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A Study of the Impact of Embeddedness and Relational Networks on Organizational Resilience in Public Benefit Organizations

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Abstract

The current global natural disasters, financial crises, regional conflicts, and public health emergencies have had a significant impact on all countries, organizations, and individuals, and not only are commercial organizations in a quandary in terms of their survival and development, but nonprofit organizations are also facing unprecedented impacts and challenges. Understanding how public interest organizations have survived the crisis, and in some cases thrived, has drawn increasing attention to Organizational resilience. The article investigates the effects of relational networks, embeddedness, and innovation capacity on the Organizational resilience of public interest institutions, and finds that relational networks have a direct positive effect on the Organizational resilience of public interest institutions; and that bimodal innovation plays a fully mediating role between relational networks and the resilience of public interest institutions. In addition, perceived embeddedness significantly moderated the relationship between inter-organizational relational networks and exploratory innovation, but its moderating effect on intra-organizational networks and exploitative innovation did not reach a significant level. The findings provide theoretical basis and practical insights for nonprofit organizations to optimize resource allocation and enhance crisis response capacity.

Keywords: embeddedness, relations network, organizational resilience, public benefit organizations

1. Introduction

Since the reform and opening up of China, China's public welfare organizations have developed rapidly, playing an indispensable role in promoting social progress and solving social problems, and gradually becoming an important force in building a harmonious socialist society. However, the current global natural disasters, financial crises, regional conflicts, public health emergencies and other “gray rhinoceros” and “black swan” events have caused China's public welfare organizations, which started late and are still in the early stages of development, to experience more volatility and uncertainty. The external environment has become increasingly complex and challenging, and the VUCA environment has evolved into a normalized crisis that enterprises must face directly. Not only enterprises, but also public welfare organizations have encountered unprecedented impacts on their survival and development. Among them are the global financial crisis of 2008 and the resulting austerity measures, and the recent global COVID-19 pandemic. Both of these events have had a wide-ranging impact on the public charity sector, with some charities closing down and others being pushed to the brink of bankruptcy (Plaisance, 2022), and a survey by the China Development Brief reported that the new coronary pneumonia epidemic has had a negative impact on public charity organizations in China, with the impact on small- and medium-sized public charity organizations, in particular, being extremely heavy. China's philanthropic organizations face many challenges and dilemmas, which can be summarized in terms of both internal dilemmas and external constraints. The construction and use of relational networks is becoming more and more crucial in the development process of public welfare and philanthropy. The relationship networks between individuals and society and between people involved in the development process of public welfare organizations are an important issue in China, which is a relationship-based society. Public welfare organizations rely on networking with government departments, corporations, other public welfare organizations, communities, and volunteers in order to enhance their overall strength and gain an advantage in an increasingly complex and competitive market environment.

The iterative upgrading of productivity throughout history has had a profound impact on the development of public welfare and philanthropy. At present, China's public welfare and philanthropy has entered a new historical stage, which puts forward higher requirements for public welfare and philanthropy. However, the development of China's public welfare and philanthropy is still in the initial stage of transition from traditional to modern, the concept of public welfare and the spirit of scientific practice have not yet taken root, and the traditional public welfare model is gradually difficult to meet the increasingly complex social problems and public expectations. Innovative models and technological upgrading can effectively improve the effectiveness and level of public welfare charity, and thus promote the transformation of public welfare charity. Innovation is an inevitable trend in the development of public welfare in the new era, and public welfare organizations must carry out innovation to improve their own capabilities.

Embeddedness refers to the need for enterprises to be locally rooted. The competitiveness of an enterprise depends not only on the national environment, but more importantly on the regional and local environment in which it is located. Like any other business, public interest organizations need to be integrated into a specific local environment. Due to the multifunctional nature of public interest institutions, nonprofit organizations must maintain good relationships with multiple stakeholders (Rymsza & Zimmer, 2004). The sustainable and healthy development of public welfare organizations is dependent on their deep integration into the local community, and embeddedness plays a crucial role in the process of integration of public welfare organizations into the local community.

