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Building transilience through social innovation in social purpose organizations☆

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ABSTRACT

In a new world punctuated by multiple entangled crises associated, for example, with climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and wars – collectively referred to as a "polycrisis" – an important question arises for management researchers. The question is: How can we learn from and support organizations to not only adapt and rebound to their pre-adversity state following a crisis event (organizational resilience) but, importantly, to emerge stronger after a crisis subsides by building critical capabilities, to better withstand future crises, a process which we term transformative organizational transilience. Our paper investigates this question through 25 longitudinal qualitative case studies of social purpose organizations (SPOs) in Bangladesh before, during and after the Covid-19 crisis. We find that those SPOs which engaged in social innovation whilst balancing the dual objectives of supporting vulnerable beneficiaries (their primary social mission) and maintaining internal financial stability (their economic imperative) were better able to withstand and emerge stronger post-crisis. These SPOs bounce forward by leveraging adaptation, innovation and learning rather than merely returning to their previous state. This paper offers a four-phase conceptual process model of organizational transilience through social innovation, contributing to organizational transilience research. Conversely, it contributes to social innovation scholarship by highlighting the role that social innovation plays in building organizational transilience.

1. Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed multiple global crises occurring sequentially in rapid succession or indeed occurring simultaneously. Under both scenarios crisis impacts are compounded through interlinked cross-crisis entanglements (Biggs et al., 2011; Klasa et al., 2025). For example, consider the interconnected impacts of climate change, Covid-19, wars affecting energy and food security, and most recently President Donald Trump's tariff hikes. Postulated as a new era of polycrisis (Dinan, Daniel, & and Howlett, 2024; Lawrence et al., 2024; Smeets & Beach, 2023) the impacts of polycrisis bear most heavily on societies and communities that are already suffering multidimensional deprivation and therefore are least able to withstand multiple crisis shocks. Taking Bangladesh as a prime example, in 2024, Bangladesh's Global Multidimensional Poverty Index was 0.104, meaning that 24.6 % of the population – rising to 27.4 % in rural areas – were classified as acutely multidimensionally poor, considering the dimensions of nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, and assets (United Nations Development Programme & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2024)

Moreover, we can see that organizations on the front line of supporting vulnerable communities during conditions of crisis are social purpose organizations (SPOs) (Olmedo et al., 2023; Scott et al., 2022). According to Doherty et al. (2014), SPOs refer to hybrid organizations which balance dual social and economic objectives. On the one hand, they aim to create social value for vulnerable beneficiaries through activities related to their primary social mission, which is their primary logic for existing. On the other hand and equally critical, they must generate economic value through external or self-generated income to maintain internal financial stability (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Battilana et al., 2015; Bonomi et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2015).

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As a class of organization, SPOs are therefore on the front line of an urgent imperative to develop organizational resilience under conditions of crisis to survive and emerge stronger to cope in a new world of polycrisis (Searing, 2021; Zhu, 2024). This raises an important – and to-date under-researched question for management researchers – which is, how can we learn from and support organizations in general and SPOs in particular to not only prepare for crisis by adapting and rebounding to their pre-adversity state following a crisis event (*organizational resilience*) but also, importantly, how to emerge stronger after a crisis subsides by building critical capabilities that better enable them to withstand future crises, a process which through this current study we have conceptualized as *transformative organizational transilience.* Against this background, our paper sits at the interface of organizational resilience and social innovation. It shines a light on the role of social innovation in SPOs as an important site of organizational transilience under conditions of continual occurrence polycrisis with a particular focus on communities and countries experiencing high levels of multidimensional poverty.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, we review the recent and burgeoning academic literature on organizational resilience, drawing particular attention to a new strand within this literature, which moves beyond the concept of resilience as a process combining both "*bounce-back*" to some of the previous routines (DesJardine et al., 2019; Herbane, 2010, 2019; Linnenluecke, 2017; Wieland & Durach, 2021), and "*bounce-forward*" to a new state through transformation and learning (Bartuseviciene et al., 2024; Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023; Su & Junge, 2023). This new view, namely "transilience," combines the dimensions of resilience and transformability (Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023) and is defined as "the ability to simultaneously restore some processes and change—often radically—others" (Craighead, Ketchen Jr., & Darby, 2020, p. 342). However, we note that research on organizational transilience to date has been theoretical only and has not been supported by evidence from primary research (Su & Junge, 2023). Addressing this, our paper offers a first empirical study of organizational transilience.

We bring the recent organizational resilience literature into conversation with the much older and more established literature on social innovation (SI). Summarizing this literature, we show that it is rooted in a several different disciplines, each giving rise to a very different theoretical perspective, which we synthesize by considering the different sociological, institutional, policy and public administration, systemic, and management studies branches of the social innovation literature. Providing a comprehensive theoretical framework of social innovation is beyond the scope of the current paper; however, the brief literature synthesis presented highlights that the current paper is rooted in the management perspective on SI and notes that social innovation takes place in both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations.

Section 3 introduces the abductive research philosophy which underpins the research by "toing and froing between theoretical and empirical worlds" (Bowker et al., 2016, p. 86). We outline the primary research design, data collection and data analysis undertaken for the primary research which comprises 25 qualitative case studies investigating the experiences of 25 SPOs in Bangladesh, tracing their organizational characteristics and responses, before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Through analysis of the research findings (Section 4) and the discussion (Section 5), we propose a four-phase process model of what we term *transformative organizational transilience*, postulating this new concept and offering four inductive evidence-grounded propositions, where each proposition maps to one of the four phases of the process model. Section 6 presents a new conceptual process model for understanding the dynamic interplay between social innovation and transformative organizational transilience in SPOs; finally, Section 7 concludes, summarizing the contributions of the paper and suggesting avenues for future research.

2. Literature review

The literature review develops the theoretical building blocks that underpin the paper bridging two, previously separate bodies of scholarship – organizational resilience and transilience on the one hand and social innovation on the other.

2.1. Organizational resilience and transilience

Organizational resilience is seen as a set of capabilities, capacity, characteristic, outcome, process, strategies, or a mix of these (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Markers of organizational resilience include the ability to anticipate and overcome disruptions (Duchek, 2014; Habermann et al., 2015; Pettit et al., 2010), cope with unanticipated dangers (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; A. D. Meyer, 1982; Xie et al., 2022) and deal with unexpected change (Chan, 2011; Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2012). Scholars identify three key themes in defining resilience: reactive vs proactive (Linnenluecke, 2017); outcome/state vs process (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Williams et al., 2017) and "bouncing back" vs "bouncing forward" (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Su & Junge, 2023).

Early research focused on reactive approaches to managing disruptions (e.g. Chakravarthy, 1982; A. D. Meyer, 1982; Rudolph & Repenning, 2002) involving crisis management and business continuity planning (Sáenz et al., 2018). This stream of studies regards resilience as an organization's ability to absorb shock and develop situation-specific responses (e.g. Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011); for instance, this may involve developing cross-functional response teams tailored to the nature and impact of the problem (Revilla & Sáenz, 2014).

Recent studies emphasize proactive approaches, emphasizing anticipating disruptions through continuous monitoring of the environment and preparing for possible disruptions (Azadeh et al., 2016; Chowdhury & Quaddus, 2016; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Sáenz et al., 2018). Organizations displaying a proactive approach make deliberate attempts to build relevant capabilities such as achieving operational efficiency through controlling and mobilizing resources strategically (e.g. Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007, pp. 3418–3422), learning continuously (e.g. Chowdhury & Quaddus, 2016), developing employees' cognitive strengths (e.g. Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) etc. Wieland and Wallenburg (2013) conceptualize organizational resilience constituting both reactive and proactive elements. It involves managing disruptions to recover quickly and preparing to minimize future threats (see also, Annarelli & Nonino, 2016).

Some scholars see resilience as a measurable state resulting from a set of antecedents (Akgün & Keskin, 2014; Pal et al., 2014). Such studies are descriptive, and outcome focused, investigating only antecedents or sources that lead to a resilient outcome (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Several scholars, on the other hand, see resilience as a dynamic process (Ambulkar et al., 2015; Ates & Bititci, 2011; Barasa et al., 2018; Gray & Jones, 2016; Jiang et al., 2019). For instance, Ambulkar et al. (2015) conceive resilience as "the capability of a firm to be alert to, adapt to and quickly respond to changes brought by a disruption." This study adopts a dynamic view, conceptualizing resilience *as a process developed continuously*.

Conz and Magnani's (2020) present a time-based perspective, comprising a resilience process of three phases: (1) a proactive phase before the onset of a crisis (at time t - 1); (2) an absorptive and/or adaptive phase during the crisis (at time t); and (3) a reactive phase after the crisis subsides (at time t + 1). The key attribute for the proactive phase is "preparedness" defined as being alert to changes (Ambulkar et al., 2015) and being ready to face crisis and to sustain superior organizational performance (Pal et al., 2014). Conz and Magnani (2020) identify two paths that can be adopted by firms facing crisis (i.e. during time t). The absorptive phase refers to "withstanding" the shock from disruptions and catastrophic events. The alternative path involves "adapting" defined as reconfiguring firm resources in a novel way, to change and adapt them as and when an unpredictable event occurs. A

reactive attribute of the firm at time (t + 1), after the event occurred, is "bouncing back," defined as recovering quickly from the damages caused by the shock and to go back to a previous state of equilibrium.

