

Lived Experiences of K-10 School Leaders in Building Organizational Resilience Through Crisis Response: A Phenomenological Study of Leadership, Adaptation, and Resource Management

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of K-10 school leaders in Davao City, Philippines, in building organizational resilience through crisis response. Through in-depth interviews with seven school principals, the research examined leadership practices, adaptation strategies, and resource management approaches during periods of institutional crisis. The study, anchored in Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory, revealed four major themes: Idealized Influence, characterized by transparent communication and leading by example; Inspirational Motivation, demonstrated through morale-boosting initiatives and fostering hope; Intellectual Stimulation, evidenced by innovative problem-solving and adaptive learning approaches; and Individualized Consideration, shown through personalized support and well-being initiatives. Twelve core values emerged, including trust-building actions, community resilience, creative resource utilization, and flexible work arrangements. The findings highlight the critical role of transformational leadership in enhancing organizational resilience, particularly in developing educational contexts. The study contributes to the understanding of educational leadership during crises and provides practical insights for school administrators in building robust, adaptable institutions capable of navigating complex challenges while maintaining educational quality and community support.

Keywords: K-10 school principals; organizational resilience; crisis response; leadership; adaptation; resource management

1. Introduction

School leaders worldwide have had to show exceptional adaptability and resilience to manage their institutions through unprecedented challenges in the global education landscape. Educational institutions have faced a range of crises, including natural disasters and public health emergencies, requiring prompt and efficient leadership reactions to uphold operational stability and uphold education quality. These challenges have fundamentally changed the expectations for school leaders, making it necessary for them to take on the roles of crisis managers, digital innovators, and emotional support providers at the same time (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023).

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the significant importance of organizational

resilience in educational institutions, with school leaders worldwide adjusting to hybrid learning models while dealing with limited resources and aiding their school communities (Shaya et al., 2023). Recent international research has revealed the strengths and weaknesses present in educational systems worldwide, highlighting the necessity for strong leadership structures that are resilient and flexible in the face of unexpected challenges (Bozkurt et al., 2020). The period after the pandemic has sped up the requirement for organizational change, urging schools to rethink traditional methods of delivering education and adopt new approaches to teaching and learning (Dwivedi et al, 2020).

In the Asia-Pacific area, educational systems have shown different levels of readiness and flexibility in addressing emergencies. Countries in the region have put in place various methods to ensure educational flow, achieving varying degrees of success depending on their infrastructure, resources, and leadership capabilities (Dabrowski et al., 2022). The rise of new educational models necessitates school leaders to prioritize improving student well-being and academic standards, as well as fortifying their ability to handle crises effectively (Fu & Zhang, 2024)).

Similar to other developing countries, the Philippines has encountered distinct obstacles in ensuring educational continuity despite disruptions. Filipino educational administrators have faced various obstacles such as inadequate technology resources, economic gaps among students, and frequent natural calamities, while also aiming to enforce educational changes required by the government (Dayagbil et al., 2021). The Department of Education's reaction to these issues has highlighted the crucial importance of school leaders in guaranteeing educational consistency and sustaining organizational durability.

In Davao City, located in the southern Philippines, the response of the Department of Education to these concerns has emphasized the critical role of school leaders in ensuring educational continuity and maintaining organizational resilience. Aquino et al. (2021) suggest that their knowledge in crisis response and management can provide useful guidance for improving leadership skills in difficult situations. School leaders need to have a better grasp of how to create and sustain organizational resilience in the face of complex challenges that arise during crisis situations. Recent research has stressed the significance of adaptive leadership skills and creative problem-solving methods in leading educational institutions through uncertain times (Uy et al., 2023). These skills are especially important when leaders need to juggle immediate crisis management alongside ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organization.

