, “I wish the students who I asked to record the session and upload for later use, stopped recording before I started, as I was singing it with an extraterrestrial voice!!!!” By being not really used to the whole new teaching methodology, members were facing weird situations, that they were ready to share with their colleagues to make fun of it, and to make it a learning experience for themselves and their colleagues. By doing so, they succeeded in creating some positive moods, although momentarily in such stressful circumstances, and in supporting indirectly other members who are facing the same but are shy to declare, not to be accused of technology ignorance. This can be depicted by the flow of messages that comes after a discussion initiated by a colleague. One member said, “Soon, I will be writing a book about the silly and funny cases that I am encountering while delivering my online classes.” In fact, members were trying to cheer up each others through WhatsApp, given the huge amount of worries and stress emanating from the whole context: being quarantined at home, confronting a deadly virus, and implementing and stress in periods of organizational change. The university offered a basic technical support first. But then everyone shared his/her thoughts and knowledge on the WhatsApp group. Consequently, we became encouraged!” Another one said, “First, I totally refused the idea, I did not even attend the training session. But then, with the colleagues’ motivating comments and support, I felt much more at ease and I took the initiative to start checking how this platform works.

Balthazard and Cooke (2004) argued that the effective organizational change is accomplished through supervising and enriching intangible assets, including knowledge sharing, communication, and interpersonal relations. The failure of drastic change initiatives is often attributed to change leaders lacking vision and credible communication (Kotter, 2007).

Given that everyone is quarantined, social media platforms came out to be the only possible and fruitful means for communication and knowledge sharing. It enriches the communication through photos, videos, and tutorials sharing. All of that could not have been possible through the traditional communication tools, such as phone. And as an organization member cannot be physically present in the peer’s office to share knowledge and guide his or her colleague throughout the innovation implementation process, social media and WhatsApp here specifically came out to be the medium through which expertise, skills, and knowledge are shared. Stemming from the social network theory, the social exchange theory, and the social penetration theory, Ngai et al. (2015) reported that social media tools are beneficial in establishing an effective two-way communication process. These theories are shown to allow employees, communities, and organizations to create, use, and share knowledge with respect to their experiences, career interests, viewpoints, and organizational policies (Kassotakis et al., 2010).

Most of the group members were supporting each others by a word, an emoji, or even a joke to relieve the stress of the ambiguous situation. However, what is worth noting is that the source of the knowledge, that had been initially shared among group members, is one professor, referred to as Mr. Pro. In addition to the different types of computer-related courses that he teaches, Mr. Pro is known for his advanced computer literacy. He was indeed the first one to attend the initial training session that the university organized asking interested members to register and attend online. The session tackled the features of WebEx, the potential platform considered for the online classes. At that time, nothing was yet assured that a complete lockdown in the country will be administered and the university’s decision for online teaching was not yet taken or shared among the organization members. L. Anderson (2018) argues that emergent leaders in a crisis move fast and are willing to take tough decisions. Although they may be ready to respect official organizational structures, such leaders will not usually wait for clearance, consent, or assistance to behave. While all organization members were invited to attend the introductory training session, almost none of this study’s group members attended.
Being the only one from his Faculty, Mr. Pro showed an emergent behavior and took the initiative to attend without the recommendation of his director. One interviewee made it clear: “First, I register but I did not attend.”

Indeed, Mr. Pro was continuously sending messages and explanatory voice notes, in addition to sharing helpful files, such as the WebEx presentation (PPT; WebEx-Tutorial Pdf file). S. K. Singh et al. (2019) argue that although knowledge exchanges are exhibited in terms of knowledge sharing and knowledge helping, the first one is reactive whereas the second is proactive in nature. It is clear how, through knowledge helping, Mr. Pro was proactively and informally assisting and supporting his colleagues who later on did not stop addressing him with tons of technical questions, by initiating the conversations with: “Since you are our IT expert . . . ” “Sorry for disturbing you at this time, but your are our WebEx guide, . . . .” During the interviews too, some interviewees revealed the importance of Mr. Pro’s guidance in this innovation implementation. One said, for instance, “[Mr. Pro]’s comments are simple, fruitful and encouraging. He is our mentor, our boss.” Although the university offered the technical support required for the smooth implementation of the platform needed for the online teaching process, and although the technical team was ready 24/7 to support organization members, it seems that that members were inclined to ask a colleague for assistance. The reason could be attributed to the members’ fear of raising simple questions in front of all the faculty members attending the online training sessions and consequently be looked at as ignorant and thus challenging their computer literacy in the 21st century. Another reason could be the trust that is found to be greater among in-group members rather than out-group ones in a collectivist culture (Huff & Kelley, 2003), such as the Lebanese one. Indeed, trust is found to lessen negative perceptions among team members, and consequently causing team members to exchange information and ideas comfortably (Rousseau et al., 1998; Yamagishi, 1998).

