

Resilience Amidst Lebanese Crisis: Analyzing Human Resource Practices

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined how well businesses in Lebanon were equipped to handle the economic crisis that arose from protests in October 2019 and how they adjusted their human resource practices in response.

Design/Methodology: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with top management and thematic analysis was to understand the effect of the crisis on businesses, the steps taken to mitigate negative effects, and changes in human resource practices.

Findings: The results showed that the currency exchange rate, bank constraints, and blocked streets caused significant harm to businesses, which had to alter their strategies or shift their focus. Many businesses were not prepared for the crisis, even though Lebanon is a volatile country. To mitigate the damage, companies implemented various measures such as cutting budgets, increasing exports, and delaying plans.

Originality: The study also found that various HR practices were implemented in response to the crisis, such as halting recruitment, allowing employees to work from home, requiring annual leave, or reducing working hours and salaries.

Keywords: *Economic crisis, currency crisis, human resource practices, crisis management.*

Introduction

Modern businesses are functioning in a time of enormous uncertainty. A few of the numerous unpredictably occurring events that have been profoundly altering businesses and leaving them more vulnerable than ever are natural disasters and humanitarian, economic, and social crises. Although each crisis is distinct in its extent and nature, they all have one thing in common: they provide little time for preparation on the part of people and organizations (Rault et al., 2022). What was once thought to be a driver of performance and engagement may no longer be relevant, which presents significant issues for human resource management strategies.

Numerous crises brought on by the external environment have affected businesses for a long time throughout history, increasing the need for professionals and businesses to come up with innovative solutions to stay in business and thrive economically.

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According to previous authors such as Bhaduri (2019), people can play a significant role in both preventing and causing crises. Based on this, previous authors have urged for more research on crisis management from the standpoint of human resources (Hutchins & Wang, 2008). However, prior research has tended to concentrate on developed Western nations, where governments have been particularly active in assisting organizations in overcoming the effects of external crises.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it is carried out in Lebanon, a country that is presently experiencing a severe economic and institutional downturn marked by hyperinflation and the devaluation of the local currency, which have weakened the banking system and driven the majority of the population below the poverty line (Nuwayhid & Zurayk, 2019).

Lebanon has been experiencing an economic crisis characterized by the exchange rate of the US dollar to the Lebanese pound and measures taken by banks to restrict international transfers and limit cash withdrawals and credit facilities. In October 2019, protests erupted in the country against a government perceived as corrupt and unable to address concerns such as the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound (Baumann, 2019; Sullivan, 2019).

The effect of the crisis on businesses operating in Lebanon started to show especially when the protests disrupted operations further by blocking roads (Sullivan, 2019). As a result, some businesses closed and there was a significant drop in sales in February 2020 (Mneimneh, 2020), leading to changes such as wage reductions and layoffs (Qiblawi, 2019).

The instability in the country also deterred tourism, which negatively impacted economic growth (Jallat & Schultz, 2011) and affected small and medium enterprises, which make up 95% of businesses in the country (Matta, 2018).

Businesses in Lebanon create job opportunities and contribute to the Lebanese economy; however, they confront difficulties such as excessive expenses, a lack of innovation, and a lack of government support (Matta, 2018). During the crisis, those obstacles increased and businesses were trying to find ways to face them.

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of human resources in times of crisis and the various human resources practices implemented, including training, recruitment, wages, and compensation. This study aims to understand the adjustments made by businesses in Lebanon in response to the crisis caused by the October 17th event and the role of human resources in crisis management planning. It examines the effect of the crisis on businesses in Lebanon, the steps taken to mitigate negative effects, and the changes in HR practices. Moreover, the study aims to highlight the importance of crisis management planning. Semi-structured phone interviews with top management from various industries in Lebanon were conducted and the data were analyzed using a literature review to identify gaps.

The research questions are as follows: (1) How did the October 17th event impact the strategic direction of Lebanese businesses? (2) What HR practices were implemented in these businesses? (3) To what extent was the crisis a major factor in HR changes in Lebanon?

After providing a relevant introduction about Lebanon and the current crisis, a literature review is presented afterward to discuss the core constructs of the study. Based on this, a conceptual model of human resource practices in times of crisis has been developed. Following the methodology and key findings, there is a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the model that is being presented. An overall conclusion finally concludes the study.

Literature Review

This study attempts to look into how the economic crisis has affected Lebanese enterprises, how prepared they were for this instability, and what changes were made in response to the events of October 17.

On October 17th, the Lebanese government imposed an additional tax on voice-over IP services such as WhatsApp, which angered the citizens who were already paying numerous taxes and receiving few benefits from the corrupt government. Protests demanding the resignation of the government erupted in the streets, leading to an ongoing revolution. During this revolution, roads were blocked by protestors, disrupting the operations of many enterprises in Lebanon (Sullivan, 2019). According to a report in the Daily Star, 265 food and beverage outlets closed down and it was predictable that the number will rise to 465 by December 2019 due to the current situation. Some businesses have struggled to function during times of crisis and have shut their doors, such as the Metropolis Cinema, which closed in January 2020, and the Beirut Cat Café, which ceased operations in December 2019 (Frakes, 2020).