Through the systematic combing of research results in the related fields of relational networks, innovation capacity, embeddedness and organizational resilience, it can be found that the existing research has achieved fruitful results in the drivers of Organizational resilience, and comprehensively explored the main factors affecting Organizational resilience, and the existing research has carried out in-depth studies on the connotation of embeddedness, its role in the development of enterprises and industries, as well as its role in relational networks, etc., and the measurement and evaluation methods of related variables have also been gradually enriched and improved with the depth of research. The measurement and evaluation of relevant variables have also been enriched and improved with the depth of research. However, in summary, there are still some shortcomings in the current research: firstly, although the research on Organizational resilience has received more and more attention in the past, most of it is based on the exploration of Organizational resilience in economics, management and other disciplines, and there is a lack of research from the perspective of geography, and there are even fewer studies exploring Organizational resilience based on the perspective of rootedness. Second, in the study of drivers of Organizational resilience, most studies analyze the direct impact of a single or several drivers in isolation. Third, existing studies mainly focus on the industrial cluster and firm level, and there is a relative lack of comprehensive research on embeddedness and relational networks at the regional level. Fourth, when exploring the role of relational networks, research on the interaction between social networks and other factors is not deep enough, and the interaction between relational networks and more complex factors needs to be further explored.

In view of this, this study takes the employees of public welfare organizations in Guizhou Province as the research object, and intends to introduce innovation ability as a mediating variable and PE as a moderating variable to study and analyze the relationship and influence mechanism between relational networks and Organizational resilience.

2. Research Hypotheses and Modeling

A relational network is a unique network of relationships constructed between members within an organization and between internal and external members based on formal or informal ties (COLEMAN, 1994). In this paper, relational networks are divided into two categories: (Intra-) and (Inter-). The former refers to networks constructed between internal members of an organization, and the latter refers to networks established between an organization and other external organizations. Relationship networks allow organizations to obtain information about industry trends, customer preferences, and new technologies that may be valuable for improving products or services and gaining competitive advantage (Birley & Westhead, 1990). In addition, social ties with other organizations such as suppliers or customers can provide access to resources such as raw materials or capital (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). The existence of relational networks can promote inter-organizational synergy and knowledge exchange, which in turn enhances the level of organizational performance. For example, partnerships between firms can allow for the sharing of resources, expertise and knowledge, which can lead to increased efficiency and innovation. It has been noted that the closer the network of relationships, the greater the Organizational resilience of the organization (McCann & Selsky 2012). Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Inter-organizational networks(Inter-) positively affect the organizational resilience(OR) of public interest institutions;

H2: Intra-organizational networks(Intra-) positively influence Organizational resilience (OR)of public interest institutions.

Innovation capability refers to the ability to creatively integrate existing resources, improve old things or create new things to obtain benefits in the field of theory and technology, which is the key to constructing competitive advantages and obtaining sustainable development of organizations (Henzlova & Duvall, 2017). As an important "soft capability" of enterprises, innovation can help organizations to be flexible and adaptable in crisis environments, which is conducive to more rapid adaptation, recovery, and rebound in the face of risks or dilemmas, thus enhancing Organizational resilience. Innovation can be realized through cross-border connections with different professional organizations. According to the relational network theory, (Inter-) bring together social capital such as information, knowledge, reputation and strategic resources, providing firms with access to resources (Ahuja, 2000). Within organizations, through information sharing and knowledge exchange in relational networks, firms are able to integrate, optimize, and upgrade existing resources, thereby facilitating effective knowledge transfer and information sharing. This internal flow and sharing of knowledge, information and resources can accelerate the accumulation and transfer of value within the organization. In the external environment, organizations are able to access diverse and heterogeneous information and resources by connecting with other networks, which helps to break through the original knowledge boundaries, stimulate new creativity and ideas, and lay the foundation for exploratory innovation activities such as exploring new markets, attracting new customers, and developing new products. Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Leveraging innovations (LI) mediate between inter-organizational networks and Organizational resilience.

H4: Exploitative innovations (EI) mediate between intra-organizational networks and Organizational resilience.

