

# REPURPOSING BUSINESS RECOVERY EMPLOYED BY CHRISTIAN BUSINESS LEADERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

The study looks at the different approaches taken by Christian business leaders to deal with the COVID-19 crisis and keep their businesses successful. The methodology used in this study combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. The study's participants were Christian senior managers and business owners in Central Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The results of this study proved that during the COVID-19 crisis, Christian leaders who exhibited high levels of resilience were able to survive and, in some cases, thrive. Leaders who exhibited fortitude and a positive outlook may have helped their followers become more resilient, which helped them survive the crisis.

## 1. PURPOSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has put business owners and leaders all over the world to the test, and this is especially true for Christian business leaders whose spiritual lives are fully integrated with their professional

lives (Anderson et al., 2021). Christian business leaders face the difficult task of making difficult management decisions in uncertain times while remaining true to their Christian values because of their responsibilities. It is their responsibility to ensure that their businesses remain profitable and resilient (Umair et al., 2021; Maak et al., 2021). The study wants to know how Christian business leaders navigated the difficult and uncertain times of COVID-19 so that their companies thrived, retained their employees, and continued to operate successfully during a global economic crisis.

Although the field of business leadership in crises has been extensively studied, there has not been much empirical research on the subject that examines Christian business leaders' responses to the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Tourish, 2020). By examining the various strategies used by Christian business leaders to deal with the COVID-19 crisis and maintain the success of their enterprises, this study aims to close this knowledge gap. Few empirical studies, however, have examined the extent to which Christian business leaders can function as effective leaders during unsettling times of crisis like COVID-19 (Anderson et al., 2021; Umair et al., 2021). They may be better able to manage their staff and satisfy customer expectations if they are aware of the role, they play in keeping their businesses thriving. This knowledge is a developmental asset that can be used to create leadership interventions and responses that will help businesses succeed after COVID-19.

## **2. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Mikušová and Horváthová (2019), an organisational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event characterised by ambiguity in terms of its cause, effect, and means of resolution that threatens the viability of an organisation and calls for swift decisions. Canyon (2020) defines it as an uncertain situation possessing latent risks and opportunities that must be resolved within a given timeframe. Common terms associated with the two modes of the definition include uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability, instability, surprise element and danger, with grave consequences for organisational viability. Likewise, both definitions highlight the need for an urgent response to crises.

Thus, while they are part of the human conditions, their effects can be minimised through crisis leadership and management. Indeed, disparities in perceptions of what constitutes a crisis set the stage for crisis leadership to unfold. Crisis leadership requires a deep understanding of the role of people in the ultimate success of an organization's vision and mission (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). This perspective shifts the concept of leadership from a theoretical to a more practical space with tangible outcomes, providing room to explore leadership styles. As noted previously, leadership plays a critical role in

enabling an organization to deal with and alleviate the consequences of a crisis.

Informed by the prescripts of contingency theory, business organisations were forced to unlearn old approaches and philosophies and relearn skills and attitudes to address the adversity at hand (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021; Bamata & Phiri, 2022). To survive the COVID-19 pandemic Christian business leaders had to demonstrate courage, adaptiveness, and resilience. The way they responded espouses the core principles of the resilience and contingency theories.

### **3. DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, AND APPROACH**

This study employs an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. quantitative methodology is used to gather demographic data about study participants, a qualitative methodology is used since the goal of the study is to explore the range of opinions. Christian business owners and senior managers in Central Durban in KwaZulu-Natal made up the study's population. These firms were chosen because they are Christian-based companies with participants who are qualified to be part of the research project.

The sample approaches chosen for this study are convenience and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling is when participants are chosen based on their availability (Taherdoost, 2016). The sample for this study was chosen using a non-probability sampling technique. Christian business leaders were chosen as participants using a purposive sampling technique.

One hundred leaders of the selected Christian businesses firm were interviewed using a semi-structured interview style to get data regarding their thoughts and views on the subject. The nature of a semi-structured interview is qualitative. It ensures that critical data is obtained while also affording the interviewer and participant flexibility in terms of clarification and question addition (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The test-retest reliability instrument was utilised in this study to assess internal consistency. This was accomplished by conducting a pilot study on five selected Christian business leaders.