The following sections include previous literature regarding the main concepts of the study which are business crises, crisis management, challenges of crisis management, strategies, HR practices, and HR in crisis management.

Types of Business Crises

According to Athamneh (2018), a crisis is described as a sudden, disruptive incident that affects a company's operations, standing in the community, use of its people resources, and capacity to accomplish its objectives (Koushafard, 2013). Natural disasters like tsunamis and storms, biological crises like pandemics, economic crises like recessions and hyperinflations, and crises connected to terrorism, cyberattacks, or violence are some examples of crises (Turner, 2007; Kowalski, 2018; Liou & Lin, 2008).

Crises can present either opportunities for organizations to revise their strategies and achieve new goals, or threats that require immediate action to mitigate potential consequences (Spillan, 2000). It is significant for organizations to comprehend the diverse types of crises that may occur and to anticipate potential ones. Additionally, organizations need to be ready for internal crises that could impede everyday operations, such as IT breakdowns, PR catastrophes, or the unexpected loss of critical personnel (Kowalski, 2018).

Despite the various crises that have happened, a Miller study indicated that 47% of 137 large organizations do not have a catastrophe plan in place in advance, while a survey by Fegley and Victor found that less than 60% of employees felt that their company was equipped to handle a crisis (as cited in Wang et al., 2009).

Explanations for this lack of crisis planning may include the belief that the firm can avoid any industry crisis (Spillan, 2017), a focus on daily tasks rather than crisis planning (Lockwood, 2005), confidence in the work of managers (Spillan, 2000), reliance on insurance companies to cover damages (Spillan, 2000), a lack of awareness of the risks facing the company (Spillan, 2000), a lack of attention to real examples of crises that have affected competitors (Lockwood, 2005), and reliance on untested crisis plans (Lockwood, 2005).

Crisis Management

Many researchers argue that it is vital for organizations to develop a crisis management plan in order to be prepared for potential crises (Athamneh, 2018; Koushafard, 2013; Kowalski, 2018). This plan is crucial for a company's survival during a crisis, as it allows firms to take action to reduce expenses and stay afloat during and after the crisis (Athamneh, 2018). According to research by Fink, unprepared firms experience the effects of a crisis for two and a half times longer than prepared firms (as cited in Thumiki

et al., 2019). A crisis management plan is also important for minimizing the negative impacts of a crisis (Hough & Spillan, 2005; Valackiene, 2010).

Crisis planning has two forms: proactive and reactive. In the reactive phase, decisions are made in response to a crisis as it occurs. On the other hand, in the proactive phase, businesses anticipate potential crises and develop strategies to address them before they occur (Hough & Spillan, 2005). However, it is not practical or efficient to plan for every possible crisis. A crisis recovery plan, a backup plan for business continuity, and an immediate crisis response should all be included in a crisis management strategy. Also, Athamneh (2018), Kowalski (2018), and Lockwood (2015) stressed that a crisis management strategy needs to be made obvious and communicated to staff so that they know what to do in case of a crisis. Further, the business should carry out a damage assessment following the crisis to determine the damage that was done (Kowalski, 2018).

Hough and Spillan (2005) developed a five-step process for designing a crisis management plan. The first step involves selecting qualified individuals for the crisis management team, who can handle pressure and work for long periods of time. The team should also include consultants with expertise in addressing specific crises. The second step involves gathering and examining data on the company's susceptibilities in preceding crises and the actions taken to stimulate persistence. The third step involves creating strategies based on potential crises the company may face including objectives for each department while taking into account the acceptable level of losses (Hough & Spillan, 2005). The business can utilize management methods like PESTEL analysis, Porter's five forces, the 3C model, and the balanced scorecard to examine the internal and external environments in order to develop a crisis strategy. PESTEL analysis is an analysis of the external factors that might affect the business. Porter's five forces analysis includes an analysis to guide business strategy to enhance its competitive advantage by analyzing suppliers, customers, substitute products, competition, and market entrants. The 3C model assesses the company's competitive advantage based on competitors, customers, and the company itself, while the balanced scorecard evaluates the company's performance in terms of financial, customer, internal business processes, and learning and development (Gyorfy et al., 2011). The fourth step involves implementing the plan, which should be flexible to allow for unexpected events. Documentation of any deviations from the strategy is important for assessment and evaluation, which can be used to improve future crisis plans. The final step is evaluating and updating the plan based on the consequences of the damage valuation and any changes in the external environment.

