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Reframing the Role of Information Technology in Crisis Response

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TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

While much attention has been given to vaccines, treatments, and therapies within the field of medical sciences for human survival during the COVID-19 pandemic, information technology (IT) has played a crucial role in the economic and operational survival of organizations. A crisis, like COVID-19, acts as an external force that   demands   current state operations and processes unfreeze in order to adapt. This pandemic has challenged higher education institutions to respond and evolve operations, practices, and processes. During times of change new learnings can be found, and if recognized, may even support a new standard of best practices.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed our extreme dependence on technology. While much research has recognized the power of technology in improving responses during emergencies, few studies focused on information technology and IT responses during crisis. The purpose of this study was to investigate how academic institutions responded during the COVID 19 crisis, analyzed IT response and strategies employed and understood how they influenced effectivity. More specifically, we researched how academic organizations have strategically used technology to respond during the COVID-19 crisis, and the   impacts associated with the strategies used   .

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology using an interpretive philosophy. The use of an interpretive methodology allowed us to account for and explore IT strategies and responses during COVID-19. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 23 informants holding a university leadership and decision making role, which included deans, associate deans, provosts, university presidents, vice presidents, IT managers, and chief information officers. Our findings from the interpretive analysis of this ongoing study suggested that health, technical, siloed data and socio-economic inequities challenged how higher education institutions strategically respond to the IT requirements of the pandemic. The results showed that, while most schools have emergency response plans for natural hazards, none included plans for epidemic or pandemic response. Our analysis demonstrated that the strategic responses led to best practices and measurable impact in the areas of sustainability, analytics, culture, and systemic racism. We discuss the implication of these findings, IT strategies, and best practices that evolved from crisis management.