In the early 1990s, Western economic geographers introduced the concept of "embeddedness" in order to analyze the relationship between enterprises and the local environment in greater depth. Embeddedness is one of the important perspectives in human geography research, which refers to the fact that all the elements in the production network of an enterprise are deeply rooted in the local area, and the development of the enterprise is affected by the spatial distance, local society and culture, politics, local history and so on. It has been shown that embeddedness has a significant effect on enterprise innovation performance. In the study of innovation performance of SMEs, relational rootedness, structural rootedness and cognitive rootedness all positively affect innovation performance, with structural embeddedness having the most significant effect (Pomegbe et al., 2020). Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypotheses：

H5: Perceived embeddedness (PE) positively regulates inter-organizational networks with exploratory innovation.

H6: Perceived embeddedness (PE) positively regulates intra-organizational networks with exploitative innovation.

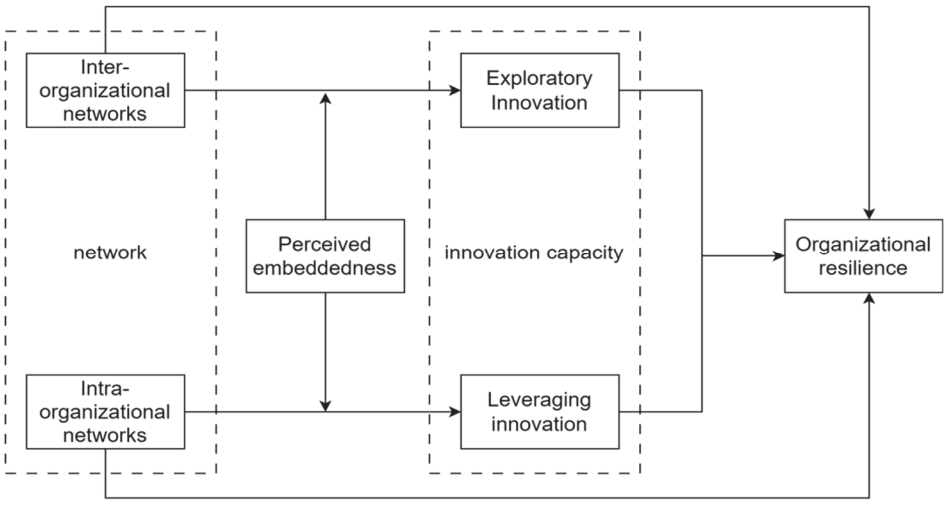

Figure 1. Conceptual Model Diagram

3. Methods and Data Collection

1) Method

Questionnaire Survey Method

Questionnaire method is a research method that collects information from respondents in written form by designing a standardized questionnaire, this study referred to the existing proven scales and made additions and modifications accordingly to the specific needs of the study.

Statistical analysis method.

Statistical analysis method is a research method based on the principles of mathematics and statistics to collect, organize, analyze and interpret data. In this study, a combination of statistical software tools such as Excel, SPSS and AMOS were used.

2) Data collection

In this study, we chose public welfare organizations in Guizhou province as the research sample, and we measured the social relationship network, innovation ability, embeddedness, and Organizational resilience with the employees of each public welfare organization in Guizhou province as the research subjects. The interviewees were formal employees of public welfare organizations in Guizhou province. The questionnaires were distributed online and offline, and a total of 355 questionnaires were distributed and 322 questionnaires were collected, with an effective recovery rate of 90.7%.

4. Results

Based on the 322 valid questionnaire samples, the research sample was preliminarily organized and screened. In terms of gender distribution, the number of female respondents was slightly higher than that of males, with males accounting for 46% and females accounting for 54% . In terms of age structure, young and middle-aged people were the main respondents, with 31.7% of respondents aged 21 - 30 and 23.3% aged 31 - 40. Marital status statistics show that the majority of respondents are married, accounting for 62.4%. In terms of position, 58.1% were general employees and 41.9% were management staff.

4.1 Analysis of Differences in Organizational Resilience by Gender and Job Status

Using SPSS 27.0 software, the analysis was carried out using independent samples T-test in terms of gender (male and female) and job title (management or not) grouping. The results showed (Tab1) that there was no significant difference in Organizational resilience between males and females. ($t = -0.768$, $p = 0.443 > 0.05$), but there was a significant difference between employees and management ($t = 2.361$, $p = 0.019 < 0.05$). It shows that in these subgroups, gender has no significant effect on Organizational resilience, while job status has a significant effect on Organizational resilience, and the average Organizational resilience of regular employees is higher than that of management.

