

# Resilient leadership in the food service sector in Lebanon

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**Abstract.** For the past two years, the Lebanese socio-economic crisis has had disastrous effects on the hospitality industry especially the food Service sector. During high adversity and incredibly challenging times, leaders must develop and nurture resilience in the organizations. Resilience may be the attribute that is most needed today by Lebanese leaders since they ought to be more responsive and more attuned to the unprecedented difficult conditions in the country. Based on the Ducheck (2020) model of organizational resilience, and the crisis management approach, this qualitative research study focuses on gaining insight and understanding about the managers/owners' perceptions of events and circumstances affecting their industry, and how they have adjusted to the challenges raised simultaneously by the worst economic crisis in the country and by the spread of Covid-19 around the world. The authors of the study utilized semi-structured interviews to collect and analyze the study data. The findings reveal that pursuing resilience is a process based on the interactions between organizational resilience capabilities and crisis management tasks, and it is mainly characterized by three phases: anticipation of potential threats, coping with disruption and adapting to the new reality.

## 1 Introduction

The current crisis in Lebanon has had no precedent since 1850 (World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor, spring 2021 edition). The country is enduring a severe and prolonged economic depression. In 2020, Lebanon Growth Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 20.3%, inflation reached a triple digit (World Bank Group, April 2021) while the exchange dollar kept losing its value to the point that the Lebanese pound has lost around 94% of its value against the American dollar over a short period of 2 years. Poverty is rising sharply in the country. As a result, the food service sector has suffered the immediate repercussions of this socio-economic crisis. This sector is experiencing a period of severe recession during

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which the number of consumers and clients has sharply declined in a country renowned for its sense of gastronomy, hospitality, and generosity.

This extreme socio-economic crisis will have serious implications for organization's design [1] and for its practice. In fact, these moments of uncertainty underscore the importance of organizational resilience, and leaders should be able to build this resilience [2]. Furthermore, many researchers have considered Leadership as a key element of improving organizational resilience and adaptability [3]. Recently, resilient leadership played an important role in management research [4]. Many studies have addressed this issue in a variety of contexts, such as the hotel industry [5], higher education [6, 7], and the hospitality industry [8]. Furthermore, the covid-19 pandemic has considerably increased the number of resilience research [2].

Many factors motivate leaders to become resilient [9]. However, past studies have focused on the relationship between different leadership styles and the employee's resilience rather than on the mechanisms for stimulating organizational resilience through a resilient Leadership approach [5, 9]. Furthermore, a number of studies have focused on a single factor, such as individual, situational, or behavioral factors, that might trigger a leader's resilience [10]. However, the role of leaders in building organizational resilience has not been sufficiently addressed in previous studies [5].

Therefore, the authors of this study believe that the food service sector in Lebanon can provide useful insights of how leaders may develop organizational resilience in the presence of such severe adversities. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the resilience of Leaders to the financial and economic crisis and to the spread of Covid-19. This research addresses the following objectives:

- Examine "Resilient leadership" in selected restaurants in Lebanon while facing one of the most severe global crises episodes.
- Determine which capabilities could help leaders to foster organizational resilience in this uncertain environment.
- Identify the practices and processes that enable leaders to deal with crises more effectively.

This paper is structured as follows: First, we cover the theoretical framework related to the research by merging findings about different theoretical constructs (e.g., organizational resilience, resilient leadership, crisis management). Second, we present the research methodology. And finally, we present and discuss the findings and the implications of the study.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Concept of Resilience**

The concept of resilience has been first applied to individuals than it has been expanded to organizations. According to Linnenluecke [11], the term 'resilience' has been used at the organizational level to describe the inherent characteristics of those organizations that are able to respond quicker, recover faster, or develop more unusual ways of doing business under duress than others [12]. At the employee level, the term has been used to refer to the ability of organizational members to bounce back, and even succeed, in the face of problems and adversity [13, 14].

Organizational resilience, considered to be one of the most important capabilities of a business, incorporates organizational abilities as well as its physical properties [15]. It can be defined as an organization's ability to foresee change and respond to change not only to survive but to thrive [16]. There are different approaches to operationalize organizational

resilience: the functional perspective, the outcome perspective, the capability perspective, and the process perspective. The first two approaches represent a static perspective of resilience while the latter consider organizational resilience as a dynamic process [3]. The outcome perspective is focused mainly on resilience as an economic outcome or financial performance [17]. According to this view, resilience represents a source of sustainable competitive advantage and could explain why some firms are more successful than others [18]. In line with this perspective, Barasa et al. [19] have done a systematic review of the literature on organizational resilience. They have found that the most important attributes that make organizations resilient are preparedness for a future crisis, use of collateral pathways, governance practices that promote flexibility, and the development of social networks and collaborations. Furthermore, complex leadership practices that forge connections and network among organization actors, rather than being controlling and directive, are an important factor that influences organizational resilience.