Crisis Management Challenges

Additionally, organizations may face a range of challenges when managing a crisis, including political, organizational, communication, and business problems. These challenges can significantly impact a crisis and cause damage. For example, Spillan (2017) identified a political challenge of a gap in understanding between employees and how a crisis can affect the company's operations, as well as a waste of time and resources on crisis management preparation. Organizational challenges may include the speed of the company's response to a crisis, which is related to the flexibility of the company's culture and the identification of potential vulnerabilities. Effective communication is crucial to the success or failure of a company during a crisis. The crisis management team should use a communication strategy to build a strong connection with stakeholders before a crisis occurs, and provide timely and accurate information to maintain their loyalty. Business challenges may include management and operational difficulties during a crisis. The business must stick to its plan in order to satisfy client demands, seize opportunities, and choose the best available human and financial resources to ensure survival. Recognizing these difficulties and creating a crisis management strategy that considers them can assist guarantee a positive result (Spillan, 2007).

Business Strategies

A business strategy is a set of procedures taken to achieve long-term, sustainable competitive advantage and market positioning (Nickols, 2016; Patel & Cespedes, 2016). This involves the efficient use of core competencies and consideration of internal and external factors, as well as aligning business goals and commitments with competitors (Patel & Cespedes, 2016; Braun, Latham & Cannatelli, 2019). To maintain its advantage, a business can identify and deliver a unique value proposition to customers. A well-developed strategy includes objectives, scope, and advantages (Patel & Cespedes, 2016). According to Porter (cited in Karami, Sahebalzamani & Sarabi, 2015), there are three types of strategies for achieving competitive advantage: innovation, cost reduction, and quality enhancement.

There are three main types of business strategies: low-cost, differentiation, and focus (Patel & Cespedes, 2016; Gupta, 2016). A low-cost strategy aims to offer low prices while maintaining a high-value proposition, a differentiation strategy involves innovation and the delivery of unique products, and a focus strategy combines both low-cost and differentiation strategies by targeting a specific market segment or product line (Gupta, 2016). To create and implement a business strategy, a company must first conduct strategic planning. This process involves analyzing the company and its environment and includes tools such as SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, and competitive analysis (Abdul Rahman, 2019; Bryson, 2015; Fuertes et al., 2020; Nickols, 2016). The strategic planning process also includes environmental scanning, which involves collecting data to identify and prioritize strategic issues, and strategic management, which includes formulating new or amended strategies, implementing the planned strategy, and evaluating performance (Bryson, 2015; Fuertes et al., 2020; Koushafard, 2013).

The strategic management process is a crucial step in the successful implementation of a company's business strategy. According to Bryson (2015), Fuertes et al. (2020), and Koushafard (2013), the process involves three main elements which are strategy formation, strategy implementation, and strategy performance evaluation. In strategy formation, new or revised strategies are created based on the data collected and the prioritized strategic issues. Strategy implementation involves implementing the planned strategy through performance measurement and budgeting (Bryson, 2015). Finally, strategy performance evaluation involves assessing the effectiveness of the strategy to ensure that it is meeting the company's goals.

Human Resource Practices

To further enhance the effectiveness of human resources practices, the company needs to implement a performance management system. With the help of this system, employees will have their expectations for their work clearly defined, receive continuing support and feedback, and have their performance periodically assessed (Bagheri, 2016; Gupta, 2016). By frequently assessing and evaluating employee performance, the company can detect areas for enhancement and provide support and development opportunities for its employees. This can lead to increased employee satisfaction and retention, as well as improved organizational performance (Gupta, 2016). In addition, implementing a diverse and inclusive workforce can also have positive impacts on the organization. A diverse staff delivers a variety of viewpoints and experiences, which can boost innovation and creativity within the business (Gupta, 2016). Inclusivity, on the other hand, refers to creating a work environment where all employees feel valued and included, regardless of their differences (Gupta, 2016). By creating a diverse and inclusive workforce, the company can improve its reputation, attract top talent, and better serve its customers (Gupta, 2016).

The human resources practices that a company chooses should be based on its business strategy. For example, if the company is pursuing a differentiation strategy, training and development are important to strengthen employee skills and improve organizational

performance. In contrast, a low-cost strategy may focus on reducing costs (Karami et al., 2015).

In their study, Karami et al. (2015) found that the Iranian banking industry, business strategy, human resource management procedures, and organizational performance are all positively correlated. With the use of strategic human resources management, companies tend to gain a competitive edge (Madera et al., 2017). Strategic human resource planning promotes the company's overall growth, highlights the importance of human resources, and helps to enhance people's abilities (Bagheri, 2016). A corporation must continually assess its plans, especially in a dynamic environment, as part of the third phase in the strategic management process, in order to sustain a competitive advantage with an efficient strategic human resource strategy.

Human Resources in Crisis Management

Many authors believed that Human Resources Management is not only an important unit but it also gains even more significance in times of crisis since it makes up an important dimension of crisis management. Those authors believed that human resources are seen as the company's most valuable asset and should be prioritized in terms of operations, infrastructure, assets, and public relations (Athamneh, 2018; Liou & Lin, 2008; Vardarlier, 2016). Thus, handling the effects of crises on human capital is a significant aspect of crisis management which makes the Human Resources (HR) department a crucial player in crisis management planning and a strategic partner. Organizations need to recognize the value of their human resources and include them in crisis management planning in order to effectively navigate and recover from crises.