Table 1. Analysis of differences in Organizational resilience by gender and job status

variable	form	sample size	Mean (sd)	T	Significance (two-tailed)
Gender	male	148	4.36±0.55	-0.768	0.443
	female	174	4.40±0.51		
position	staff	187	4.44±0.50	2.361	0.019
	management	135	4.3±0.55		

4.2 Organizational Resilience Correlation Analysis

In this study, SPSS 27.0 software was used to correlate the variables using Pearson's correlation coefficient as an indicator. As can be seen in Tab2, the means and standard deviations of the variables are in the reasonable range and all of them passed the significance test ($p < 0.01$). Specifically, intra-organizational relational network(Intra-)as well as inter-organizational relational network (Inter-) showed a positive correlation with Organizational resilience (OR) ($r=0.21$); intra-organizational relational network (Intra-) was significantly positively correlated with exploitative innovations (LY) ($r=0.38$), and inter-organizational relational network (Inter-)was positively correlated with exploratory innovations (EI) ($r=0.33$). Both exploratory innovation (EI) and exploitative innovation (LY) are significantly and positively correlated with Organizational resilience (OR) ($r > 0.3$). In addition, there is a high positive correlation between exploitative innovation and exploratory innovation (r

= 0.70), indicating that they have a synergistic effect; there is also a strong positive correlation between Organizational resilience and PE (r = 0.60), indicating that Organizational resilience is closely related to the employees' sense of belonging to the organization. The results of the correlation analysis were basically consistent with the research hypotheses, which provided preliminary support for the study.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis

variable	Intra-	Inter-	LI	EI	OR	PE
Intra-	1					
Inter-	0.11*	1				
LI	0.38**	0.32**	1			
EI	0.33**	0.33**	0.70**	1		
OR	0.21**	0.21**	0.44**	0.40**	1	
PE	0.25**	0.34**	0.33**	0.41**	0.60**	1
Mean	4.33	3.93	4.22	4.42	4.38	4.4
Sd	0.55	0.55	0.48	0.59	0.53	0.52

* Significant at the 0.05 level . ** Significant correlation at the 0.01 level .

4.3 Regression Analysis, Mediated Effects Analysis and Moderated Effects Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was first used to test the direct effect of relational networks on Organizational resilience, and the results of the regression analysis showed (Tab3) that both intra-organizational (B = 0.175, p < 0.001) and (Inter-) (B = 0.182, p < 0.001) showed a significant positive effect on Organizational resilience. The covariance statistics indicated that there was no multicollinearity problem between the independent variables (tolerance > 0.1, VIF < 5). The model was overall well fitted and the relational network showed a positive correlation on Organizational resilience, supporting hypotheses H1 and H2.

Table 3. Table of results of regression analysis

variable	B	SE	β	t	P	covariance statistics	
						tolerances	VIF
Intra-	0.175	0.051	0.184	3.403	0.001	0.987	1.013
Inter-	0.182	0.052	0.191	3.532	0	0.987	1.013

Note: Indicators of model fit: R2 = 0.078, adjusted R2 = 0.073, F-value = 13.579 (p < 0.001)

Secondly, the mediating effect of testing innovativeness was tested in SPSS software by drawing on scholar Hayes (2012) who developed the PROCESS plug-in. The results of the mediating effect test show (Tab 4). The total effect of (Intra-) on Organizational resilience was 0.20 (SE = 0.05, p<0.01, CI = [0.101, 0.303]), the direct effect was 0.06 (SE = 0.05, p=0.24, CI = [-0.041, 0.162]) and the indirect effect was 0.267 (SE = 0.03, CI = [0.092, 0.198]), indicating that (Intra-) have a significant positive effect on Organizational resilience through exploitative innovation, as confirmed by H3. The total effect of (Inter-) on Organizational resilience was 0.18 (p < 0.001, CI = [0.081, 0.286]), with a significant indirect effect of 0.11, (SE = 0.02, CI = [0.132, 0.257]) suggesting that exploitative innovations act as a mediator, H4 is confirmed.