### **4. FINDINGS**

The findings of this study ascertained that Christian leaders who demonstrated high levels of resilience were able to survive and, in some cases, thrive during the COVID-19 crisis. Leaders who demonstrated resilience and a positive outlook could increase the level of resilience in their followers, allowing them to survive the crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous effect on all aspects of human existence including national economies and businesses (Bai et al, 2021). The degree of survival is solely dependent on human resilience.

The pandemic has tested nation-states and humanity's limits and ability to withstand adverse situations, cope with their effects, and recover (Ajili & Slimene, 2021). However, the road to recovery has not been easy (Gorjian Khanzad, and Gooyabadi, 2021). The study's findings show that the capabilities of Christian business leaders depended on a range of factors (Bonilla-Enriquez & Caballero-Morales, 2020) such as business diversification, saving and investing in an emergency fund, securing comprehensive insurance to ensure the business is protected from any liabilities, investing in relationships and join business networks, teamwork among colleagues, skills development for the team, ongoing organizational learning, and positive mindset.

The insights gained during the pandemic suggest that Christian business leaders need to boost their leadership and organizational capabilities to continue thriving in uncertain times in the aftermath of the pandemic. To be resilient, they should (Amadi-Echendu & Thopil, 2020):

- plan and prepare for the next inevitable disruption by designating a crisis response team, designing a crisis response plan aligned to their strategy, goals, and purpose, and building an integrated resilience program;
- break down silos between resilience competencies and teams, and integrate them to coordinate the tactics, tools, and technologies required for effective crisis response;
- build organizational resilience by establishing high-level resilience governance, revisiting, and rethinking the crisis management structure and response strategy, and fostering a culture of resilience.

The findings also point to the need for Christian business leaders to re-evaluate their business models to strengthen their resilience (Hadjielias et al., 2022). They should focus on (Anderson et al., 2021):

- Investing in new digital experiences, products, and services in response to changes in customer behaviours and needs.
- Developing new partnerships, both within and outside of their industries. As per the findings, partnerships are critical support mechanisms for Christian business leaders and their enterprises.
- Adjusting operational and supply chain systems to manage risk. Business entities are seeking to balance the need for just-in-time delivery with protection against delays or shutdowns by securing alternative sources of supply and ensuring that the labour force can continue to operate.
- Improving the sales model. Most businesses have revised their sales model to adapt the way they market and sell their products. They are shifting to contactless delivery, home delivery, and pick-up orders. Moreover, business-to-business models are shifting to remote and digital models.
- Faster product development through rapid iteration. Client preferences have changed significantly during the pandemic, forcing businesses to create innovative products and services that match clients' expectations and preferences.

## 5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND ORIGINALITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought attention to the necessity of situational analysis in dealing with and resolving a crisis. Conscious of the COVID-19 situation and guided by the contingency theory, Christian business leaders had to unlearn old habits and adjust to new ways of operating.

This research is a new investigation into the ability of Christian business leaders to navigate through the turbulent times of COVID-19 so that their businesses and their followers can survive and prosper. While all businesses can and will face adversity, the COVID-19 pandemic can be regarded as a game changer in rethinking crisis leadership and management. Its unprecedented and disruptive nature, with high morbidity rates and restrictive regulations to control the spread of the virus, resulted in a paradigm shift, forcing Christian businesses to review some of their core practices and operations.

It is, therefore, recommended that Christian business leaders are called on to be servant leaders who inspire a positive outlook among their followers. Christian businesses are, therefore, urged to invest resources in developing both resilient and servant leadership styles among their followers. Resilient servant leadership can ultimately become a strategic advantage for Christian business organisations and enable them to respond to challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need for situational analysis to address and overcome a crisis. Informed by the contingency theory, Christian business leaders had to take cognisance of the COVID-19 situation, unlearn old practices, and adapt to new ways of doing things. An organisation's success during a crisis depends on the application of contingent factors to the situation.

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