Individual and collective learning may be challenging to attain when the HR department does not have a strategic role to play in the business (Kraiger et al., 2004). This is because professionals' understanding of learning and performance may not be capitalized on. In order to establish core competencies that improve a company's competitive advantage, strategic human resource management focuses on integrating HR practices with organizational goals and values (Garavan, 1991, 2007). Two specific contributions to crisis management can be made by strategic human resource management. It first gives organizations the operational tools they need to handle emergencies. Second, it helps businesses comprehend the fundamental goal of crisis management, which is to gain knowledge by "learning together from an event to prevent, lessen the severity of, or improve on responses to future crises" (Hillyard, 2000, p. 9). A crucial set of interventions that support both group and individual learning is strategic human resource management. It aids in the introduction of routines and actions that are likely to enhance crisis responses.

The HR department provides support and training to employees, including risk assessment, business continuity planning, crisis recovery, influence investigation, simulation exercises, and survival tactics (Athamneh, 2018).

During a crisis, the HR department is responsible for redesigning the organization's structure and providing training to employees. Modern HR practices such as part-time work, wage adjustments, and canceled bonuses can be implemented instead of layoffs to lessen the effect of a crisis (Vardarlier, 2016). Other practices are for example those implemented by some Chinese firms during the global economic crisis, such as downsizing, early retirement plans, and more strictly evaluated employee compensation and incentives (Rowley & Bae, 2004). Other actions taken during the recession include freezing or reducing pay and benefits, implementing performance-based pay, and prioritizing employee development (Lai et al., 2016). Many factors impact the HR practices used during a crisis. Research has shown that the size of a business affects the HR practices used during a crisis, with small firms being more flexible and quick to reduce pay, while large firms tend to lay off employees and cut costs (Lai et al., 2016). Also, in certain industries, like maritime, HR practices may not be as heavily impacted by

external factors due to the importance of retaining employees with technological expertise (Asyali et al., 2015).

Also, after a crisis, the HR department helps the company transition to growth and expansion strategies, including developing a recovery plan, redesigning the organizational structure, and increasing recruitment (Thumiki et al., 2019).

It is worth noting that HR practices have a great impact on employee engagement which is a state of mind that is positively fulfilling and involves vigor, dedication, and absorption at work (Giurge and Bohns, 2002). Employees who are emotionally connected to their employers are more involved and active at work (Harter et al., 2002). Arnetz and Blomkvist (2007) claimed that good companies sustain the psychological and physical welfare of their workers to foster successful performance during times of crisis. Thus, the examination of employee engagement during crisis outlines the role of human resource management in enhancing a positive working mindset centered around high energy, resilience, and a strong desire to work hard, inducing dedication by fostering enthusiasm and pride and absorption by boosting wellbeing while at work (Leiter & Maslach, 2003). Wei Zheng (2020) discovered that including employees in decision-making increased their engagement because they felt needed, trusted, and treated as insiders in the company.

Further, Jeffrey Hill et al. (2004) discovered that individuals with workplace flexibility typically work longer hours before reporting work-life conflict and that perceived schedule flexibility and work-from-home are generally connected to reduced work-life conflict. Flexibility in the workplace is advantageous to both employees and organizations, and it is a smart HR strategy in times of crisis (Jeffrey Hill et al., 2004).

Finally, the human resources division's value as a strategic partner was highlighted by Thumiki et al. (2019). The HR department increased training sessions to help employees cope with difficult circumstances and used job enlargements to rethink the employees' unpaid job descriptions in their research. Asyali et al. (2015) found that three out of sixteen companies adjusted the number of training sessions; two companies increased training to develop specific skills and product knowledge, while the third company decreased training to cut expenses. Four out of sixteen human resources experts also concentrated on dispersing jobs among employees in order to efficiently and successfully manage the business; one interviewee increased the amount of work for full-timers and decreased it for part-timers.

The main findings of previous research related to the strategies implemented by businesses during a crisis are listed in Table 1.

Author	Main Findings
Athamneh (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support and training to employees • risk and threat assessment • business continuity planning • crisis recovery • business influence investigation • simulation exercises • survival tactics
Lai et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • freezing or reducing pay and benefits • implementing performance-based pay

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prioritizing employee development
Rowley & Bae (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • downsizing • early retirement plans • more strictly evaluated employee compensation and incentives
Thumiki et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • businesses undertook internal restructuring • businesses tend to avoid cutting hours worked • providing unpaid time off, or • otherwise lowering salaries during times of financial difficulty.
Vardarlier (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • part-time work • wage adjustments • canceled bonuses <p>can be implemented instead of layoffs</p>

Table 1: Previous Research Findings

Methodology

An in-depth investigation of the changes in the strategic orientation of businesses was conducted to address the research questions. The philosophy of this research is pragmatism which emphasizes the use of observable data and subjective meanings to interpret it (Saunders et al., 2009). The study is a qualitative and exploratory study as there are limited studies on this topic specifically in Lebanon.