2.1.1. From resilience to transilience

A recent and urgent scholarly debate involves whether resilience means "bouncing back" or "bouncing forward" (Conz et al., 2017; Su & Junge, 2023). The "bouncing back" concept originates from engineering literature and refers as the time it takes for a displaced variable to return to its original equilibrium (Cai et al., 2018; Yodo & Wang, 2016). In ecological studies, however, resilience is often seen as "bouncing forward," emphasizing learning and innovation by individuals and societies. This perspective views resilience as a form of "transformation" (Matyas & Pelling, 2015; Shaw & Theobald, 2011). The analytical framework that merges resilience with transformative capacity is termed "transilience" defined as the "capacity to persist, adapt flexibly and positively transform in the face of an adversity" (Nasi et al., 2023, 2024). A recent stream of management research finds that organizations demonstrate critical learning and innovation during crises, making it impossible to fully return to the pre-crisis state for all affected elements (Bellis et al., 2024; Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023; Su & Junge, 2023). While certain aspects may be restored, organizations leverage learning and innovation to transform others, establishing a new normal (Su & Junge, 2023). Even if structural components remain intact, the individuals and entities within these organizational structures evolve, underscoring transformation as an essential dimension of resilience, captured in the concept of transilience (Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023). Accordingly, Su and Junge (2023), divide the process of resilience in four stages: (1) preparedness during normal functioning (pre--adversity); (2) absorption during setback (during adversity); (3) adaption to bounce back (during adversity); and (4) transformation to bounce forward (post-adversity). Importantly, while Conz and Magnani (2020) conceptualize organizational recovery as a post-crisis (t + 1) "bounce-back," Su and Junge (2023) propose that recovery begins during the crisis itself, with organizations ultimately "bouncing forward" through processes of learning and transformation. This idea of "bouncing forward" aligns with transilience's emphasis on forward momentum creating new trajectories rather than restoring old ones.

2.2. Organizational resilience and transilience through innovation

Resilience and innovation are key in managing uncertainty (Richtnér & Löfsten, 2014). While they may appear distinct, research shows they offer complementary insights (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003). Resilience refers to an organization's ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruptions, while innovation refers to the development of new products, services, or processes to adapt to changing environments (Do et al., 2022). These two concepts frequently operate together in analyzing organizational survival (Faeroevik, 2024; A. Khan & Pillania, 2008), business performance (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024), sustainability performance (N. R. Khan et al., 2023; C. Xue & Wang, 2024) and supply chain performance (Ghomi et al., 2023; Sabahi & Parast, 2020), particularly when managing crises.

Innovation helps organizations adapt to dynamic environments (Sabahi & Parast, 2020). It spurs change, allowing firms to adjust quickly to external variables and thus directly linking innovation with resilience (Pacheco et al., 2023). Organizations facing complex challenges use a variety of capabilities and expertise to manage short- and long-term risks (Al-Omoush et al., 2024). Whether through radical or incremental innovations, companies develop new products, reformulate business models, or enter new markets as responses to crises. Sabahi and Parast's (2020) systematic literature review further reinforces this link by showing how innovation enhances firms' capabilities in knowledge sharing, agility, and flexibility – all of which have a significant positive impact on resilience.

In the transilience literature, innovation drives transformation, enabling organizations to adapt and reinvent themselves during crises (Nasi et al., 2023, 2024). Crises such as pandemics are more severe and threatening compared to other common adversities like economic downturns or supply chain disruptions typically encountered by organizations (Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023; Nasi et al., 2024). Addressing such acute and unprecedented crises demands innovative solutions, further intertwining transilience with the concept of innovation (Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023). Innovation in transilience involves new learning to survive crisis (Kyrdoda et al., 2023), developing new internal resources (Do et al., 2022), operational process reengineering (Deng & Noorliza, 2023), development of new products or services (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024), and restructuring of organizational frameworks or business model as a whole (Ramdani et al., 2022). It involves creative problem-solving and proactive approaches to change, allowing organizations to not only survive crises but to emerge stronger and better equipped for future challenges (Su & Junge, 2023).

Numerous studies have shown a positive relationship between organizational resilience and various types of innovation, including technological (Gong et al., 2023; Rusinko, 2020; Shi et al., 2023), service (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024), product (Akgün & Keskin, 2014), industrial cluster (Faeroevik, 2024), and open innovation (Li et al., 2024; Vasi et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, these examples are mainstream market-driven innovations rather than alternative forms of innovation that are triggered by social and environmental concerns. The relationship between alternative forms of innovation and organizational resilience is primarily explored by environmental, social, and governance (ESG)-related studies. ESG-driven innovation strategies lead to superior firm performance in terms of labor productivity, and to financial survival (Cabaleiro-Cerviño & Mendi, 2024). Numerous studies find that superior ESG performance leads to financial stability (e.g. Alkaraan et al., 2022; Qian, 2024; Shan et al., 2024; Zhang & Lucey, 2022). ESG innovations enhance financial and organizational resilience during crises (Cardillo et al., 2023; Gao & Geng, 2024; Reyad et al., 2024; A. Yadav & Asongu, 2025; N. Yadav & Bhama, 2023). ESG innovation enhances financial resilience by improving risk management (Reyad et al., 2024), ensuring a higher level of cash holding and liquid assets (Cardillo et al., 2023) and reducing costs associated with environmental and social issues (Elamer & Boulhaga, 2024). Additionally, strong ESG performance attracts investors and customers, leading to increased financial stability by creation of "rainy day assets" (Gianfrate et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2025; Khalil, Khalil, & Khalil, 2024; Khalil, Khalil, & Sinliamthong, 2024).

However, ESG research typically focuses on for-profit organizations, where the relationship between financial performance and green innovation has received more attention (e.g. Bai et al., 2024; Casciello et al., 2024; U. Khan & Liu, 2023; Y. P. Xue et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2022). Only a few studies examine the role of social innovation in enhancing ESG performance (e.g. Aksoy et al., 2022; Katsamakas et al., 2022; Popescu et al., 2022) and even fewer explore how socially responsible innovation leads to superior ESG performance, thereby enhancing the financial resilience of for-profit firms (Gao & Geng, 2024; Gehrig et al., 2024; Popescu et al., 2022).

These ESG studies view social innovation instrumentally as a means to achieve both societal goals and the financial well-being of the organization. In their conceptualization, ESG provides a strategic foundation, social innovation acts as a mechanism to achieve ESG goals, and organizational resilience is the resulting outcome of social innovation. Although limited in numbers, these ESG-focused studies help establish the link between social innovation and organizational resilience for for-profit firms. Unlike for-profits that defensively pursue ESG innovations to enhance organizational resilience, SPOs are fundamentally aligned with ESG principles, where social innovation is an organic mechanism. Yet, the link between social innovation and organizational resilience in hybrid organizations remains unclear.

2.3. SPOs as hybrid organizations

SPOs have been identified as prime examples of hybrid organizations in a recent stream of studies (e.g. Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014). Hybrid organizations are defined by Doherty et al. (2014:418) as "organizations drawing on at least two different sectoral paradigms, logics and value systems." In the case of SPOs, hybridity occurs as they operate in multiple functional domains to achieve their social and economic goals (Santos et al., 2015). The concept emerged as nonprofits having increasingly transformed into quasi-commercial entities, generating income from goods and services, government funding, donations, grants, and in-kind support, and contributing to the rise of social enterprises (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006).

Alter (2007), Nicholls (2009), and Lyon and Owen (2019) argue that social enterprises should be self-sustaining through commercial revenue and bank financing, independent of government or donor funding. The British model suggests that at least 50 % of income must come from market-based activities to qualify as a social enterprise (SEUK, 2011). Dees (1998) describes social enterprises on a continuum, from purely philanthropic to fully commercial entities, encompassing nonprofits, charities, cooperatives, mutuals, and social businesses (Grant, 2008).

In this paper, we refer to all these varied forms of hybrid organizations as SPOs (see also Best et al., 2021). Alter (2007) presents a spectrum of hybrid organizations including three categories: traditional nonprofits, nonprofits with income-generating activities, and social enterprises. Traditional nonprofits rely entirely on donations from individuals, businesses, or the government and often engage in fundraising to support their activities. Nonprofits with income-generating activities incorporate commercial revenue streams, though these typically contribute only a small portion of the budget. A social enterprise, as defined by Alter (2007), is "a business venture created for a social purpose." Our study includes all three types of SPOs.

2.4. Social innovation in social purpose organizations

Social innovation is theorized from multiple perspectives encompassing a broad range of actions, initiatives, and change processes (Ledingham et al., 2024). We review both contemporary and foundational literature to synthesize five research perspectives on social innovation, aiming to understand its contribution to organizational resilience. Table I provides a concise overview of each perspective, including its core description and primary focus. The five perspectives are: 1. Institutional; 2. Sociological; 3. Policy-driven; 4. Systemic; and 5. Management.

1. Social innovation from an institutional perspective

Scholars who conceptualize social innovation from an institutional perspective include Holan et al. (2019), Wijk et al. (2019) and Asogwa et al. (2023). This view emphasizes that social innovation is not a solitary endeavor by individual entrepreneurs but an interactive process involving collective knowledge sharing among various organizations and institutions (Phillips et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2015). Institutional theory focuses on the macro level, examining the roles and actions of interdependent actors within institutional contexts (DiMaggio & Powell, 2000). The institutional context fosters collaborative approaches and dynamic interactions that generate new knowledge, playing a vital role in solving societal problems (Asogwa et al., 2023; Wijk et al., 2019). The institutional view also highlights that rules, norms, and beliefs are socially constituted and can be renegotiated to foster social innovations (Steiner et al., 2023). While social innovators are crucial, the social orders that shape and influence their actions are equally important (Purtik & Arenas, 2019). Scholars adopting the institutional theory also view social innovation as a response to fulfilling institutional voids (e.g. Agostini et al., 2020; Rao-Nicholson et al., 2017; Turker & Altuntas Vural, 2017).

Table 1
Social innovation theoretical perspectives.