The functional-based approach views organizational resilience as a function of an organization's awareness of the overall situation, the management of critical weakness, and the ability to adapt in a dynamic, complex and interdependent environment [20]. Furthermore, the capability perspective encompasses a more holistic view that considers an organization's capacity for resilience. Duchek's work [18] is fully in line with this perspective. He defines organizational resilience as the firm's ability to anticipate adverse situations, deal with sudden events, and, in some cases, turn these threats into opportunities, a matter that fosters organizational change [21].

Finally, according to the process perspective, Williams et al. [22] defined resilience as the process by which an actor (individual, organization, or community) builds and uses its resources to interact with the environment in a way that positively adjusts and maintains functioning prior to, during, and following adversity. Resilience implies a constant process of trimming and perfecting by which individuals and organizations aim to perfect themselves knowing that at some points they will fail [23]. This view emphasizes the dynamic nature of resilience, as a dynamic and progressive process launched by organizations and including among others improvised practices [24, 25].

This research is mainly focused on the capability approach of organizational resilience since it emphasizes the ability of organizations to change into a crisis mode while the process approach outlines organizational resilience as the process of recovering from a crisis [3]. In other words, the capability perspective refers to the ability of an organization to transform in order to adapt to significant adversity.

## **2.2. Resilient Leadership**

Resilient Leadership has emerged as an approach that enables organizations to survive, achieve their missions, and stated goals [26]. According to Baah [27] "resilient leadership is one that is able to sustain an organizations or a group's competitive advantage over time through its ability to perform two tasks simultaneously: deliver excellent performance against current goals, and effectively innovate and adapt to rapid, turbulent changes in markets and technologies". Thus, resilient leadership has two key characteristics: the capacity to resist adversity and the capacity to change in order to meet the new demands of its environment.

In a crisis context, resilient leadership has an important role to play to enable the organization to resist and to address the extreme circumstances that are threatening its existence and its survival. Moreover, they have to influence their subordinate's behaviors, motivate them to achieve certain goals, and empower them to work under conditions of high adversity and uncertainty [5]. Hence, they need to understand how to handle harsh conditions and how to overcome failures to help the organization to recover and move toward a better

future. Thus, resilience of leaders can be considered as a key characteristic of leadership during disruption times [28].

Furthermore, according to Giustiniano et al. [9], the presence of resilient individuals within the company doesn't guarantee the diffusion of organizational resilience since the latter is based simultaneously on individuals and groups. However, resilient leaders contribute to generate collective resilience by promoting a culture of collaboration and mutual support within their teams. Therefore, they can turn the adverse consequences of a crisis into opportunities for learning and for performance improvement.

### **2.3. Leadership and Crisis Management**

Crisis management consists of the activities and processes that aim to minimize the impact of a crisis [29]. It is about leading, guiding, and ensuring the cooperation between all the parties concerned in order to successfully manage threats and difficulties. Therefore, effective crisis management can play a pivotal role in reducing the damage caused by a crisis.

Boin et al. [29] argue that crisis management encompasses six main tasks: sensemaking, making critical decisions, orchestrating vertical and horizontal coordination, meaning-making, rendering accountability, and facilitating reflection and learning from a crisis. Sensemaking involves processing and sharing information to understand issues that are related to unexpected and disruptive events. It contributes to developing a collective understanding of the multiple facets of a risky and dangerous new situation. The sensemaking carried out by leaders builds and conveys a shared vision among the organization's members and helps them to change their own practices accordingly. It creates opportunities for organizational transformation and enhances organizational resilience [30].

In addition, leaders have to make critical decision, at operational or strategic level, and to facilitate coordination among all stakeholders [30]. According to Gil Fombella et al. [31], effective decisions must be made in times of crisis in order to allow the implementation of actions on both the individual and collective level. During these critical situations, there is no time for advance planning, and the necessary decisions must be taken quickly and effectively.

Moreover, leaders must act as orchestrators who support cooperation across vertical and horizontal borders. To achieve this, leaders have to facilitate and mentor effective cooperation between individuals, the firm, and other firms [29]. This will lead to a state of coordinated behavior which could help to overcome the crisis [29].