Understanding the practical experiences of school leaders is essential for developing and strengthening educational leadership practices when building organizational resilience during crises. The aim of this phenomenological research is to explore how school administrators in K-10 schools in Davao City cope with challenges, implement crisis response strategies, and enhance institutional resilience to support their educational communities. Through the utilization of practical experiences, this research seeks to enhance our comprehension of educational leadership during times of crisis and provide valuable guidance for upcoming leaders.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of school principals in building organizational resilience through crisis response. Specifically, it sought to:

1. examine how school principals exemplify idealized influence in their leadership during crises.
2. analyze the ways school principals demonstrate inspirational motivation in navigating uncertainties.
3. investigate how school principals apply intellectual stimulation to promote innovative problem-solving during crises.
4. explore how school principals practice individualized consideration to address the needs of their school communities during crises.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How do school principals demonstrate Idealized Influence in building organizational resilience during crises?
 - 1.1 What leadership qualities or actions have helped you model resilience and ethical decision-making during crises?
 - 1.2 Can you share specific instances where your actions inspired trust and confidence among stakeholders?
2. How do school principals apply Inspirational Motivation in building organizational resilience?
 - 2.1 What strategies have you used to foster hope and encourage unity among staff and students during uncertainties?
 - 2.2 Can you describe a time when your leadership inspired your school community to adapt successfully to a crisis?
3. In what ways do school principals employ Intellectual Stimulation to address challenges in building organizational resilience?
 - 3.1 How have you encouraged innovative solutions or adaptive teaching-learning approaches during crises?
 - 3.2 Can you provide examples of creative problem-solving measures that proved effective?
4. How do school principals demonstrate Individualized Consideration to meet the unique needs of staff and students during crises?
 - 4.1 How have you tailored your crisis response to address the diverse needs of your school community?
 - 4.2 Can you share specific practices that supported the well-being of staff and students during challenging times?

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how school leaders build organizational resilience through crisis response. The theory encompasses four key dimensions: Idealized Influence, which manifests through principals' modeling of resilient leadership and ethical decision-making; Inspirational Motivation, demonstrated through clear crisis response strategies and fostering hope during uncertainties; Intellectual Stimulation, shown through the promotion of innovative solutions and adaptive teaching-learning approaches; and Individualized Consideration, evidenced by attention to specific needs of staff and students during crises. These dimensions interact with both external factors (educational policies, technological infrastructure, socioeconomic conditions, natural disaster risks, and public health emergencies) and internal factors (institutional capacity, resource availability, staff competencies, digital readiness, and organizational culture) to produce outcomes in institutional adaptability and community impact. The framework was mediated through leadership response mechanisms (crisis assessment, resource optimization, stakeholder collaboration) and organizational development processes (capacity building, system strengthening, professional development), providing a lens through which to examine how K-10 school leaders in Davao City navigate the complex challenges of building organizational resilience through crisis response while acknowledging the unique context of the Philippine educational system.

2. Method

This study was employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of K-10 school principals in Davao City in building organizational resilience through crisis response. Phenomenology focuses on understanding participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences, making it ideal for examining the complex realities faced by school leaders during crises (Jedličková et al., 2022). This method provided thorough, in-depth understanding of how school principals manage challenges, provide and implement strategies, and develop organizational resilience in their educational institutions. The study involved seven (7) school principals selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling ensured that the backgrounds of the participants are relevant to the objectives of the study. Participants must have managed schools during serious crises (pandemics, natural disasters, or other major disruptions), have been school administrators for at least three years, and actively participate in the execution of crisis response plans in order to be qualified. In qualitative research, it is often established that deliberate sampling is an effective method for identifying individuals with relevant experiences or specialized knowledge (Campbell et al., 2020). Semi-structured interview was used for data collection since they preserve the freedom to explore deeply into participants' experiences while allowing for the examination of emerging themes. Three (3) main areas were addressed by the interview questions such as noteworthy experiences in fostering organizational resilience, coping techniques and problem-solving approaches, and insights and lessons gained. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to explore complex phenomena and encourage participants to elaborate on their unique perspectives (Adeoye-Olatunde, & Olenik, 2021). The interviews were conducted in a confidential and convenient setting, with participants' consent, and was audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of data transcription. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), the six-step technique was used to do thematic analysis of the data. This process includes understanding the data, developing preliminary codes, identifying and assessing themes, defining and labeling themes, and producing the final report. Thematic analysis is especially well-suited for research that seeks to identify recurrent themes throughout participants' experiences since it is very adaptable and enables the methodical discovery of patterns in qualitative data (Terry et al., 2017). Ethics are of the utmost importance in this research. Anonymization of all data was ensured strict confidentiality, and all participants were asked for their informed consent. Any participant may leave the study at any time without facing any consequences.