Social Innovation Perspective	Definition	Focus
1. Institutional perspective (e.g. Holan et al., 2019; Wijk et al., 2019)	Social innovation is not a solitary endeavor by individual entrepreneurs but an interactive process involving collective knowledge sharing among various organizations and institutions	Regulatory and social institutional structure in which SI takes place
2. Sociological perspective (Domanski et al., 2020; Howaldt et al., 2015, 2021; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017a, 2017b)	Social innovation as a process where new social practices emerge, become socially accepted, and are diffused through society via imitation, adaptation, and social learning	Social structure and social interactions in which SI takes place
3. Policy-driven perspective ((e.g. Fox & Grimm, 2015; Grimm et al., 2013; Moulaert et al., 2007; Moulaert et al., 2013; Moulaert & Mehmood, 2020)	Social innovation as a promising alternative for fostering inclusive developmental policies	Development of urban or rural societies
4. Systemic transformation view (Avelino, 2021; Avelino et al., 2017, 2019, 2020, 2023; Haxeltine et al., 2016)	Transformative social innovation referring to changes emerging from interactions between multiple forms of change and innovation that work together to challenge, alter, or replace dominant institutions in the social context	Interaction of SI agents within a system
5. Management based agent centric perspective (e.g. Drucker, 1987; Mulgan, 2012, 2019; Tracey & Stott, 2017)		
5a. Process oriented view (Mulgan, 2006, 2012)	Social innovation involves several stages embedding innovation and improvement into various sectors and organizations, ensuring continuous adaptation and refinement	Social enterprise
5b. Dynamic capability-based view (Best et al., 2021; Tabaklar et al., 2021; Vézina et al., 2019)	Social innovation as a dynamic capability enabling organizations to sense opportunities and threats, seize these opportunities, and reconfigure internal and external resources to address societal needs	Social enterprise
5c. ESG innovation-driven view (Gao & Geng, 2024; Gehrig et al., 2024; Popescu et al., 2022)	Social innovation is pursued not only to address social problems but also to ensure the financial resilience and overall performance of the firm	For-profit firms
5d. Resilience-based view (H. Meyer & Hartmann, 2023; Shahidullah et al., 2020)	SPOs design innovative ideas/strategies to respond to socio-ecological changes and to foster community resilience	Beneficiaries of SPOs

2. Social innovation from a sociological perspective

From a sociological viewpoint, social innovation is defined as a process where new social practices emerge, become socially accepted, and are diffused through society via imitation, adaptation, and social learning (Howaldt et al., 2015; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017a, 2017b). These practices are then institutionalized as regular social routines. The

stability or instability of these practices depends on the parallel processes of diffusion and institutionalization. Drawing on Gabriel Tarde's social learning theory, a group of scholars in their global research project "SI-DRIVE: Social Innovation – Driving Force of Social Change" emphasize conceptualizing social innovation as social change (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Domanski et al., 2020; Howaldt et al., 2016). They focus on bottom-up innovation both at micro and meso levels (Domanski et al., 2020; Domanski et al., 2017; Maldonado-Mariscal, 2023; Schwarz et al., 2015). In their conceptualization, social innovation involves creating and structuring institutions, behavioral changes, and empowering actors. Consequently, the proponents of this view link human development with social innovation (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017b). Human development theories highlight the cultural and mental constructs that underpin social innovation, enhancing our understanding of the behavioral and psychological processes involved. This deeper understanding helps create effective and contextually relevant social innovations that better address the needs and challenges faced by individuals and communities (Howaldt et al., 2021). For instance, Amartya Sen's capability-based human development theory focuses on expanding individuals' capabilities and freedoms to achieve the lives they value. Social innovations that enhance education, healthcare, and economic opportunities empower individuals to make choices that improve their well-being and contribute to their communities (Domanski et al., 2017).

3. Social innovation from a policy-driven perspective

Social innovation is conceptualized from a policy-driven perspective, critiquing the shortcomings of neoliberal policy frameworks (e.g. Fox & Grimm, 2015; Grimm et al., 2013). Neoliberal policies emphasize market efficiency and cost-effectiveness but often fail to address the pressing social and economic needs of marginalized groups, relying on the market to distribute resources. This approach leaves significant social needs unmet, particularly for those lacking formal education, sufficient income, or facing discrimination (Moulaert et al., 2007). Studies, such as, Moulaert et al. (2007); Christiaens et al. (2007); Moulaert and Mehmood (2020) and Galego et al. (2022) criticize neoliberal policies for exacerbating social issues and conceptualize social innovation as a promising alternative for fostering inclusive developmental policies. Researching the Integrated Area Development approach toward urban development involves diverse counter-hegemonic movements and initiatives aimed at addressing urban socio-economic challenges. Scholars in this group study social innovation as a tool for rural development as well (Neumeier, 2012; Steiner et al., 2023).

4. Social innovation from a systemic perspective

A recent perspective on social innovation directs it toward transformative outcomes by adopting a systemic approach (Avelino et al., 2019; Avelino et al., 2017; Haxeltine et al., 2016). Avelino et al. (2017), through their TRANSIT project, introduced the concept of transformative social innovation (TSI), which refers to changes emerging from interactions between multiple forms of change and innovation that work together to challenge, alter, or replace dominant institutions in the social context. TSI involves changes in social relations and new ways of doing, organizing, framing, and knowing (Avelino, 2021; Avelino et al., 2020; Avelino et al., 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2022). It is driven by social innovation agents (SI agents) who engage in initiatives, networks, and fields (Avelino et al., 2017). The process is influenced by contextual factors such as institutions, resources, power dynamics, and practices, and involves coevolution between social innovations and their context (Avelino et al., 2023). TSI emphasizes the capacity of SI agents to contribute to transformative change in a relational framework (Pel et al., 2020; Pel et al., 2023), level of empowerment (Avelino et al., 2019, 2020), and the creation of new narratives for change (Wittmayer et al., 2019, 2020, 2022). The TSI framework integrates insights from sustainability transition studies, social innovation research, and social psychology to develop a comprehensive theoretical and conceptual platform (Haxeltine et al., 2016).

5. Social innovation from a management perspective

Social innovation is also theorized from a management perspective with an agent-centric ontology (e.g. Mulgan, 2012, 2019; Tracey & Stott, 2017). The foundational proponent of this view is Peter Drucker, who saw social innovation as a task for managers (Drucker, 1987). He highlighted the role of management and employees in fostering a culture of innovation, where new ideas are encouraged and nurtured. Drucker's perspective included the idea that social innovation should be driven by a commitment to creating positive change and addressing social needs effectively. His view placed organizations at the center of social innovation research (Tracey & Stott, 2017). Social enterprises are a key form of organization studied in this context (Leung & Adams, 2010). Linked with this management-based view, Mulgan (2006) presents a process-oriented view on social innovation. Mulgan et al. (2007) have an agent-centric focus in which social innovation happens from the "symbiosis of bees and trees," where "bees" are small organizations or individuals or groups with ideas and "trees" are big organizations including big nongovernmental organizations, government and companies. This involves several key stages: generating ideas by identifying unmet needs and potential solutions, developing, prototyping, and piloting these ideas, assessing, scaling up, and diffusing successful innovations, and continuously learning and evolving. This stage involves embedding innovation and improvement into various sectors and organizations, ensuring continuous adaptation and refinement. Researchers also study the process of social innovation in social enterprises from a dynamic capability view (Best et al., 2021; Tabaklar et al., 2021; Vézina et al., 2019), conceptualizing it as a capability that enables organizations to sense opportunities and threats, seize these opportunities, and reconfigure internal and external resources to address societal needs. Oeij et al. (2019) conceptualize the social innovation process based on the innovation journey model, and Abad and Ezponda (2022) draw on a resource- and capability-based view to understand the process of social innovation.

In our paper, we lean toward a management-oriented view of social innovation applied in an SPO context. Given the hybrid nature of SPOs, this viewpoint is particularly relevant because they must continuously innovate to tackle social challenges while finding new ways to sustain themselves financially (Battilana et al., 2015; Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014). Hybrid organizations need to put equal focus on both social and financial goals, which are integral parts of their operational models (Santos et al., 2015). Unlike for-profits that may tactically pursue social innovation to enhance their ESG performance and achieve organizational resilience, SPOs are inherently designed to solve social problems through social innovation (Bonomi et al., 2021; Hagedoorn et al., 2022). For SPOs, social innovation is not merely a compliance tool but an essential part of their organizational DNA, helping them develop solutions to social problems and generate continuous income streams. Without financial survival, their social missions cannot be fulfilled (Bonomi et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2015) and, arguably, social innovation helps them achieve both. But this intertwined relationship between dual logics in hybrid SPOs and how the interplay between social innovation and organizational resilience might be different in hybrid SPOs compared to for-profits is under-researched.

The social innovation literature largely draws on resilience theory to study its role in responding to socio-ecological changes and fostering community resilience (H. Meyer & Hartmann, 2023; Shahidullah et al., 2020). For example, Partanen (2022) found that social innovation in local tourism built resilience in Kemi, Finland. Shahidullah et al. (2020) examined how innovative strategies that restructured people's relationships with ecosystems helped build resilience in wetland communities in Bangladesh. Fougère and Meriläinen (2021) explored the

unintended consequences of social innovation on social systems in post-disaster settings. However, these studies typically focus on the beneficiaries of SPOs within society, community, or ecosystem. Research on resilience and social innovation at the organizational level in hybrid organizational context is rare (Ciccarino & Rodrigues, 2023; H. Meyer & Hartmann, 2023; Shahidullah et al., 2020; Zhu, 2024).

Therefore, as the introduction discusses the increasing complexity of global crises – referred to as a "polycrisis" – and their disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities, we need to understand how SPOs can and do become more resilient in responding to polycrisis. The literature review discussed how SPOs as hybrid entities that balance the dual logics of social mission and financial sustainability. The review connects organizational resilience and transilience (encompassing both bounce-back and bounce-forward dynamics) with social innovation, emphasizing the need to understand their interplay in hybrid SPOs. It also synthesizes five perspectives on social innovation and highlights a gap in empirical and theoretical research linking social innovation to organizational transilience in crisis-prone, resource-constrained settings.