Table 4. utilized innovation, exploratory innovation mediation test results

implicit variable	independent variable	Type of effect	EFFECT	SE	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
OR	Intra-	total effect	0.20	0.05	3.94	0.00	0.101	0.303
		direct effect	0.06	0.05	1.17	0.24	-0.041	0.162

		indirect effect	0.14	0.03	/	/	0.092	0.198
		total effect	0.18	0.05	3.53	0.00	0.081	0.286
	Inter-	direct effect	0.07	0.05	1.38	0.17	-0.030	0.173
		indirect effect	0.11	0.02	/	/	0.068	0.163

As shown in Tab 5, PE was overall significant (F = 30.690, p < 0.001) in the moderated model of interorganizational networks with exploratory innovation, as shown in the figure, with the interaction term int_1 (Inter- × PE) with the dependent variable exploratory innovation (β = 0.259, SE = 0.102, p = 0.012), i.e., PE positively moderates interorganizational networks with exploratory innovation, hypothesis H4 was supported. However, the interaction term Int_2 (Intra- × PE) with the dependent variable exploratory innovation (β = 0.047, SE = 0.08, p = 0.558), significance did not pass the statistical test, and hypothesis H6 was not supported. Given that PE has a moderating effect on interorganizational networks and exploratory innovation, a simple slope test was conducted and the results are shown in the table; when PE is low, the effect of interorganizational networks on exploratory innovation is weak and insignificant (β = 0.064, Se = 0.087, p > 0.05). At moderate PE, interorganizational networks significantly promote exploratory innovation (β = 0.2, Se = 0.057, p < 0.01). When PE was high, interorganizational networks had the strongest positive promotion of exploratory innovation (β = 0.335, Se = 0.069, P < 0.001).

Table 5. Summary of the model of the moderating role of perceived embeddedness on networks and innovativeness

implicit variable	**R**	**R^2**	**MSE**	**F**	**df1**	**df2**	**p**
EI	0.474	0.225	0.268	30.69	3	318	0
LI	0.452	0.204	0.185	27.219	3	318	0

Table 6. Regression coefficients of the moderating effect of perceived embeddedness on networks and innovativeness

implicit variable	variant	β	Sd	t	p	95% confidence interval
	constant term	4.392	0.031	143.843	0	[4.332,4.452]
	Inter-	0.2	0.057	3.484	0.001	[0.087,0.313]
EI	PE	0.407	0.06	6.766	0	[0.289,0.526]
	int_1 (Inter×PE)	0.259	0.102	2.534	0.012	[0.058,0.459]
	constant term	4.219	0.025	171.08	0	[4.17，4.267]
	Intra-	0.279	0.047	5.982	0	[0.187，0.37]
LI	PE	0.234	0.047	4.948	0	[0.141,0.327]
	Int_2 (Intra×PE)	0.047	0.08	0.587	0.558	[-0.11,0.204]

Table 7. Validation results of self-help sampling method for perceived embeddedness

PE	**β**	**se**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
-0.524	0.064	0.087	0.739	0.46	-0.107	0.235
0	0.2	0.057	3.484	0.001	0.087	0.313
0.524	0.335	0.069	4.869	0	0.2	0.471