In-depth, phone, and semi-structured interviews were done with human resource directors or owners of Lebanese businesses. The interview questions covered the impact of the crisis on the companies, the change in strategic orientation, the existence and role of a crisis management team, and the human resource practices and challenges faced during the crisis. While phone interviews have the advantage of speed and flexibility, they do not allow for the observation of nonverbal communication. However, the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews permitted the exploration of new ideas and experiences in the context of this qualitative and exploratory study.

The convenience non-probability sampling method was employed based on the referrals of the researchers from their social networks. Table 2 shows the location and the industry where the seventeen interviewees work.

Interviewee	Location	Industry
1	Country area	Food and Beverage
2	Chekka	Food manufacturing and wholesale
3	Beirut	Food processing and wholesale
4	Beirut	Food manufacturing and wholesale
5	Beirut	Food manufacturing, wholesale, and retail
6	Country area	Manufacturing, wholesale, retail, and construction

7	Zouk	Manufacturing and wholesale
8	Beirut	Quality control and training
9	Beirut	Digital Marketing
10	Country area	Management consultancy
11	Zahle	Food manufacturing and wholesale
12	Country area	Water Manufacturing and wholesale
13	Beirut	Manufacturing and wholesale
14	Tripoli	Food manufacturing, wholesale, and retail
15	Country area	Retail
16	Chekka	Cement manufacturing and wholesale
17	Country area	Banking Sector

Table 2: The Geographic Location and Industry of the Sample

Thematic analysis, which is the best technique for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data, is used to examine the observations that were gathered. The chosen approach assisted the researchers in developing themes and codes to group the common topics while identifying the most crucial information. The analysis is done in line with answering the main research questions. The various codes that were chosen were categorized under several themes, each of which stands for a unique fundamental idea. Furthermore, the theme analysis highlighted trends in some of the data about the opinions and experiences of the respondents, aiding the researchers in understanding how they think and behave (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The examination of transcripts was facilitated by manual coding because there was a dearth of electronic approaches due to the small amount of textual data. Dey asserts that categorizing and labeling data is a crucial step in the analytical process (as cited in Basit, 2003). Sub-codes that described all the gathered data were constructed from the original codes. The researchers were able to determine the similarities and differences between these codes and sub-codes by looking at them. They might also exchange categories and orders, compare data, and compare data sets (Seidel and Kelle, as cited in Basit, 2003). The method that was found to be the most adaptable for evaluating a few interviews was manual coding.

Like any other study, this research had some limitations. The interviews were conducted in March 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic which caused the inability to conduct face-to-face interviews because of the global lockdown. Thus, the researchers were not able to observe nonverbal communication. Phone interviews allowed for flexibility in conducting interviews outside the workplace and eliminated travel time. As a result, two or three interviews per day were conducted, resulting in the anticipated sample size. Another limitation is that some respondents had confusion during the data-gathering procedure and chose to concentrate on the global epidemic that developed during the October 17th revolution in Lebanon rather than merely the tactics used at the time. Since everyone has a different understanding of what is meant by the term "strategy," some answers also did not completely address specific issues, even though they were still relevant to the idea. Because interviewees might not have been completely truthful and transparent, the researchers were unable to guarantee the accuracy of the responses.

Data Findings and Analysis

In this section, the findings from the interviews with several Lebanese businesses are demonstrated and various themes and subthemes observed through the thematic analysis were classified. The findings were then interpreted in accordance with the previous research results.

The first theme of the analysis focuses on how the economic crisis has impacted Lebanese enterprises. According to the majority of interviewees, the situation had already had a detrimental influence on their operations prior to the events of October 17th. Some businesses took precautionary measures to prevent any significant harm to the business; interviewees 5, 7, and 15 stopped all forms of recruitment, interviewee 4 stopped only external hiring, and interviewee 15 also undertook internal restructuring which is based on the advice of Thumiki et al. (2019).

Yet after the incident on October 17, the economy in the country deteriorated, and the respondents' businesses were negatively impacted by a number of these effects. The deepening currency crisis forced Lebanese banks to impose several restrictions on all accounts, including caps on cash withdrawals and a halt to transfers outside of Lebanon, which affected businesses' liquidity and account movements. According to interviewee 17, those restrictions had a negative effect on the bank's reputation. According to respondent A, the cost of living increased and the fluctuating currency exchange rate generally influenced all employees. Some used to receive their salaries in dollars, but owing to a shortage of liquidity, businesses transferred the salaries to Lebanese pounds, as stated by interviewee 6. Also, due to the fluctuation in the dollar exchange rate, two organizations that bill in dollars encountered problems with clients' payment methods, as did eleven out of the sixteen interviewees. Roadblocks had a significant impact on the event, leading to a rise in employee absenteeism and a breakdown in the flow of goods between suppliers and businesses delivering items to clients.