3. Methodology

Our study uses an abductive approach which involves moving back and forth between empirical findings and theory (Bowker et al., 2016). This approach allowed us to observe the patterns during data collection and then explore their theoretical significance by consulting the relevant theories (e.g. social innovation, organizational resilience and transilience) that best explains this pattern. It allowed for new insight to emerge during the research process, ultimately developing four propositions and a four-phase process model for organizational transilience through social innovation (Fig. 2) and a conceptual process model for understanding the interplay between social innovation and organizational transilience (Fig. 3) contributing to the theoretical understanding of transformative organizational transilience in hybrid SPOs context.

3.1. Sample selection

This study uses organizations as the unit of analysis. In 2018, 45 SPOs were purposefully selected from the Non-governmental Organizations Association Bureau directory, representing three categories by Alter (2007): traditional non-profits, non-profits with income-generating activities, and social enterprises. Email invitations and follow-ups secured participation from 32 SPOs. However, six SPOs struggled to continue their operation during the pandemic and eventually closed. Thus, in our second round of data collection in 2023, we included the surviving 25 SPOs (detailed case profiles are in Table II) including three donation-dependent traditional non-profits, six non-profits with income-generating activities, and 15 social enterprises, including four microfinance institutions.

3.2. Data collection

The study employed a qualitative case study method, collecting data through face-to-face interviews, observations and analysis of organizational documents and websites. Across two phases, 25 1-h semi-structured interviews were conducted with SPO founders and senior managers, observation of different functions and informal conversation with SPO employees. We collected 47 organizational documents, including reports, brochures, newsletters, websites, and Facebook pages. Triangulation validated findings and provided deeper insights.

In 2018, prior to the pandemic, data were collected on SPOs' economic and social missions, operational models, income sources, managerial tensions, and capabilities, offering insights into their innovation and resilience strategies. Clearly, the focus of the 2018 fieldwork was not on crisis-specific issues. Instead, it centered on the internal tensions arising from the hybrid nature of SPOs, which are obligated to navigate dual logics – social and economic missions – within pluralistic institutional environments (Faruq & Hoque, 2023). Recognizing the importance of their pandemic responses, a second data collection in 2023 explored changes made to address challenges during and after the crisis. This phase focused on adjustments to achieve economic and social goals and the implementation of these changes internally and externally, revealing how SPOs adapted and transformed in response to the pandemic.

3.3. Data analysis

The first round of data collection provided insights into the SPOs' economic and social missions, focus, size, geographical reach, income sources, innovation initiatives, and resilience strategies, forming the sample profile in Table II. Data from the second round were inductively coded by two of the co-authors of this paper to ensure validity. Open coding generated first-order categories, while axial coding identified connections, forming second-order categories and broader themes (Elliott, 2018). These categories revealed SPOs' engagement in social innovation across all phases of the pandemic. The iterative analysis used abductive reasoning, comparing observed data with insights from academic literature to identify patterns. NVivo software was used for coding. The codebook is presented in Fig. 1, illustrating key social innovation strategies across four distinct stages, presented in Fig. 2 in Section 5. The process emphasized rigorous design, to-ing and fro-ing between theory and empirical data to develop a conceptual process model of transformative organizational transilience in SPOs (Fig. 3, Section 6) linking theory and observed phenomena to ensure robustness.

4. Findings

The analysis reveals that the case-study SPOs used different mechanisms of social innovation for maintaining their economic and social goals before, during and after the crisis. These mechanisms were applied to progress through all four phases of the resilience process, proposed in our four-phase process model of organizational transilience (Fig. 2). The four phases are, namely, preparedness (t - 1), withstanding (t_a), adapting (t_b), and transforming to a stronger position (t + 1).

The resulting outcome combined financial stability with stronger protection of beneficiaries before, during and after the crisis (See Fig. 2, end of Section 5). The curve in Fig. 2 reflects turbulence but shows an upward trend, symbolizing positive transformation driven by social innovation to safeguard social and economic goals. Transformation is a critical outcome of using social innovation mechanisms at all stages of the organizational resilience process. Although the level of adaptation and transformation varied between cases, some level of positive transformation was observed in all the cases.

4.1. Before pandemic (t - 1)

Before the pandemic, non-profit organizations pursued innovative methods to stay attuned to changes involving stakeholders like donors, other SPOs, the government, beneficiaries, and consumers. Organizations such as those in cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 22, and 24 maintained regular communication with funders through meetings, emails, site visits, and strict accountability regarding fund usage. They sought new donors through networking, presenting projects, and marketing initiatives. All organizations participated in association meetings, conferences, government events, and other gatherings to stay informed about social sector changes.

To understand beneficiaries' needs and challenges, all cases conducted formal field meetings and maintained informal interactions between beneficiaries and field officers. Micro-foundation organizations (cases 4, 7, 13, 17, 18, 19, and 23) tracked loan repayments through monthly in-person reporting using manual logbooks. Missed payments indicated potential problems, prompting intervention. These processes

Table 2
Profile of the studied cases: before and after crisis.

Case No	Mission	Product/service	Type	Employee Size	Product/service delivery market and operational branches
1	Advocate equal rights for children and adults with disabilities	**Pre-crisis:** Free health care, education, and rehabilitation for poor disabled children	Traditional non-profit	550	Dhaka and 8 districts; 12 branches
		Post-crisis: Healthcare and education for affluent disabled children; handicraft sale; training institute; handouts to beneficiaries	Non-profit with income	754	Same
2	Support less affluent people of the rural north with affordable eye care treatment	**Pre-crisis:** Subsidized eye care	Non-profit with income	232	North-west region; 3 hospitals
		Post-crisis: Mobile eye clinic, telemedicine	Non-profit with income	240	5 remote villages covered through mobile clinic
3	Providing work based and non-work based childcare facilities for poor working mothers	**Pre-crisis:** Childcare at garment factories	Non-profit with income	200	Dhaka; 12 branches
		Post-crisis: Independent childcare; child minding training	Non-profit with income	250	Dhaka; 15 branches
4	Address poverty of rural people through microfinance	**Pre-crisis:** Personal loan and business start-up loan	Social enterprise	1400	Dhaka and 42 districts; 56 branches
		Post-crisis: share market investment; covid recovery loan; medical loan	Same	1800	2 districts added; 58 branches
5	Provide sustainable income generating opportunities for under privileged rickshaw pullers	**Pre-crisis:** Rickshaw branding; rickshaw art sale	Social enterprise	72	Dhaka; 1 HQ
		Post-crisis: Artisan store; School for rickshaw pullers children; asset sale	Same	120	Dhaka; 1 HQ
6	Empower women of rural villages by creating sustainable employment opportunities and eradicating poverty	**Pre-crisis:** Export toys made by rural women	Social Enterprise	115	Exported to UK; 5 branches in 5 districts
		Post-crisis: Hand-stitched bedding and table ware, crocheted decoration items	Same	120	Sweden added as export market
7	Solve social problems with information technology, offered at affordable prices.	**Pre-crisis:** Soil testing and fertilizer usage app	Social Enterprise	95	56 districts; 10 branches
		App for climate forecasting, prenatal care for farm animals; affordable Wi-Fi; farmers' training institute	Same	115	Whole Bangladesh; 8 branches
8	Women empowerment through creating business opportunities in the healthcare sector	**Pre-crisis:** Door-to-door sale of affordable generic medicines, sanitary products, family planning items using rural women	Social Enterprise	147	23 districts; 5 branches
		Post-crisis: Hand-sanitizers, musk, and supplementary vitamins.	Same	156	Same
9	Provide affordable solutions to mosquito in low-income communities	**Pre-crisis:** Manufacture & sell impregnated mosquito nets	Social Enterprise	150	Whole Bangladesh; 1 factory
		Post-crisis: Same	Same	184	Export to Africa and Myanmar
10	Ensure access to clean water in arsenic affected communities	**Pre-crisis:** Sell bottled treated water at affordable price	Social Enterprise	420	26 arsenic prone areas; 1 factory
		Post-crisis: Same	Same	560	Export to sub-Saharan Africa
11	Provide solution to malnutrition in low-income communities of Bangladesh	**Pre-crisis:** Manufacture and sell fortified yogurt at subsidized rate using rural women as sales force	Social Enterprise	211	Whole Bangladesh; 1 factory
		Post-crisis: Same	Same	258	Export to Myanmar
12	Develop nursing and midwifery standards through the creation of employment opportunities for potential nurses coming from poor families	**Pre-crisis:** Diploma in Nursing and Midwifery for an affordable fee	Social Enterprise	153	Dhaka; 1 institute
		Post-crisis: Partnership with hospitals for guaranteed graduate positions	Same	132	Same
13	Promote and disseminate social business philosophy and provide one-stop solutions to all the resources needed for social businesses	**Pre-crisis:** Social Business Hub in different global universities to offer support to start-up social businesses.	Social Enterprise	162	Dhaka and 234 global universities; 1 HQ in Dhaka and 234 hubs
		Post-crisis: Sports Hub to train young people to start-up social business in the sports industry; Online webinars and short courses on social business	Same	188	Dhaka and 250 global universities; 1 HQ in Dhaka and 250 hubs
14	Secure market access for dairy farmers, ultimately helping them generate income. Over time, BDFP's goal has expanded to include serving high quality milk product to their customers	**Pre-crisis:** Manufacturing and sell of dairy products	Social Enterprise	1200	Whole country; 23 collection and distribution centers
		Post-crisis: Mobile collection truck with refrigeration and quality testing facility	Same	1385	Whole country; collection from 27 remote villages by mobile trucks
15	Prevent and stop all forms of violence against women and children.	**Pre-crisis:** Mobilizing and supporting civil society movements to promote and protect the rights of children and women.	Traditional non-profit	52	Whole country; 5 branches in Dhaka, and 4 districts
		Post-crisis: Affordable fee-paying institution for training women about business start-up and vocational skills	Non-profit with income	87	Same