3. Result and Discussion

The research offers an in-depth examination of organizational resilience via Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory in K-10 educational institutions in Davao City, Philippines. The study uncovers four essential aspects of leadership: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration, which engage with both external and internal organizational elements. The twelve key core values—such as clear communication, fostering trust, creative problem-solving, and well-being efforts highlight the intricate process of developing resilience in crisis situations. This study explores leadership by analyzing crisis evaluation, resource efficiency, and stakeholder cooperation, showcasing how educational leaders manage difficult situations by aligning institutional requirements with personal assistance.

The framework illustrates that organizational resilience is not a fixed concept, but rather a complex, adaptable process significantly shaped by leadership styles, contextual hurdles, and the capacity to cultivate innovative organizational cultures (Pacheco-Cubillos et al., 2024). Nevertheless, external influences like educational policies, technological resources, and socioeconomic circumstances interact with internal aspects such as institutional capability, employee skills, and organizational ethos to formulate effective leadership strategies (Kahpi et al., 2024). Thus, by emphasizing tailored support, adaptable work setups, and flexible

learning methods, school leaders can successfully foster community resilience and sustain institutional efficiency amid uncertainties.

The theoretical value of this research lies in its holistic perspective on leadership during crises, providing educational leaders with a thorough model that goes beyond traditional management paradigms. Moreover, it emphasizes the vital role of transformational leadership in creating environments that are both proactive and adaptable, rather than merely reactive. Additionally, highlighting the connection among leadership behaviors, organizational values, and systemic resilience, the study offers significant insights into how educational institutions can develop robust, flexible strategies that promote both institutional goals and individual well-being, particularly in complex and rapidly changing environments like the Philippine educational system.

As indicated in Figure 1 from the gathered data during the in-depth interview (IDI) of the participants, four (4) major themes have emerged in the experiences of school heads in building organizational resilience through crisis response, these are the following: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. In addition, twelve (12) core values have been identified; transparent communication, leading by example, trust-building actions, fostering hope and unity, community resilience, innovative problem-solving, adaptive learning approaches, creative resource utilization, personalized support, flexible work arrangements, and lastly well-being Initiatives.