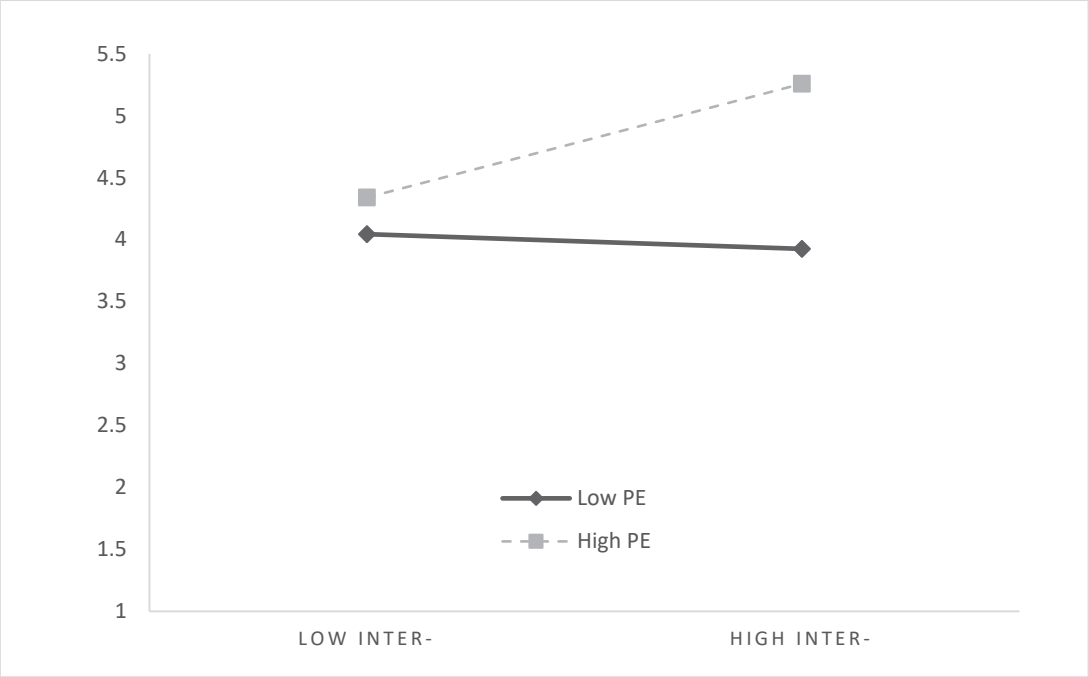

Figure 2. Moderating effect of perceived embeddedness on interorganizational networks and exploratory innovation

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

Based on 322 valid questionnaires, this study systematically explored the mechanisms by which networks, innovation capacity and perceived embeddedness influence Organizational resilience in public interest organizations. Demographic analysis revealed that the sample was dominated by young and middle-aged people (21-40 years old, accounting for 55%), married (62.4%), and general employees (58.1%). Independent samples t-test and ANOVA analysis showed that job status (general staff resilience was significantly higher than management, $t=2.361$, $p=0.019$), age ($F=2.82$, $p=0.02$), educational qualification ($F=3.47$, $p=0.02$) and years of institutional existence ($F=2.76$, $p=0.04$) had a significant effect on Organizational resilience, whereas gender, marital status and type of enrollment had no significant effect.

Correlation analysis further verified the positive correlation between intra-organizational networks ($r=0.21$, $p<0.01$), inter-organizational networks ($r=0.21$, $p<0.01$) and Organizational resilience, which was significantly strengthened by innovativeness (exploitative vs. exploratory innovation, $r=0.70$) and perceived embeddedness ($r=0.60$). Regression analysis confirmed that intra-organizational networks ($\beta=0.184$, $p<0.001$) and inter-organizational networks ($\beta=0.191$, $p<0.001$) had a direct positive effect on Organizational resilience. The mediation effect test indicated that exploitative innovation (indirect effect=0.14, 95% CI=[0.092,0.198]) and exploratory innovation (indirect effect=0.11, 95% CI=[0.068,0.163]) fully mediated between the two types of relational networks and resilience, respectively. In addition, perceived embeddedness significantly moderated the relationship between interorganizational networks and exploratory innovation ($\beta=0.259$, $p=0.012$), but its moderating effect on intra-organizational networks and exploitative innovation did not reach a significant level ($\beta=0.047$, $p=0.558$).

In summary, Organizational resilience in public interest institutions is driven by internal and external networks and is indirectly strengthened by innovation capabilities, while perceived embeddedness plays a key contextual role in cross-organizational collaboration. The findings provide theoretical basis and practical insights for nonprofit organizations to optimize resource allocation and enhance crisis response capacity.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

First, the study validated the direct driving effect of relational networks on Organizational resilience, supporting the social capital theory that "network resources are central to organizational adaptive capacity" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Intra-organizational networks strengthen exploitative and exploratory innovation capabilities through facilitating information sharing and trust, while inter-organizational networks enhance Organizational resilience by integrating resources across boundaries, respectively. This is consistent with Teece's (2007) dynamic capabilities framework, suggesting that network resources underpin innovation capabilities.