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

Case No	Mission	Product/service	Type	Employee Size	Product/service delivery market and operational branches
16	Facilitates sustainable social and economic development and poverty reduction increasing access to knowledge and resources and supporting sustainable livelihood opportunities.	**Pre-crisis:** Seven projects on various social development issues	Non-profit with income	552	Southwest region; 2 branches
		Post-crisis: Community managed bank for extremely poor; digital monitoring and information system	Non-profit with income	558	Same
17	Working as a catalyst of social movement against corruption	**Pre-crisis:** Research, information, dissemination, campaign and advocacy against corruption	Traditional non-profit	96	Dhaka and 6 districts; 7 branches
		Post-crisis: Micro-finance; Community monitoring system (Shocheton Nagoric Committee); digital tracking app; crisis recovery loan	Non-profit with income	150	Same
18	Provide access to financial services to people living in poverty and are disproportionately excluded from mainstream financial market	**Pre-crisis:** Customized loans, savings account for small enterprises, women, migrants, farmers, low-income job holders	Social Enterprise	1700	Whole country; 56 branches
		Post-crisis: Micro-insurance; digital app for payment and service; cashless branches; medical treatment loan; sanitation loan; crisis recovery loan	Same	1520	Whole country; 35 branches
19	Economic and social empowerment of women across Bangladesh.	**Pre-crisis:** Micro-finance for women; affordable healthcare; produce and supply renewable energy; scholarship for women	Non-profit with income	1100	Dhaka; 1 HQ
		Post-crisis: Community based development projects; Altered loan repayment scheme; Digital app for payment and service	Non-profit with income	1360	Same
20	Create sustainable income for elderly, disabled and women in the community	**Pre-crisis:** Large scale village cooking broadcasted through YouTube channel	Social enterprise	10	2M Subscribers; Shimulia YouTube village; HQ Dhaka
		Post-crisis: YouTube village tourist spot; biodiverse park	Same	25	4.5 subscribers
21	To create economic opportunities for marginalized rural women by establishing key supply-chain linkages and developing informal market systems serving base-of-the-pyramid communities	**Pre-crisis:** Door to door sales ladies getting products delivered from Private Sector partners	Social enterprise	575	Whole Bangladesh; 12 branches
		Post-crisis: Crisis recovery loan; affordable TV viewing subscription; digital app for tracking the inventory, ordering and transactions	Same	650	Same
22	To provide primary health service, legal aid and income-generating programs to least advantaged customers	**Pre-crisis:** Micro-finance for women; affordable healthcare for child and mother	Non-profit with income	102	Dhaka; 1 HQ
		Post-crisis: Longer loan repayment period; digital app; crisis recovery loan; community-based projects	Non-profit with income	135	Same
23	Providing comprehensive financial services to empower the poor to realize their potential and to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty.	**Pre-crisis:** Micro-finance and saving schemes for farming, small enterprise start-up, housing, education, beggars.	Social enterprise	2044	Whole country; 45 branches
		Post-crisis: Loan insurance; crisis recovery loan; longer loan repayment; digital app for loan tracking and payment	Same	2800	Same
24	To prevent acid and burn violence and empower survivors through an integrated approach using a replicable holistic (bio-psycho-social) model	**Pre-crisis:** Health care and rehabilitation of acid victims; crime prevention awareness	Traditional non-profit	26	Dhaka and 3 districts; 4 branches
		Post-crisis: Tele medicine service for general people	Non-profit with income	52	Same
25	To support poverty stricken rural and urban poor, especially women so that they could empower themselves by utilizing and further enhancing their skills.	**Pre-crisis:** Country's largest retail chain for selling handcrafted fashion, jewelry and household decoration items.	Social enterprise	2500	Dhaka and 6 districts; 26 branches
		Post-crisis: International e-commerce site to serve global markets.	Same	2800	UK, USA and Australian market via online platform

enhanced alertness to threats and opportunities through stakeholder engagement.

SPOs developed systems to track social sector changes, identify new product or service opportunities, and monitor market trends. They attended conferences, maintained networks with government officials, followed news and social media, and conducted field research. Field officers' informal relationships with beneficiaries helped identify demand for new products or services. Social enterprises (e.g., cases 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 20, 21, 25) explored new business opportunities by monitoring for-profit strategies, analyzing competitor websites, attending private sector events, and networking with businesses.

These organizations developed management prudence and savings through strict internal governance, including centralized budget control, regular donor reporting, frequent departmental expense reporting, maintaining operational reserves, and inter-departmental coordination. Collaborative projects with other SPOs increased resourcefulness by sharing resources. Empowering beneficiaries through consultation, collaboration, and capability-building training prepared them to manage projects independently. Field officers' involvement in decision-making and regular meetings provided insights into emerging issues, enabling rapid responses in terms of the identification and reporting of potential threats.

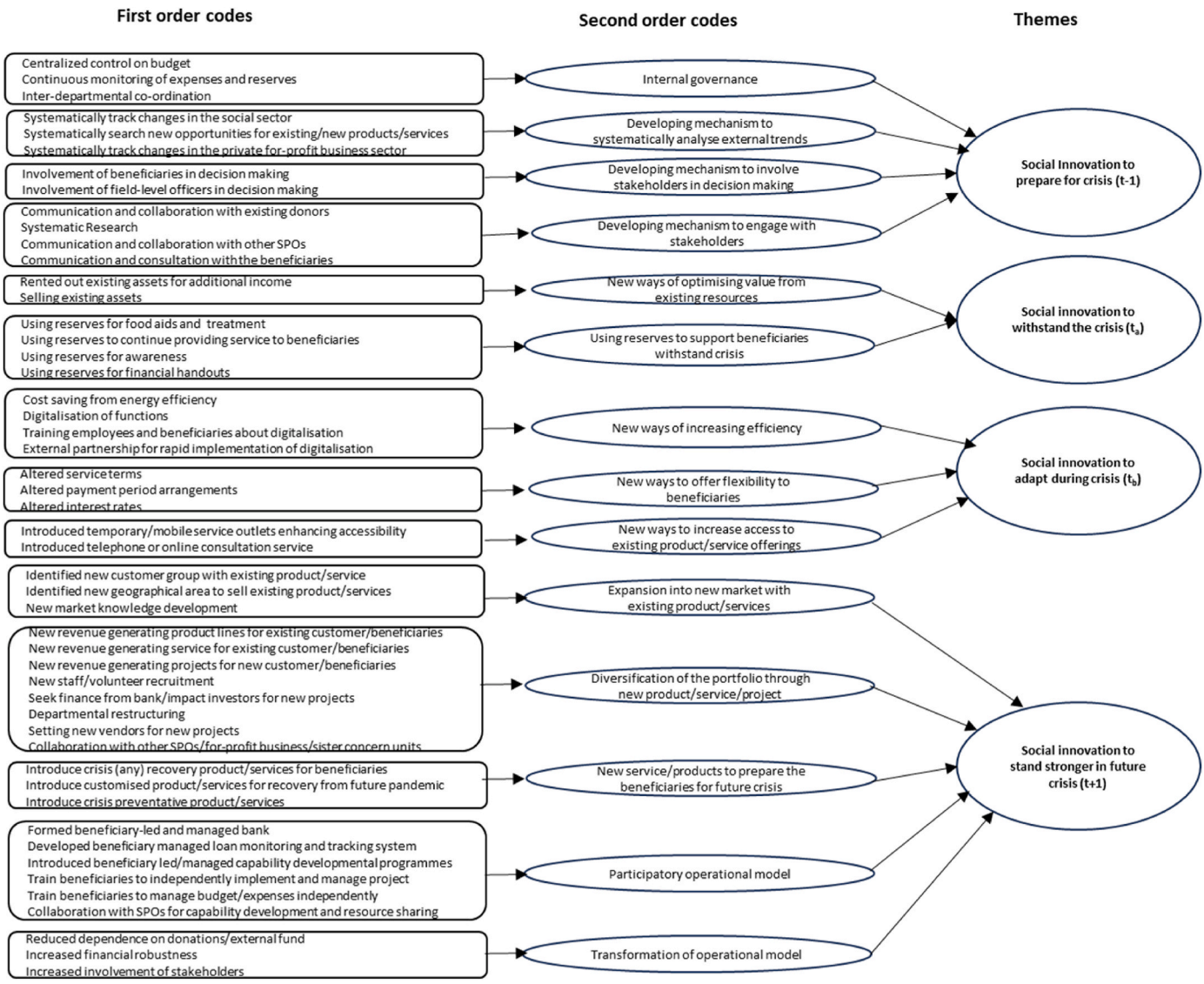

Fig. 1. Codes and themes generated from data analysis.

4.2. During pandemic (t_a, immediately when crisis begins)

4.2.1. New ways of optimizing value from existing resources

As the SPOs sensed the financial threats emerging due to reduction in income from regular sources, they realized the pressure to reduce operational expense. Triggered by these threats, cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, and 25 innovated opportunities for income generation and cost saving by renting out unused assets. For instance, case 1 rented a floor of their office building to another educational institution, case 2 rented out a part of their eye hospital to doctors for use as chambers for private practice and cases 3 and 4 also rented a segment of their office buildings to commercial offices. All the cases reported how they sold assets such as land, vehicles and even a section of the office building to liquidate cash.

4.2.2. Using reserves to support beneficiaries withstand crisis

In their quest to balance the social mission with the economic mission, the studied SPOs also prioritized their obligation to protect their beneficiaries from the immediate shock due to the pandemic. The beneficiaries experienced financial challenges, and shortages of food and medicine. As an immediate response, all cases provided financial aid, food, medicine, and clothes donations to beneficiaries. Most of these supplies were purchased and delivered using the operational reserves. The executive director of case 1 said:

> "We have a duty of care to our beneficiaries, and we had to stand beside them on an urgent basis. We could sense that the donations are going to reduce from our typical donors, but we did not wait for their affirmation. Rather we used our operational reserves to provide financial handout and other relief materials to our beneficiaries on an urgent basis."