It is worth noting too that while checking the different WhatsApp chats exchanged on the 8th of March, you can clearly find out that even the director is counting on Mr. Pro to share his knowledge with the group members. He said, “kindly listen to the voice message of [Mr. Pro] in which he explains the possibilities of WebEx.” J. Singh (2008) and S. K. Singh (2008) highlighted the same finding in technological settings and revealed that delegating rather than directive leadership style has a fruitful impact in knowledge management practices. On an another note, the director acknowledged Mr. Pro’s effort by saying, “Thank you [Mr. Pro]. Very important info.” Thus, it is revealed that the traditional leader here was delegating some leadership duties to a follower who emerged in response to this crisis and who is found to be well equipped for this innovation implementation. This finding supports L. Anderson (2018) who argued that during a crisis, leaders must effectively navigate the interactions between the established and the spontaneous actors and organizations.

L. Anderson (2018) states that a common phenomenon following major disasters is the observance of emergent behavior—represented by individuals or organizations that assume original or adapted roles and responsibilities in response to unfolded needs during the crisis. Such members exhibit their readiness or even bias for action. They work proactively to pinpoint the current, emergent needs and to foresee what will be required next. It seems that in cases of an innovation implementation during crises, virtual technical leadership support is not necessarily exercised by the traditional leader, but by the member who ends up supporting colleagues technically and helping them to go out of a crisis with the least amount of damage. Mangundjaya (2013) revealed a significant association between a supportive leadership behavior and readiness for change, especially when it comes to change commitment. In the context of an innovation implementation, the supportive leadership is supported by a temporary leader with some kinds of emergent behaviors, technical ones specifically. The findings support S. K. Singh et al. (2019) who argue that some individuals, by sharing their part of knowledge that is essential for the survival and growth of the team (Morgeson et al., 2010), become influential and a prominent figure in the team. Obviously, knowledge is power. Such individuals connect at large with the team and assist its members. They become involved in some informal mentorship with those relatively less experienced individuals to whom they provide support. Thus, where knowledge has substantial consequences on task accomplishment, individuals assisting others through knowledge sharing and helping are able to crucially influence team members and consequently act as team leaders. It was clearly stated by one participant who said: “he is . . . our boss,” while referring to Mr. Pro.

To conclude, the author argues that a crisis ensured a quick adoption of an organizational change tackling an innovation implementation, a technology-related one specifically, with the least amount of employees’ stress in terms of amount and time. Faculty members who were first somehow resentful to the virtual lectures using WebEx started to take initiatives to make the best use of this tool. They shared on WhatsApp their motivation to record the session and to share the video later on with the students who were not able to attend or with those whose internet connection was not really favorable. One interviewee revealed, “I feel ashamed how, the first few days, I did some kind of blockage; where the implementation and the whole online teaching process ended up being simple and fruitful to finish the Spring semester with the least losses.” Although some connection problems are worrying organization members, however, they seem to be proud of their newly acquired expertise. This is revealed in the regular positive feedback they share after each session they teach, as well as in the new tips they are proud to discover alone and share with other members. As Bernerth (2004) argued, “readiness is more than understanding the change, readiness is more than believing in the change, readiness is a collection of thoughts and intentions toward the
specific change effort” (p. 40). Thus, left with no other alternatives under such a crisis, members’ intentions toward the online classes as well as their intentions toward their fruitful efforts in implementing this change became positive, consequently boosting their readiness for it. A readiness that was secured in few days, not even exceeding one hand’s fingers. This readiness was definitely shaped by the colleagues’ positive support and by the constructive knowledge sharing process. Although the member who showed an emergent behavior took the technical lead during the first few days, later on everyone played an important role.