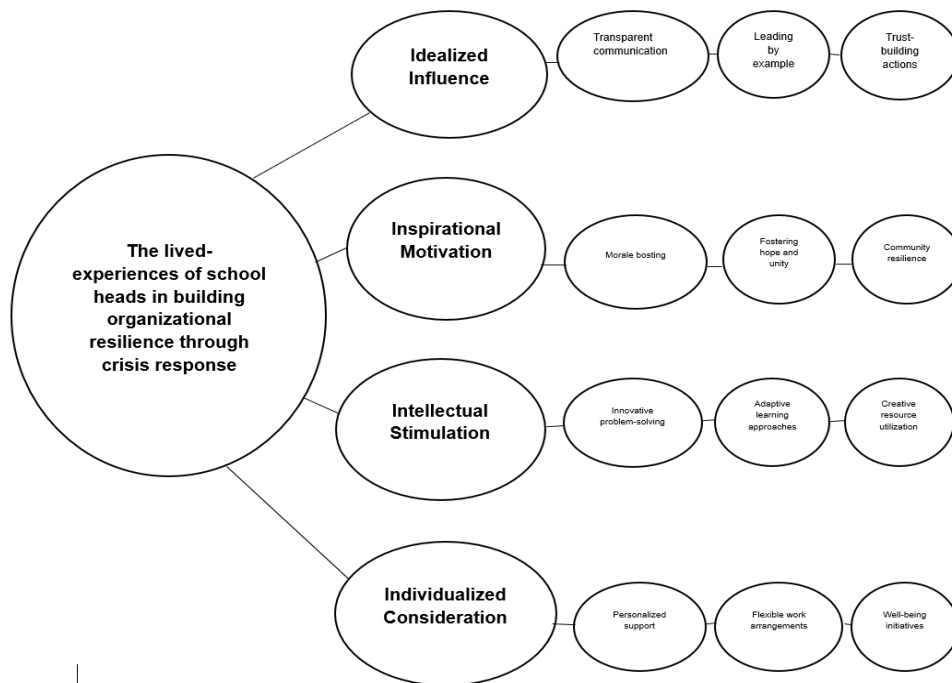


Figure 1. Experiences of School Heads in Building Organizational Resilience Through Crisis Response.

3.1. Idealized Influence

The experiences of public-school heads in building organizational resilience through crisis response (Pastor et al., 2024) in the MATATAG Curriculum (K-10) revealed the theme idealized influence. This

highlights the various challenges faced by school heads in their leadership roles. These includes transparency communication, leading by example, and trust-building actions (Yue et al., 2019). The same is true for the in-depth interview participants where good number of them had encountered the same experiences.

Informant 147 shared of how they dealt the issue of transparent communication stating that:

"Naghatag ko ug updates regularly, especially sa situation ng school funds." (*I give updates regularly, especially about school funds*).-(Participant 1)
- "Sinisiguro ko na tapat at bukas ang communication." (*I make sure that communication is honest and open*) - (Participant 5)
- "I made it a point to model ethical decision-making." (Participant 7).

While informant 468 shown how they led the organization by example.

"As a leader, kinahanglan model ka sa pagkamaayo ug patience." (*As a leader, you must model kindness and patience*). -(Participant 4)
- "Nag-share ko ug personal sacrifices sa teachers, like using my own resources for online classes" (*I share personal sacrifices with teachers, like using my own resources for online classes*). -(Participant 6)
- "Firm in decision making and fair to all concerned parties in a conflict." (Participant 8)

In addition, informant 136 go the extra mile in building trust within the organization and community by putting it into action.

"When I personally visited barangays to deliver modules, nakita nila nga seryoso ko sa pagtabang" * (*When I personally visited barangays to deliver modules, they saw that I was serious about helping*). -(Participant 1)
- "Nag-volunteer akong mag-repair ng classrooms after the typhoon" (*I volunteered to repair classrooms after the typhoon*). (Participant 3)
- "I assured transparency sa paggamit ng calamity funds" (*I assured transparency in the use of calamity funds*) -(Participant 6).

The experiences of the participants emphasize their dedication to transparency, personal sacrifice, and setting a good example (Yue et al., 2019). The school leaders show their commitment to their community by regularly informing about important matters such as school and disaster funds, promoting transparent communication (Meng et al., 2024).

They show patience, kindness, and a hands-on approach way beyond the ordinary administrative routine. These school leaders evidence a leadership approach that shows more concern for their educational community than just managing resources - actively participating in community activities, transparent management of funds, and an openness to personal sacrifice as well (Santoso et al.,). Their behaviors demonstrate a deep understanding of the fact that to be a leader is to lead by example, inspire trust, and demonstrate an authentic commitment to the welfare of teachers, students, and the greater community through concrete, visible expressions of ethical values and care in service.

The findings thus resonate with Kouzes and Posner's (2017) principle of "modeling the way" in that leaders demonstrate commitment by personal sacrifice and transparently making decisions. Participants emphasized the critical importance of honest communication and, more specifically, leading in an ethical manner, as is evident in crisis context.

3.2. Inspirational Motivation

Characterized by strategic crisis response and hope generation (Mizrak, 2024), this second theme reveals leadership's critical psychological dimension that manifest clear articulation of crisis response strategies and maintaining organizational morale during uncertainties.

The data illuminate's innovative morale-boosting strategies, such as organizing virtual check-ins, implementing gratitude initiatives, and maintaining a resilient organizational narrative.