4.3. During pandemic (t_b, short-term when crisis is ongoing)

4.3.1. News ways of increasing efficiency

Shortly after the pandemic began, shrinking external funding pressured all SPOs to reduce operational costs, prompting strategic and operational adaptations. They maximized existing resources, tapped into financial reserves, and made necessary adjustments, including developing new capabilities for employees and beneficiaries, and restructuring departments and roles. For example, cases 1, 6, 8, 9, and 10 improved energy efficiency by installing solar panels and efficient lighting. All cases adopted work-from-home arrangements, significantly reducing operational costs. Most cases adopted digital technologies,

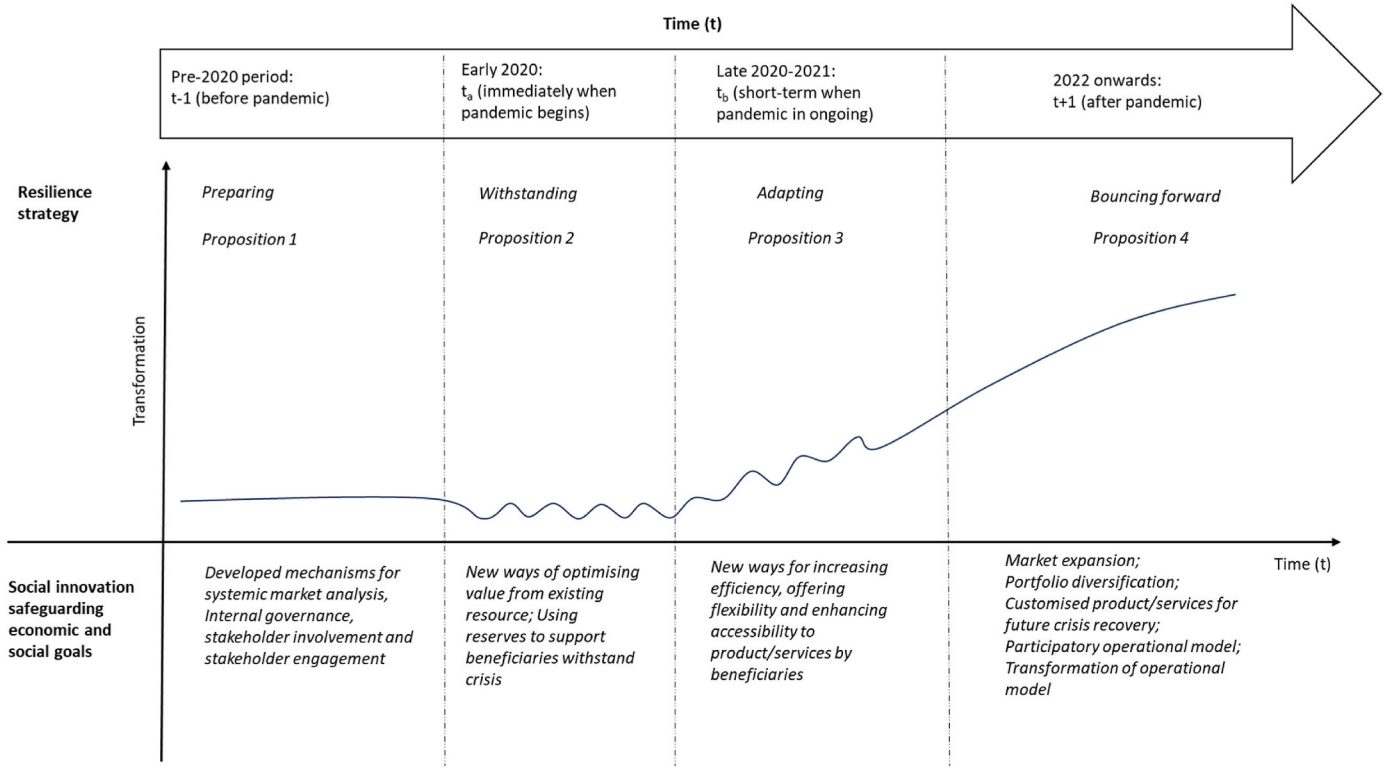

Fig. 2. Four-phase process model for organizational transilience through social innovation by SPOs.

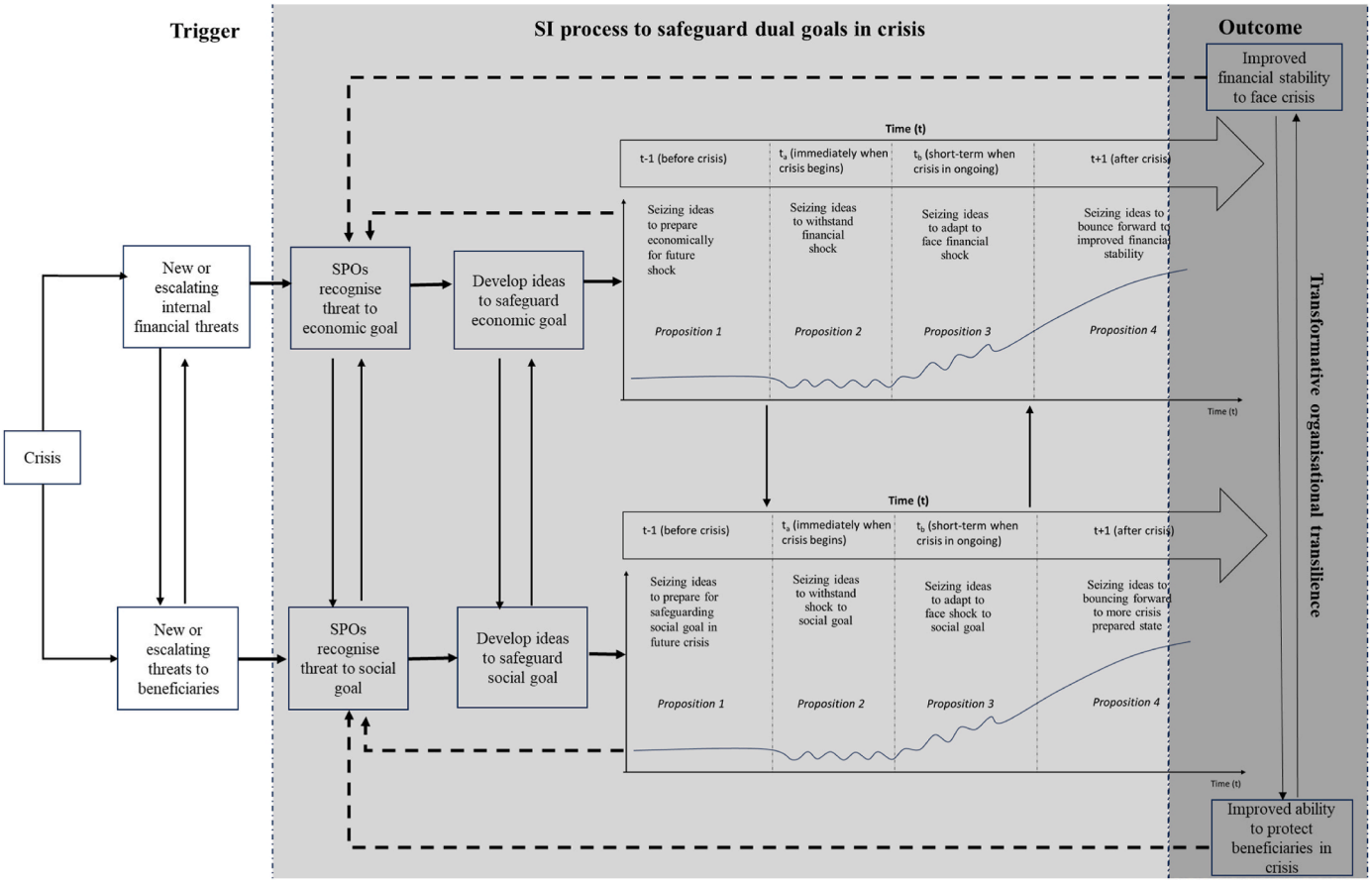

Fig. 3. Conceptual process model for understanding the interplay between social innovation and organizational transilience in hybrid SPOs.

improving asset optimization and service delivery. Microfinance organizations like cases 16, 18, 19, 22, and 23 developed apps for loan applications, repayments, and support services, reducing the need for field officers. As the interviewee from Case 18 explained:

> "We developed the Agami app, the first-ever microfinance client-centric mobile application. Clients can access transaction information 24/7. The idea emerged during the pandemic, and we later partnered with a software developer to bring it to life. The app enables potential borrowers to request loans and current borrowers to make repayments without visiting branch offices, reducing our need for field officers and lowering operational costs."

Cases 21 and 14 implemented inventory tracking software, while others such as cases 1, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, and 25 relied on online meetings for communication and information sharing. Case 24 introduced telemedicine services. Their executive director shared:

> "During the pandemic, we provided patients with a phone number for doctor consultations. Prescriptions were sent via mobile messaging, allowing patients to purchase their medication independently. This digital approach made our service more accessible and efficient while saving costs by enabling doctors to work from home."

To manage these transformations, many SPOs reorganized resources and capabilities. Cases 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 23 partnered with IT firms to develop and maintain digital apps, training staff and beneficiaries to use them. Digitalization led to workforce reductions, decreasing the need for area managers, field officers, and branch office staff, ultimately resulting in functional efficiency.