To sum up, the researcher agrees with different scholars who have sketched on the coping theory assuming that an innovation usage hangs on the cognitive assessment of such innovation as a threat or a chance to flourish and prosper (Beaudry & Pinsoneault, 2005). The emphasis in these theoretical accounts has mostly been on the employees’ anticipations of the costs and benefits associated with an innovation and a workplace modernization. While the benefits listed are numerous (e.g., finishing the planned course material, and enjoying the summer break without any possible extension of the Spring semester, securing the salary, safeguarding the job) and have boosted faculty members’ readiness to implement the change; it is worth revealing the potential cost that members are scared of ending up incurring: being closely monitored by the upper administration as their online teaching sessions can be easily tracked and recorded. Indeed, the privacy concern was clearly initiated by different members. While the online teaching sessions were taking place, and the majority was doing relatively well, a new concern popped out, especially after an email faculty members received from the upper administration asking them to name the WebEx meeting according to the course code and section (all caps, no spaces, two-digit section number). Members believed that such coding makes tracking modes easier and consequently raised the issue of their privacy that might be at risk! One member wrote, “They only want to provide us with statistics or they are spying on us. Who is doing what and how? Who is teaching over WebEx and who is not?” Another faculty member answered back: “It is for spying purposes only!” A third one argued, “Since it is digitally controlled, they can see what is happening in all courses.” However, the computer lab assistant replied, “I think the data will be overwritten after a period of time.” And the flow of discussion continued for a while, clearly highlighting their negative feedback to a possible risk of having their privacy being endangered. Respondents shared the same fear during the interview process, as well. One interviewee argued, “I did not like the idea that I do not know who will have access to my lecture.” It seems that this issue was raised during one of the training session offered by the university, as one group member revealed, “when I was attending the session with [IT officer], he told us that the university can not register the whole session, but definitely they can track whether the session was done or not.” One replied, “What if [IT officer] does not have the right to tell us all the truth!!” The researcher wanted to wrap up this section with the privacy concern raised by faculty members as it is an issue that needs further investigation to end up with fruitful recommendations minimizing the drawbacks of the possible stressed caused by such worries. Its ethical dimension can be tackled too. Such worries have been revealed throughout different studies as well. For instance, faculty members have conveyed privacy concerns when using social media, such as the confusing restrictions and thus threatening one’s career and livelihood (Gruzd et al., 2012). Other worries were revealed pertaining to copyright issues such as plagiarism and the commercialization of content (Lupton, 2014), especially with the videos of the recorded sessions.

**Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations**

This study revealed that anytime the innovation adoption is attributed to constructive intentionality, employees’ attitude toward such innovation becomes positive and fruitful. Consequently, their behaviors tended to reflect a fertile engagement with the innovation, similar to what Ferris et al. (1995) argued. The importance of this study lies in the unusual context in which the innovation in the work process has been implemented: a crisis that forced everyone to be quarantined. Such a crisis shaped the contextual variables and the members’ emotional response, which boosted their readiness. Moreover, the significance of this research lies in the implications of the colleagues’ support which was exercised remotely, through a social media platform specifically. This remote support was initially fortified by the knowledge sharing and helping practices that were mainly exercised by an emergent member with some advanced information technology skills, basically required for this specific innovation implementation.

**Practical and Theoretical Implications**

S. Park and Kim (2015) argued that a substantial number of studies are still needed to assess the relationship between organizational change and knowledge exchange, and consequently being able to draw empirical and theoretical conclusions. Thus, this research’s importance lies in the different theoretical and practical implications that it entails, especially that such information exchange was merely taking place through a social media platform, as the physical presence in the workplace was totally banned due to the quarantine imposed by the Corona crisis. On the other side, its importance is emphasized by the nature of this organization change, which is the adoption of a technology-based innovation.

**Practical Implications**

This research reveals that coping with an innovation implementation requires a cooperative approach and emphasizes
the prominence of some emergent roles that few organization members can assume throughout an organizational change process. Organization members seek assistance from professionals in the context of difficult and uncertain conditions, leading to individuals’ engagement in knowledge helping and knowledge sharing (Hofmann et al., 2009). The informal mechanism of knowledge helping, a person-focused developmental activity and an altruistic one, deemed necessary for collective learning to take place during a crisis. The formal leader should take advantage of the superior skills of specific members and empower them to support and hold their colleagues’ hands throughout the implementation stage, especially when the situation involves the need for some technical and technological literacy. The psychosocial capital of such specific members is mainly interpersonal in nature and thus counts on the informal knowledge exchange to govern team leadership. Practically speaking, leaders should encourage the emergence of such technical leadership behavior and motivate the informal communication among members, as both are found out to be effective in the implementation of an innovation during a crisis, and where organization members are not physically present. Indeed, virtual technical leadership seems to work well, and casual and informal communication through a social media platform (e.g., WhatsApp) seems to be effective in achieving organizational objectives.