Informant 146 shared their experiences on how they boosted their morale:

"Nag-organize ako ng kamustahan sessions online to boost morale." (*I organized hello sessions online to boost morale*). -(Participant 1)
 "Sa mga meetings, nagbibigay ako ng positive affirmations" (*In meetings, I give positive affirmations*) - Participant 4)
 "Gi-highlight nako ang small victories." (*I highlighted small victories*). -(Participant 6)

In so doing, informant 136 shared their best practices in fostering hope and unity.

"Naghatag mi og outreach programs for affected families" (*We provide outreach programs for affected families*). -(Participant 1)
 "Nagkaroon kami ng weekly check-ins with staff and student's" (*We had weekly check-ins with staff and students*). - (Participant 3)
 "Nagbutang mi og 'Gratitude Walls' sa school." (*We put up 'Gratitude Walls' in the school*). - (Participant 6)

Furthermore, informant 872 imparted their experiences as to community resilience.

"Showing to the staff that as a leader I am the main responsible for all the outcomes" (Participant 8)
 "Nag-facilitate ako ng parent-teacher dialogues" (*I facilitated parent-teacher dialogues*). -(Participant 7)
 "Maski unsa, maayo nga starting point." (*Anyway, good starting point*). - (Participant 2)

Inspirational motivation is vital in strategic leadership, ultimately combining defined response strategies with morale-boosting initiatives to cultivate resilience and hope (Stanwicks, 2024). Additionally, leaders can greatly boost organizational morale during uncertain times (Luthans et al., 2007). Furthermore, participating in tasks like virtual "kamustahan sessions" (check-ins), sharing positive affirmations, and acknowledging small accomplishments boosted morale and nurtured a resilient narrative. Consequently, leader accountability enhances trust and confidence, aligning with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, and highlights how the actions of leaders impact the resilience of their followers. Additionally, these techniques correspond with the tenets of transformational leadership, enhancing organizational outcomes during crises (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Combining strategic management with psychological support enables leaders to cultivate a strong and favorable organizational culture, but additional research is necessary to assess the long-term impacts on recovery and well-being.

3.3. Intellectual Stimulation

Educational leaders have effectively fostered intellectual stimulation by integrating innovative problem-solving, adaptive learning strategies, and creative resource utilization (Cadis, 2024).

Firstly, it encouraged creative thinking through brainstorming sessions and challenges that inspired innovative solutions.

As informant 127 made mention during IDI.

"I encouraged my teachers to think outside the box." (Participant 1)
 "Nagbutang ko og brainstorming sessions" (*I set up brainstorming sessions*). - (Participant 2)
 "We started a 'Challenge of the Month'" (Participant 7)

Secondly, embracing adaptive methods like project-based learning, peer collaboration, and experimentation with blended learning approaches further nurtured an environment of flexibility and continuous improvement.

This was supported by informant 136 when they said:

"Nag-organize kami ng peer-learning sessions." (*We organize peer-learning sessions*). - (Participant 1)
 "I encouraged project-based learning." (Participant 3)
 "Gi-allow nako ang pag-experiment sa blended approaches." (*I allow experimentation with blended approaches*). - (Participant 6)

Lastly, Resourcefulness was evident as leaders tapped into community and alumni networks, devised module distribution systems, and enlisted local assistants to support learning.

"Nag-hire kami ng local community members as assistants" (*We hired local community members as assistants*). - (Participant 1)
- "Nagbutang mi og 'Module Drop-Off Stations'" (*We set up 'Module Drop-Off Stations'*). - (Participant 2)
- "I tapped alumni to donate prepaid load for students." (Participant 7)

Intellectual Stimulation emphasizes innovation and adaptability that exemplified through promoting innovative problem-solving approaches, encouraging adaptive teaching-learning methodologies, and leveraging collective intelligence and community resource (Gafoor, 2024).

3.4. Individualized Consideration

Leaders have demonstrated an empathetic and adaptive approach to supporting their teams by focusing on personalized support, flexibility, and well-being initiatives (Shwetha et al., 2024). By addressing individual needs, leaders have prioritized students and families most affected by economic or technological challenges, ensuring equitable access to resources.