4.3.2. New ways to offer flexibility to beneficiaries

The studied micro-financing organizations (cases 4, 19, 18, 22, and 23) adapted loan repayment conditions to help beneficiaries cope with the pandemic's financial impact. Cases 4, 18, and 19 allowed repayments to start after one year, while cases 22 and 23 extended repayment periods without increasing the total payback amount. They used operational reserves to cover losses from these changes and introduced stricter reporting systems via digital apps. Beneficiaries were trained in financial management and timely reporting during the exemption period. The CEO of case 19 said:

> "We allowed a one-year pause of repayment, but we ensured that they regularly update us about how the loan amount is used during the whole time. As a result, they could not disappear or use the loan amount for something else."

4.3.3. New ways to increase access to existing product/service offerings

During the lockdown period, people in both rural and urban areas struggled to travel to the service centers for seeking support. As a result, some of studied cases devised innovative ways to make their services more accessible to the beneficiaries. For instance, cases 2 and 24 introduced mobile clinics and telephone consultation to reach out to existing and new patients in more remote areas. Similarly, case 14, a social enterprise manufacturing and distributing dairy products, introduced mobile trucks to bring milk from dairy farmers in the remote villages to district hubs. The delivery trucks were equipped with quality testing facilities and vet services as well. Therefore, these mobile trucks served the dairy farmers as a one-stop service point available at their doorstep.

The new initiatives were implemented using existing financial and staff resources. For instance, cases 2, 14, and 24 have used operational reserves for funding the purchase of mobile vans and other physical assets needed. All of them utilized existing staff to execute the tasks involved. The founder of case 14 said:

> "To implement the initiative, we bought two new trucks and repurposed our 10 existing distribution trucks. Pre-COVID, these trucks only delivered goods from the factory to retail outlets. Now, they also collect from dairy farmers. We adjusted the schedules of quality testers and vets to cover both collection centers and mobile trucks."

4.4. After pandemic (t + 1)

4.4.1. Expansion into new market with existing product/services

As the pandemic stabilized, SPOs aimed to recover financially and prepare for future crises by adopting sustainable strategies. Several cases (e.g., cases 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 19, 20, 23, 25) expanded their markets to new customer groups or locations. For instance, cases 1 and 12 began offering services to affluent customers for a fee, creating additional income. Case 9 expanded to sub-Saharan Africa and Myanmar to sell mosquito nets, and case 10 sold clean bottled water in sub-Saharan Africa. Cases 2 and 16 used mobile setups to reach remote areas. Case 2's mobile eye clinics increased income and accessibility. The executive director of case 2 noted:

> "The mobile clinics allowed us to reach more patients in remote villages. This initiative increased our income from service fees and made our service more accessible and inclusive."

These adaptations optimized existing resources like staff and logistics. For geographical expansion, cases 9 and 10 partnered with new importers and distributors, recruiting staff for new markets. Cases 1, 2, 12, and 16 trained existing staff on new market characteristics and service delivery methods.

4.4.2. Diversification of the portfolio through new product/service/project

Almost 50 % of the cases secured new revenue sources through product, service, or project diversification. For instance, case 1, a donor-dependent non-profit offering healthcare and education to disabled children, started selling handicrafts made by these children via craft shops. Case 5, which supports rickshaw pullers, introduced artisan stores selling fashion and jewelry items made by the pullers' wives. Case 6 introduced hand-stitched bedding, tableware, and crocheted items for export. Case 7 developed software for climate forecasting and cattle prenatal care, while case 8 began producing hand sanitizers, masks, and vitamins for rural areas. The interviewee from case 8 stated:

> "We recognized a need for affordable hygiene and nutritional products. Producing and selling these items in rural markets provided an additional income stream and better protection for our beneficiaries."

Several cases started new service lines post-pandemic. Case 5 established a school for rickshaw pullers' children, case 18 introduced medical and sanitation loans, and case 21 launched affordable Wi-Fi and entertainment services in rural areas. New business projects included case 25's international e-commerce site, case 4's share market investments, and case 15's fee-paying institution for women's vocational training. The founder of case 20 stated:

> "I started a YouTube channel featuring community cooking by villagers. It gained popularity, attracting tourists and promoting the village as a destination. We created a biodiverse botanic park to attract more visitors."

These ventures required significant reorganization and resource reconfiguration. Cases relied on operational reserves and sought bank loans for investments. Partnerships with private enterprises and multinational companies helped fund, manage, and distribute new products. Recruitment and training of staff and beneficiaries were essential, with some cases creating new departments. Beneficiaries were involved in project implementation to empower them and reduce costs. As interviewees from these cases indicated:

"Involving beneficiaries helps develop their capability and reduces our operational costs." (Case 15)

"They understand their problems and needs better than any external. They often work voluntarily or for lower remuneration." (Case 20)

4.4.3. New service/products to prepare the beneficiaries for future crisis

After the pandemic, the studied cases recognized the need to help beneficiaries prepare for future crises. They introduced products and services specifically for recovery from crisis-induced damages, such as crisis recovery loans (cases 4, 19, 23), medical loans for long-Covid sufferers (case 18), sanitation and hygiene loans for building toilets (case 18), loan protection for repayment during accidents and illness (case 4), and income protection for low-income households (case 18). The founder of case 18 stated:

"Nearly 40 % of village houses don't have toilets, leading to unhygienic conditions during the pandemic. We introduced sanitation and hygiene loans to prevent future disease spread."

"Income protection is usually for higher-income households. Low-income families, with no savings, suffered more during the pandemic. We introduced an income protection scheme for them, the first of its kind in Bangladesh."

These initiatives involved financial schemes implemented in partnership with commercial banks (cases 4, 19, 23) or an internal sister bank (case 18). Operationalizing these products required optimizing existing resources and collaborating with partnering banks.

4.4.4. Participatory operational model

To prepare for future crises, several cases (16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22) decided to involve beneficiaries more in decision-making and project operations, which empowered beneficiaries and enhanced project efficiency. Case 16 introduced a bank managed by beneficiaries, while case 17 started a community monitoring system with local influencers overseeing projects. Cases 19 and 22 employed local professionals for community-based projects. The founder of case 16 said:

"Beneficiaries understand their problems better and can manage projects more efficiently. During the pandemic, involving them could have eased project management."

Interviewees emphasized developing beneficiaries' capabilities before delegating responsibilities. Cases 16 and 19 launched pilot projects to train beneficiaries. All related cases noted that involving beneficiaries reduced the need for area managers and field workers, cutting costs long-term. They also highlighted collaborating with other nongovernmental organizations and social enterprises to share resources. The founder of case 22 mentioned:

"In Gazipur and Norshingdi, we piloted an organic dairy farm project managed by farmers. Collaborating with another social enterprise, we trained farmers in cattle management, reducing costs and improving project governance."

4.4.5. Transformation of the operational model

Social innovation led to changes in the operational models of SPOs, moving them across Alter's spectrum. Traditional donor-dependent non-profits (e.g., cases 1, 15, 17) began generating income from sales or service charges, transitioning to non-profits with income generation. Non-profits with income-generating activities increased their revenue streams (e.g., cases 2, 3, 4, 16) and started financially self-sufficient social enterprise projects (e.g., cases 19, 22). Social enterprises introduced new profit-making projects (e.g., cases 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 20, 25), improving financial robustness. Interviewees indicated that these changes would strengthen their ability to achieve social and economic goals and prepare for future crises:

"We realized the importance of financial self-sufficiency. We could serve our beneficiaries better with more financial reserves and continuous income." (CEO, case 22)

"Entering e-commerce made us more confident about future resilience. We now have global customers, ensuring steady revenue despite local market challenges." (CEO, case 25)

5. Discussions and propositions

The findings demonstrate that the innovations introduced by SPOs before, during and after the pandemic enabled them to achieve financial stability and to empower their beneficiaries, equipping them to handle future challenges more effectively. We found no evidence for bouncing back to pre-pandemic states. Instead, SPOs experienced a process of "bouncing forward" by embracing transformation and learning. Based on our findings, we propose the following four propositions.

Before crisis (time t - 1): The analysis shows that even before the pandemic, SPOs had mechanisms to stay alert to external changes and prepare stakeholders for potential crises. The finding resonates previous innovation studies showing that investing in innovation before a crisis creates a greater organizational awareness of environmental shifts and technological progress, enabling them to develop organizational resilience (Andreas Engelen et al., 2024; A. Engelen et al., 2014; Faeroevik, 2024; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003). For SPOs, this means identifying innovative ways to stay alert and ready for changes in both social and economic domains (Bonomi et al., 2021). This preparedness helps them anticipate and address financial challenges while safeguarding their social mission to protect their beneficiaries (Al-Omoush et al., 2024). In light of this understanding and our findings, we propose.

Proposition 1. *SPOs that invest in social innovation mechanism during stable periods are better equipped to anticipate and respond to both financial and social challenges during crises. Proactive social innovation strategy enhances SPOs' organizational resilience, enabling them to maintain financial stability and flexibility while safeguarding their social missions.*

During crisis (time t): During the pandemic, the studied SPOs' innovation unfolded in two phases. In the initial phase (stage t_a), they faced turbulence and focused on withstanding the crisis by utilizing financial reserves, maintaining operational continuity, and shielding beneficiaries from immediate impacts. In the second phase (stage t_b), they adapted by improving cost efficiency, embracing digitalization, increasing operational flexibility, and enhancing access to their services. Despite turbulence, their preparedness and innovative approaches helped them avoid major setbacks.