Furthermore, the majority of businesses saw a decline in sales. For instance, interviewee 8 reported an 82% drop in sales during October. Two of the interviewees also noticed variations in their sales depending on the products; some products saw an increase in sales, while others saw a decrease. This variation was due to the differences in the target markets and customers' needs. Also, interviewee 3 observed a rise in their sales since the crisis brought high-quality local products to the Lebanese market especially since the local market was growing more conscious of home manufacturers. To overcome a crisis, 47% of the companies either altered the markets where their plans were implemented, increased their concentration on a few markets, or altogether changed their strategies, according to 29.4% of the companies.

The October 17th incident has had a mixed impact on employee engagement across various businesses. Employees were motivated and productive at work, according to interviewees 1, 3, and 12; however, interviewers 2, 14, and 16 claimed that employees were afraid of the unknown, which reduced their productivity. Those findings show the importance of employee engagement which is in line with the findings of Giurge and Bohns (2002) who mentioned that HR practices have a great influence on employee engagement, the findings of Arnetz and Blomkvist (2007) who found that companies should sustain the psychological and physical welfare of their employees to foster successful performance during times of crisis, and the findings of Leiter & Maslach (2003) who believed that the employee engagement is an important matter during a crisis in enhancing a positive working mindset centered around high energy, resilience, and a strong desire to work hard, inducing dedication by fostering enthusiasm and pride and absorption by boosting wellbeing while at work.

A crisis management plan is essential for a business to withstand any form of crisis, as stated in the academic literature (Athamneh, 2018; Koushafard, 2013; Kowalski, 2018), and it will significantly lessen the negative effects (Hough & Spillan, 2005; Valackiene,

2010). Twelve out of the seventeen organizations in this study had created a crisis management strategy, but the majority of them dealt with flooding, robberies, terrorist attacks, or IT conflicts. Interviewees 4 and 6 didn't have a definite plan for the economic crisis, but they had taken into account the situation in Lebanon and operated strategically to decrease the adverse effects that were going to be faced. Interviewee 1 was the only company that established a crisis management plan in advance. Just nine of the twelve interviewees who had created a crisis management strategy included the HR division. This emphasizes the findings of Athamneh (2018) and Liou & Lin (2008) who found that the human resources division plays a significant position in planning and maintaining its communication with all employees while developing the crisis management strategy and is seen as a strategic partner.

“People are the biggest asset in our company, thus, the human resources department is a key player in the business. As a company, we must make our people understand our goals and trust them (Interviewee 1, phone conversation, April 2020)”.

“The human resources department is considered one of our strategic partners (Interviewee 4, phone conversation, April 2020).”

Five interviewees gave various explanations for why they had not created a crisis management plan in advance, including that they had not anticipated the crisis, that a plan would be too expensive, or that the business could sustain instability. These results are in agreement with Spillan (2000), Spillan (2017), and Lockwood writers (2005).

After the incident on October 17, businesses had to take action to lessen the detrimental effects, starting with drastically cutting the budgets for every department. To accomplish this, some businesses modified their production schedules, others prioritized their purchases, some stopped participating in social activities, and some switched from holding in-person meetings to online video conferences. According to the findings, two businesses reduced their production or inventory levels to avoid overstocking; nevertheless, other businesses boosted their supply levels to improve sales volume and lower fixed costs or to avoid paying suppliers more in the future because of the currency crisis. This is stressed in the research of Kumpikaite et al. (2011) who investigated how corporations adapt to a short-term cost-cutting strategy during times of crisis. On one hand, only a few numbers of the interviewees considered suspending some of their non-moving products and delaying any new plans in the current market. However, with the various portfolios that the businesses have, some actions were executed according to the company's strategy. Yet, a few of the interviewees worked on completing ongoing projects at low cost or on product diversification that satisfies the needs of the new consumers. Many businesses thought about concentrating on market diversification due to political and economic unrest. For instance, interviewee 8 constructed new offices in other nations, interviewees 8 and 14 built new clientele, and interviewees 12 and 13 focused their products on particular industries. Some of the companies that were interviewed placed a strong emphasis on exporting their own goods to boost their global sales, which led to an increase in new money that gave them more liquidity, including interviewees 3, 5, 6, 7, and 14. Two businesses used a different strategy to address the currency crisis and the supply chain disruption, which is to focus on the purchasing department's hunt for new suppliers on a local or international level.

Because interviewee 17 is a bank, unlike many other companies, its reputation and image were impacted. To lessen the negative effects, the company concentrated on connecting with consumers extensively to improve the firm's image.

More than 70% of those who participated in the interviews stated that they must live day by day to survive in a volatile and unpredictable market. Only one company is looking for a steady market, according to three out of the seventeen interviewees who said they will maintain expanding in other markets.