Moreover, the proactive helping behavior revealed in the knowledge helping process is found to be a culture-specific phenomenon prevailing in a collectivistic culture. Thus, managers can benefit of such emergent behavior, as well as of that intra-team trust clearly noticeable in such cultures, to motivate information sharing between team members, boost its occurrence, and consequently secure a smooth implementation of any organizational change. This finding might have practical implications on managers’ jobs in individualistic cultures too, but unfortunately, their efforts could be more challenging.

Another implication is the possibility of the organization’s executives to take advantage of some unusual contextual variables to introduce any change they deem necessary for their employees’ growth and for their organization’s survival. While being fully focused on, and strained from some non-work-related matters, organization members will not be as stressed out from an organizational change that could have been implemented under normal conditions. By considering such opportunities for a change introduction, organizations can secure and boost its competitive advantage in such a rapidly growing business environment, while minimizing employees’ stress and anxiety.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study revealed that a crisis ensured a quick move of organizational members over the different stages of an organizational change tackling an innovation implementation. This rapid move has been done with the least amount of stress, especially that the tension, anxiety, and fear caused by the crisis itself overwhelmed every single person on earth. Thus, a work-related stress seemed not to be as frustrating when compared with a life threatening one.

Different theories tackled the importance of the support an organization member cherishes from a leader or a peer at the workplace. However, none highlighted the prominence of a virtual and remote support, a finding deemed crucial in an organizational change during crisis. Within the same context, virtual technical leadership is not found to be necessarily exercised by the traditional leader, but by an emergent member, who is technically well equipped and who is ready to share knowledge, thus supporting his or her colleagues technically. Moreover, the knowledge helping process is not found to be necessarily governed and managed by managers, at least when it is first initiated.

Although different scholars (e.g., Armenakis & Harris, 2002) argued that a lack of preparation may lead to a failure of an organizational change, this study challenged this belief in the context of a crisis, where a proper traditional preparation is not possible due to different constraints, including time, physical presence in the organization’s premises, and face-to-face influencing and communication. It seems that a crisis formulated the measures differently and challenged the conventional way provisions were encouraged, as other types of preparations deemed to be fruitful.

Another important theoretical implication is the extent to which an organizational change and the usual stress and resistance that accompany it is easily overcome when other more challenging situational factors are present.

**Recommendation for future research.** A leader is known to play a crucial role in any organizational change as well as during a crisis. Thus, in the context of this study, his or her role is extremely vital and imperative as the situation involves an innovation implementation during a crisis: two critical situations combined in one. However, the quarantine that has been imposed on all, made his or her role to be played remotely. Consequently, a new research tackling the implications of such remote leadership practices would be extremely innovative and fruitful, especially that such leadership practices are not communicated through some traditional means, but through a technologically related one: through social networking and more specifically, via WhatAapp. Other than the technical support role that has been delegated, what are the other roles that the leader took care of to back up and encourage followers in these critical times?

Moreover, this study opens doors to future research tackling the efficiency and effectiveness of such innovation in the teaching methodology. Results of such studies will have different implications. First, they will check if the organization members’ readiness to and attributions of the innovation do lead to effective implementation. Second, in case positive and encouraging results come out, the traditional practices of the teaching/learning process will be challenged, and a new era will flourish. Thus, assessment studies are to be
conducted highlighting the pros and cons of such virtual classrooms, and the challenges that the different organization stakeholders faced, including administrators, faculty members, and students. Future studies may highlight the different age group readiness for such process, the different subjects, as well as the different cultures’ readiness for such technology-based teaching/learning process. Another study may assess the organization members’ willingness to continue benefiting from such a newly adopted technology-based methodology, their preference to go back to traditional methodologies if conditions allow, or simply their inclination to combine both techniques when conditions permit. Furthermore, studies tackling the privacy issues should be of a great importance, as participants in this study seem to sincerely worry about whether they are being watched out without their consent. Are such worries triggered by the potential hidden objectives of such observance?

**Limitations**

The relatively moderate infrastructure available in Lebanon hampered the successful implementation of the online teaching process, as frequent network connection issues were raised. Thus, the researcher was not in a highly confident position to attribute the stress that the faculty members exhibited at the beginning, to the poor internet connection, or to both, connectivity issue and innovation implementation. Were faculty members hiding under an external variable to cover a specific personal weakness?

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**ORCID iD**

Dorine Maurice Mattar [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7461-182X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7461-182X)

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