Second, the moderating effect of perceived embeddedness reveals the importance of contextual factors. Its positive moderation of interorganizational networks and exploratory innovation suggests that cross-organizational collaboration is more likely to stimulate breakthrough innovations when employees feel a strong sense of belonging to the organization. However, its moderating effect in intra-organizational networks was not significant, possibly stemming from the structural features of internal networks (e.g., hierarchical entrenchment) limiting the space for moderating perceived embeddedness. This finding echoes Granovetter's (1985) "embeddedness paradox," which suggests that excessive internalization may reduce the flexibility of situational factors.

5.2.2 Practice Insights

Public interest organizations can enhance resilience through the following strategies:

Optimize network structure: Strengthen internal knowledge-sharing platforms (e.g., regular cross-departmental meetings) while expanding external collaborations (e.g., linking with nonprofits and government).

Balance Dual Innovation: Consolidate existing capacity through process standardization (leveraging innovation) while encouraging experimental projects (e.g., pilot community co-creation programs) to stimulate exploratory innovation.

Cultivate a culture of embeddedness: Enhance a sense of belonging through mission shaping (e.g., a clear vision for the public good) and participatory decision-making by employees to amplify the innovation effect of cross-organizational collaboration.

5.2.3 Limitations

There are three limitations of this study:

Cross-sectional data: causal relationships between variables could not be inferred; longitudinal tracing or experimental design could be used in the future.

Sample bias: respondents were concentrated in young and middle-aged and prefecture-level organizations, conclusions need to be generalized with caution.

Single moderating variable: only perceived embeddedness was examined; contextual factors such as institutional environment or technological resources could be included in the future.

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Appendix

Questionnaire (Survey)

number	subject	strongly disagree	disapprove	general	agree	Couldn't agree more.
Intra1	I interact a lot with other employees in the organization					
Intra2	I communicate with most of my coworkers without an intermediary or with very few intermediaries					
Intra3	I regularly communicate and exchange skills, experience, etc. with other employees of the organization					
Inter1	I talk to clients, foundations and peers on a regular basis					
Inter2	I talk to trade associations all the time.					
Inter3	I'm in constant communication with the civil and tax authorities.					
Inter4	I talk to all levels of government on a regular basis					
Inter5	I often talk to intermediary organizations (e.g. hospitals, schools, etc.)					
LI1	I organize or participate in events in which I have already gained a lot of experience					
LI2	I organize or participate in regularization activities					
LI3	I am willing to adopt existing product services to meet the urgent needs of the public					
LI4	I organize or participate in activities that I know exactly how to accomplish					
LI5	Activities that I organize or participate in focus primarily on achieving short-term departmental objectives					
LI6	I use my existing knowledge to help the public sector run its activities smoothly					
EI1	I am concerned about improving and updating the organization's programs, technologies or services					

EI1	I am looking for new possibilities in terms of institutional projects, technologies or services.	
EI1	I'm invested in activities that give us insight and new things to see.	
EI1	I would like to be involved in innovative activities that are challenging and require a long period of adaptation	
EI1	I actively seek opportunities for innovative collaborations with businesses or other institutional sectors	
OR1	When faced with a crisis or unexpected situation, our organization remains strategically positioned	
OR2	When faced with a crisis or unexpected situation, our organization is able to propose different solutions	
OR3	In the event of a crisis or emergency, our organization will do everything in its power to avoid damage.	
OR4	When faced with a crisis or unexpected situation, our organization will stick to its path and will not give up lightly.	
OR5	When faced with a crisis or unexpected situation, our organization acts quickly to	
OR6	When faced with a crisis or unexpected situation, our organization will take the necessary actions to respond flexibly	
OR7	In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, all members of our organization are in their respective roles and positions	
OR8	In the event of a crisis or unexpected situation, all members of our organization can act in unison	
PE1	I feel like I have a deep and strong relationship with the organization.	
PE2	I feel connected to the organization's surroundings	
PE3	I actually felt a sense of stability and solidity in the organization.	
PE4	I feel very close to things around the organization, to nature and to the people around me.	
PE5	I have a strong sense of belonging to the organization, as if I have found my place here	