This finding is similar to Conz and Magnani (2020) who identify two paths that organizations can take during a crisis: relying on reserve resources to absorb the impact (Azadeh et al., 2016; Golgeci & Ponomarov, 2013; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007, pp. 3418–3422) or quickly adapting strategies and practices to align with new circumstances (Ambulkar et al., 2015; Chowdhury & Quaddus, 2016, 2017). Organizations typically use one or both approaches to respond to disruption (Conz & Magnani, 2020) For example, Ghomi et al. (2023) emphasize the absorptive approach, arguing that investments in innovation and flexibility enable firms to generate new ideas and practices necessary for absorbing the impact of a crisis. In contrast, Li et al. (2024), found that 201 small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in China adapted their innovation strategies by adopting open innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic (see also, Vasi et al., 2024). Additionally, Wang and Sun (2024) highlight how SMEs rapidly embraced digital innovation to maintain stability throughout the pandemic (see also Rusinko (2020)). For SPOs, this means using innovative methods to address both internal financial challenges and external threats to their beneficiaries, allowing them to absorb the shock and/or adapt more effectively to crises. Therefore, we propose.

Proposition 2. *SPOs that invest in social innovation to address both internal financial challenges and external threats to their beneficiaries are better equipped to absorb the impact of crises, enhancing their ability to maintain financial stability while also protecting their beneficiaries.*

Proposition 3. *During a crisis, SPOs that quickly pursue new social innovation to address emerging internal financial challenges and external threats to their beneficiaries are more able to adapt their strategies effectively, enhancing their ability to maintain financial stability while also protecting their beneficiaries.*

After crisis (time t + 1): As the crisis subsided and restrictions eased, the studied SPOs entered a transformation phase, prioritizing future crisis preparedness. This included market expansion, portfolio diversification, and new products to help beneficiaries prepare for future challenges. Many adopted participatory models involving beneficiaries in governance and decision-making. The findings suggest that SPOs "bounced forward" rather than "bouncing back," improving operational efficiency and effectiveness beyond pre-pandemic levels.

Our finding on these transformations is similar to Su and Junge (2023), who found that some organizations capitalize on adverse events to achieve a better position than before the crisis. This growth, or "bouncing forward," involves renewing and reconfiguring resources to respond to future crises. Similarly, after the pandemic, our case-study SPOs innovated to improve their financial stability while enhancing their ability to support beneficiaries in future crisis (cf. Littlewood & Holt, 2018), ultimately transforming into a more crisis-prepared state. Therefore, we propose.

Proposition 4. *SPOs that leverage innovative methods to transform and reconfigure their resources and capabilities post-crisis are better positioned to bounce forward, achieving a stronger and more resilient state than before the crisis. This proactive transformation enhances their ability to respond to future challenges and supports the long-term financial stability and protection of its beneficiaries.*

Based on this proposition, we propose a four-phase process model for organizational transilience in Fig. 2 including the social innovations pursued at each stage to safeguarding social and economic goals in hybrid SPOs.

6. Developing a conceptual process model for understanding the interplay between social innovation and organizational transilience in hybrid SPOs

Drawing on insights from academic literature and empirical findings, we propose a conceptual process model in Fig. 3 to understand the dynamic interplay between social innovation and organizational transilience in hybrid Social Purpose Organizations (SPOs) during times of crisis.

When a crisis emerges, hybrid SPOs encounter new or intensified threats to both their internal financial stability and the well-being of their beneficiaries. These dual threats prompt SPOs to recognize the vulnerability of their intertwined economic and social goals—both of which are equally critical due to their hybrid nature. In response, SPOs begin to generate ideas aimed at safeguarding these goals. While some ideas are developed to ensure internal financial stability, their primary purpose is to support the organization's social mission, with economic sustainability serving as a necessary foundation. Thus, addressing social problems is the ultimate objective of these innovations, aligning them closely with the widely accepted definition of social innovation.

These innovations often address both economic and social concerns simultaneously, reflecting their interrelated nature. Initially, SPOs seize these ideas to absorb the immediate financial shock and to help beneficiaries navigate the early turbulence. This marks the beginning of organizational resilience, catalyzed by social innovation.

Once the initial shock is managed, SPOs move to the next phase: adapting through further innovative ideas to address short-term challenges. These adaptations gradually lead to fundamental changes in their financial structures and their capacity to support beneficiaries. As the crisis subsides, SPOs continue to seize innovative opportunities to strengthen their financial position and enhance their ability to serve. They also begin preparing for future crises by developing mechanisms to detect and respond to emerging threats to their dual mission.

Through this ongoing process of innovation, SPOs undergo significant transformations in their operations, capabilities, and resources. Rather than merely returning to their pre-crisis state, they emerge stronger being more financially stable and better equipped to protect their beneficiaries. We conceptualize this forward-moving recovery as transformative organizational transilience.

The hybrid nature of SPOs means that even during crisis, the pursuit of economic and social goals occurs in parallel and is deeply interconnected. In contrast, for-profit organizations typically prioritize financial stability during crises, often relegating social goals. SPOs, however, prioritize their social mission, with financial stability serving as a prerequisite. Consequently, their crisis response involves innovating to protect both goals simultaneously.

Thus, for SPOs, organizational transilience entails strengthening both internal financial health and social impact, while social innovation refers to the development and implementation of ideas that safeguard both dimensions. Our conceptual model captures this continuous interplay, illustrating how SPOs adapt, bounce forward, and prepare for future disruptions embodying the essence of transformative organizational transilience.

7. Conclusion

By presenting four testable propositions, a four-phase process model (Fig. 2) and a conceptual model (Fig. 3), our paper contributes toward research in the field of social innovation, and organizational resilience and transilience. Our study reveals that SPOs pursued social innovation to foster resilience in their beneficiaries while simultaneously ensuring their own financial and operational stability. Given their hybrid nature, SPOs had to balance both social and economic factors contributing toward organizational resilience, highlighting a critical link between social innovation and organizational resilience (Gigauri & Bogacz-Wojtanowska, 2022; Montrone, Searing, & Poledrini, 2024; Mouhcine et al., 2023). Unlike the institutional, systemic or policy-driven social innovation literature, which often emphasizes community or social resilience as the primary goal (e.g. Dejene et al., 2024; Meyer & Hartmann, 2023; Shahidullah et al., 2020), our findings put organizational resilience and transilience in SPOs at center of analysis (cf. Drucker, 1987; Mulgan, 2006; Tracey & Stott, 2017). The findings indicate that SPOs cannot promote beneficiary resilience during crises without simultaneously stabilizing their internal operations. Organizational resilience, therefore, is as vital to SPOs as it is to for-profit enterprises. This research responds to calls from Westley (2013) and Tracey and Stott (2017) to integrate insights from organizational resilience literature into social innovation studies and to explore social innovation from an organizational perspective. Our paper, therefore, advances the management-oriented perspective in social innovation literature by linking it with organizational resilience theory in a hybrid organizational context.

Further, our findings show that SPOs did not return to their pre-crisis state rather they achieved incremental yet positive transformations through social innovation since the onset of the pandemic. While this finding advances the understanding about transilience (Bartuseviciene et al., 2024; Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023; Su & Junge, 2023), it contradicts Su and Junge (2023) and Bartuseviciene et al. (2024); (Gatenholm & Halldórsson, 2023; Su & Junge, 2023), who suggest that organizations first bounce back and then bounce forward. This finding advances organizational resilience literature by adding to the emerging narrative on bouncing forward by emphasizing that the social innovations pursued during and after the pandemic facilitated a

transformative process, leading to more stable outcomes post-pandemic. Hence, we propose a term transformative organizational transilience. The paper, therefore, integrates the transilience perspective from organizational resilience literature with social innovation literature.

Our paper contributes to Conz and Magnani's (2020) call regarding considering time and the outcome while studying resilience. Figs. 2 and 3 show both the dimensions: "time (t)" and outcome refer to as "transformation." It expands upon Conz and Magnani's (2020) framework by introducing a nuanced temporal perspective. Specifically, we divided the reactive "Phase-t" (during crisis) into two sub-phases: $\mathbf{t_a}$, representing the immediate crisis response, and $\mathbf{t_b}$, reflecting short-term adaptations as the crisis persisted. During $\mathbf{t_a}$, SPOs adopted absorptive strategies to endure initial shocks, while in $\mathbf{t_b}$, they shifted to adaptive approaches, reconfiguring resources, capabilities, and operations to sustain themselves. In contrast to the dominant view of resilience as bouncing back (Bullough & Renko, 2013; Herbane, 2010, 2019; Linnenluecke, 2017; Powley, 2009), we found that SPOs sought to proactively prepare for future crises, embodying a bounce-forward approach. Our paper, therefore, adds a new temporal phase to Conz and Magnani's (2020) conceptualization of "time" in resilience process and a new outcome to the resilience process by bringing the bouncing forward perspective to it.

We also make a methodological contribution. Previous studies focusing on social innovation, and resilience largely focus on single case studies, usually a community affected by cyclone, earthquake and ecological changes (e.g. Dejene et al., 2024; H. Meyer & Hartmann, 2023; Shahidullah et al., 2020). However, we collect data from 25 cases and have "organization" as our unit of analysis rather than "society" or "community." We collect micro-level longitudinal data from multiple sources including interviews and organizational documents. The longitudinal data allow us to compare the resilience process before and after the pandemic.

Our four propositions which merge onto the four phases of the process model, along with the proposed conceptual model offer actionable insights for SPO managers. These propositions and models provide hybrid SPOs with a strategic framework to navigate crises by leveraging social innovation as a dual-purpose tool – preserving financial stability while fulfilling their social mission. It equips practitioners with a clear, phased approach to not only withstand disruptions but to transform their operations, enabling them to emerge stronger and more resilient in the face of future challenges.

We recommend two areas for further research. First, to examine how the level of transformation across the four phases (as outlined in Fig. 2) varies depending on the size, resources, and capabilities of SPOs. Our findings indicate that while all cases demonstrated some degree of transformation, the extent of transformation differed, suggesting a fruitful avenue for further empirical investigation. Future studies could create a typology of SPOs' organizational resilience based on factors influencing their ability to transform in the face of crisis. Second, future research could investigate failure cases to identify why they could not recover, which was beyond the scope of this paper.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Samia Hoque: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Abdullah Al Faruq:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Sally Randles:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Copilot in order to improve readability and language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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