As informant 125 made mention:

"I made sure to know each teacher's situation." (Participant 1)
- "Gi-prioritize nako ang pag-identify sa mga families nga pinaka-apektado" (*I prioritized identifying the families most affected*). - (Participant 2)
- "Gihatagan nako og special considerations ang mga estudyante nga walay internet." (*I give special considerations to students without internet*). (Participant 5)

Moreover, flexible work arrangements, including adjusted workloads and hours, have further accommodated personal and professional demands, fostering stronger parent-teacher collaborations.

Informant 376, when ask about flexible work arrangements, explained;

"I adjusted workloads for teachers who were also taking care of their children" (Participant 3)
- "Offered flexible working hours to staff members" (Participant 7)
- "Nag-allow ako ng parents-teachers partnerships" (*I allow parent-teacher partnerships*). - (Participant 6)

Additionally, initiatives promoting mental and physical health, such as wellness programs and counseling, reflect a broader trend toward prioritizing employee well-being and addressing holistic health concerns in the workplace.

On the matter of well-being initiatives, informant 127 have their utterances:

"Nag-organize kami ng wellness programs like yoga sessions" (*We organize wellness programs like yoga sessions*). - (Participant 1)
- "Giingnan nako ang mga guro nga dili sila mag-overtime" (*I told the teachers not to work overtime*). - (Participant 2)
- "Arranged grief counseling sessions" (Participant 7)

This theme focuses on transformation in educational leadership to turbulent times, which carries the spirit of empathy and fluidity with an underlying motivation toward well-being (Deemie Sr, 2024). Therefore,

leaders embraced approaches such as personalized interventions by designing interventions in three pivotal aspects: support for vulnerable individuals, flexible work environment strategies, and overall well-being measures (Abdalla et al., 2024). Through focused attention to fair resource distribution among the most affected families, leaders can target specific challenges in the context. Flexible adaptations in work regarding adjusted loads and modified schedules helped to exhibit workforce resilience regarding the accommodation of personal and professional pressures (Jamshidi et al., 2024). Wellness programs, access to mental health support and policies discouraging overtime depict a culture change toward adequate care for employees (Shankar et al., 2024). This requires empathetic, context-sensitive leadership within the process of developing organizational resilience and well-being; it is within such studies in the future that long-term effects upon employee satisfaction and educational outcomes will be identified.

3.5. Practical Implications

Educational institutions can leverage these insights to develop more resilient leadership development programs. The research underscores the importance of cultivating leaders who can balance operational efficiency with genuine human-centric approaches.

3.6. Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its specific cultural and geographical context. Future research could explore comparative leadership strategies across different educational ecosystems and cultural environments.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study explains how transformational leadership plays a very important role in enhancing organizational resilience for educational organizations in times of crisis, particularly focusing on the experience of school administrators implementing the MATATAG Curriculum in Davao City, Philippines. Based on the aggregation of empirical data gathered through comprehensive interviews, the research proves that effective responses to crises are basically derived from four dimensions of transformational leadership: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration. These dimensions are used through twelve core values of open communication, innovative problem-solving, adaptive learning, and holistic well-being initiatives. The findings support the transformational leadership model by Bass and Avolio (2006) that shows how leadership surpasses traditional management practice during times of crisis through the forms of psychological empowerment, organizational adaptability, and human-oriented strategies. Moreover, the research adds further to the dialogue on the matter of organizational resilience by viewing the complex nature of the interaction between leadership practices and institutional flexibility and community support systems. Further research may be required to extend the basic model into other educational settings as it examines processes of leading across cultures and places to build further understandings for strategies in fostering resilience in educational leadership contexts (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Luthans et al., 2007).

Educational institutions should pursue holistic transformational leadership by developing integrated strategies that improve the strength of an organization. Such leadership programs are characterized by open communication, creativity in problem solving, and flexible learning techniques on four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Through continuous learning platforms, psychological resilience training, and maintaining open channels of communication, educational organizations will be better able to create responsive and supportive structures that will not only survive crises but will emerge more united and prepared for uncertainties. The new

leadership must shift from the traditional practice of management toward a more empathetic, innovative, and human-centered approach where both the effectiveness of institutions and individual well-being are at the core.

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