“The company’s aim at the moment is to maintain our leading position in the market (Interviewee 14, phone conversation, April 2020).”

The use of HR practices during a crisis should be highlighted; all but one of the organizations that participated in the interview changed or implemented new practices. As was previously noted, interviewee 1 created a crisis management strategy. Because this plan is already systematized and employs the most effective practices, no revisions were required. In times of crisis, a few small changes were made in regard to interviewees 4 and 6.

The four key changes were mandatory annual leaves, working from home, freezing recruitment, and reducing working hours, which resulted in lower salaries. The findings regarding the recruitment freeze are consistent with Lai et al. (2016), and the findings regarding the reduction of the basic hours are consistent with those of Vardarlier (2016) and the aforementioned researchers. The findings contradict a study by Thumiki et al. (2019), which claimed that businesses tend to avoid cutting hours worked, providing unpaid time off, or otherwise lowering salaries during times of financial difficulty.

Some other procedures were used with the intention of cutting costs. 23.53% of the sample firms stopped any kind of bonuses and promotions in accordance with Vardarlier (2016) and Asyali et al. (2015), 5.88% reduced 25% of managerial positions’ salaries, 11.76% stopped the overtime schedules, as mentioned by Lai et al. (2016) where the overtime was reduced, and lastly, 17.65% finalized some employment contracts, as seen in Lai et al. (2016) and Rowley and Bae (2004).

According to Matta (2018), one of the difficulties that Lebanese businesses are facing as a result of Lebanon’s current economic condition is surviving in an unstable and tumultuous environment, which lowers productivity and demotivates workers.

“Lebanon has become an island, and there is no support as a country Interviewee 1, phone conversation, April 2020).”

“The government did not stand up to the crisis; when a salary deduction was applied to employees’ salaries, the income tax and the social security percentages were still based on the old salaries. Thus, the company was paying based on the original salary and staff members faced two reductions; the salary deduction and the additional taxes (Interviewee 8, phone conversation, April 2020).”

The ability of firms to continue operating in such conditions while managing employee retention and supporting the workforce in terms of social responsibility and skills is another significant concern.

This research emphasizes the Lebanese economic condition, its effects on different businesses, and the responses made to this circumstance, to put it briefly. The majority of firms saw unfavorable effects from the dollar exchange rate, which reduced liquidity, disrupted the supply chain, and reduced sales. Following every previous result, there was either a shift in tactics or a focus designed to mitigate the harm done.

Also, Lebanon’s crisis was not predicted and most of the organizations were not prepared to confront it. They had a created crisis management plan with the cooperation of the HR department about other disasters, such as wars, earthquakes, or robberies.

The majority of those interviewed mentioned that their departments’ budgets had been reduced overall. Some participants concentrated on diversifying their markets, while others engaged in diversifying or discontinuing their products depending on the needs of their customers and the resources available to their businesses.

Regarding the adjustments made to human resources during times of crisis, many actions were used, including stopping the hiring process and redistributing the tasks of existing employees, working remotely to prevent operations from being disrupted, and finally

cutting back on working hours and providing annual leaves to cut down on labor costs. A small number of businesses also implemented additional procedures, such as downsizing, suspending bonuses and promotions, lowering the pay for managerial positions, ending overtime, and altering the number of training hours, either increasing or decreasing them.

For the minority of businesses that anticipated the crisis, they either made some minimal adjustments, such as suspending hiring or redistributing work among staff, or they made no adjustments at all.

Due to the turbulent and uncertain business environment they currently operate in, the majority of interviewees are primarily concerned with getting by day to day. Most importantly, they are working to maintain the mental health of their workforce while continuing to operate in such conditions in order to keep the company and its workforce.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the HR practices that have been implemented by businesses in Lebanon in response to the economic crisis following the October 17th event. The main objective of this research is to understand the impact of the crisis on these businesses and their level of preparedness for such a crisis. It has been found that the economic crisis has had a significant effect on businesses in Lebanon over the past two years, leading to the implementation of various practices such as freezing recruitment or restructuring internally. The currency crisis and the October 17th revolution have further exacerbated these issues, causing disruptions to the supply chain, problems with the banking sector, and reductions in sales for many businesses. In order to cope with these challenges, some firms have had to shift their strategies from growth to survival, while others have focused on specific markets.

The major findings showed that the economic crisis in terms of exchange rate fluctuations affected the liquidity of the businesses and their payment terms with suppliers, and in terms of closure of roads affected their supply chain. The sales of those businesses were affected and some products were affected more than other products. The economic crisis led to changes in the businesses' strategies and switched their focus.

Thus, the impact of the economic crisis on Lebanese businesses was significant and required immediate action. Many companies were forced to implement changes to their budgets, purchasing practices, and production schedules to reduce costs and increase sales. Many businesses lowered their budgets by discontinuing social activities, production schedules, and traveling, switching to virtual conferences, and prioritizing the products from suppliers. Some had to find new local and global suppliers. Also, to decrease the impact of the crisis, many businesses diversified their markets by increasing exports and targeting new customer bases to bring in revenues in fresh dollars. Other companies conducted product diversification, product discontinuation, or postponement of plans. Some companies decrease their supplies in an attempt not to overstock or increased their supplies to avoid the increase in prices.

Overall, it was clear that the human resource department played a key role in implementing these changes and helping businesses navigate the crisis. The involvement of the HR department in crisis management planning and strategy development was crucial in helping firms respond effectively to the challenges they faced.

All of the companies have a human resources department that handles all HR functions, with the exception of one firm where these tasks are delegated to other departments. During times of crisis, many companies implemented similar changes to their HR practices, which were categorized by researchers into three categories: rescheduling and readjustment, financial changes, and training. Rescheduling and readjustment included stopping overtime, stopping recruitment, redistribution of employees' tasks, reduction of

working hours, transitioning to remote work, giving forced annual leaves, and downsizing. Thus, some firms stopped overtime and redistributed employees' tasks, while a few let go of some employees. In terms of financial changes, one company implemented salary cuts for managerial roles, and a few stopped offering bonuses and promotions to cut costs. As for training, some companies sought to share knowledge during the crisis by providing additional training to employees, while others focused on reducing expenses and minimizing training sessions.

Due to the unpredictability of the nation, the most frequently suggested strategy is to live day to day while attempting to expand into other markets. In order to maintain the continuity of their businesses and keep all of their employees, businesses place a high priority on the mental health of their workers so that they are motivated and productive.

Theoretical Contribution

The study significantly increased understanding by presenting some of the findings of numerous researchers that were examined in the academic literature. With regard to crisis management planning, the shift from long-term to short-term strategies discussed by Kumpikaite et al. (2011), and the various practices used in times of crisis, specifically highlighted the significance of the human resource department and its status as a strategic partner as found by Liou & Lin (2008) and Thumiki et al. (2019). For many reasons, Lebanese businesses did not invest in crisis management planning despite the fact that some indicators of the crisis were visible beforehand (Spillan, 2000; Spillan 2017; Lockwood, 2005). The study demonstrates that the companies with a crisis management plan were not as negatively impacted by the current crisis as the others, supporting the notion put forth by Hough and Spillan (2005) and Valackiene (2010) that having a crisis management plan is crucial to surviving in times of crisis (Athamneh, 2018; Koushafard, 2013; Kowalski, 2018).

This research demonstrates the use of human resources during the Lebanese crisis, which is consistent with many academics' observations. The researchers categorized the activities into three categories. The first category is related to researchers from the literature review and involves rescheduling and cost-saving modifications (Lai et al., 2016; Vardarlier, 2016; Rowley and Bae, 2004). The second category as mentioned by Asyali et al. (2016), Vardarlier (2016), and Lai et al. (2016) is related to financial value decreases (2015). The third category as noted by Asyali et al. (2015) is reducing the number of training sessions, and this was found in this study as well. However, Thumiki et al. (2019) discovered in their research that firms prefer to avoid modifying the basic income in times of crisis, but instead shift some jobs and enhance training sessions, which was only observed in a small number of firms in this study. Further, according to Matta (2018), who was speaking about the many issues SMEs face, uncertainty and conducting business in a tumultuous climate were the prevalent challenges encountered in this study.

The study finds that while most businesses in Lebanon do not invest in a crisis management plan, there are some issues that they are currently confronting. The business was experiencing a variety of crisis-related effects, and different modifications to human resource policies were made.

Practical Significance

The researchers looked at the significant adjustments made in Lebanese enterprises throughout the study, particularly in relation to human resources. Following the incident on October 17, businesses are aware of the crisis and are convinced of the value of crisis management planning. Lebanese enterprises are convinced that it is crucial to prepare for various sorts of crises in order to survive and minimize harm. The findings of this study

also demonstrate the significance of people as a company's most valuable resource and the basis for business continuity. This study serves as a guide for all HR professionals, present and future business leaders and entrepreneurs on how to prioritize employees and plan for crises in the workplace.

Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Businesses in Lebanon should be aware that doing business in a volatile and dynamic environment carries certain risks, and that they must constantly be prepared to deal with crises of any kind, especially given that the current economic crisis in Lebanon was predicted. A corporation must create a crisis management plan to be prepared for a crisis. This plan must take into account numerous analytical methods to examine the environment, and the company's features, and to choose the best techniques to use both during and after the crisis. The strategy will lessen the negative effects the business will experience and assist it in emerging from the crisis more quickly. The human resource is the most valuable asset and must be treated as such, hence it is essential to incorporate the human resource manager when creating a crisis management strategy in order to survive any crisis while safeguarding the staff. Lebanese businesses must also develop a growth strategy to broaden their markets or concentrate on exporting so that they are not restricted to the domestic market.

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