Furthermore, the process of meaning-making aims to interpret the situation, brings hope, and gives confidence to the various parties. Leaders tend to impose their own interpretations and their view of the unfolding events. Consequently, they tend to influence the beliefs of the organizational members about the significance of disruptive events and their consequences [30].

Rendering accountability is to have open and honest discussions with all stakeholders in order to explain what happened, and why it happened the way it did. Leaders have to be clear and transparent and to justify not only on a legal basis. Finally, reflection and learning, during and after a crisis, are crucial tasks since they could help "to correct dysfunctional processes and apply freshly discovered solutions "[29].

### **2.4. Research model**

Grounded in a dynamic perspective of organizational resilience, the present study aims to investigate the processes and practices that leaders activate to enhance organization's ability to recognize and adapt to unexpected and acute crises. The study will adopt Duchek's

approach [18] that distinguishes between three successive and interactive phases during the resilience process: anticipation, coping, and adaptation.

The anticipation capabilities represent the incremental capacities of leaders to anticipate and adjust to the environment. They build the foundation for an effective response to the crisis that involves observing the development of internal and external environments, identifying potential threats, and preparing to face adversity [18]. The coping capabilities are developed by leaders while trying to recover from crisis and bounce back to a state of normality [29]. They involve the main actions and behaviors adopted by leaders to manage a crisis, namely sensemaking, decision making, developing formal and informal coordination mechanisms, and meaning making.

Finally, the adapting capabilities include two major capabilities: developing learning processes and changing management capabilities. The adapting capabilities allow leaders to consider crises as opportunities to learn, consolidate their knowledge base, and realize significant and advanced changes in the organizations [18].

This study will use Ducheck's model [18] and crisis management approach to investigate the behaviors adopted by leaders in their attempt to effectively handle unexpected events to achieve organizational resilience. This will lead to developing a model (Fig. 1) for resilient leadership that is based on the cognitive and behavioral capabilities of leaders.

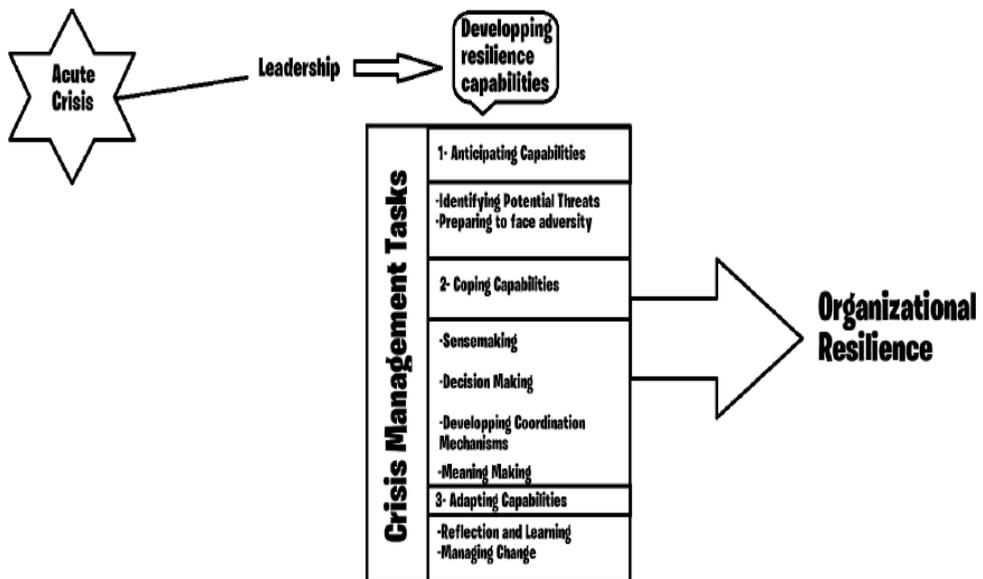


Fig 1. Research model

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1. The context of the study

Since 2020, Lebanon has been facing unprecedented challenges: a severe and prolonged economic and financial crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, and the Port of Beirut explosion. According to the spring 2021 edition of the World Bank Lebanon Economic Monitor (LEM),

the Lebanese economic and financial crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century.

Furthermore, due to social distancing and partial lockdowns during COVID-19, restaurants were forced to close down for dine-in but open for takeout and home delivery during this period. Thus, Lebanese restaurants were under tremendous pressure during the extraordinary circumstances that the country has been experiencing. Considering the importance of this sector in general and its important role in the Lebanese economy, this study aims to examine how resilient leadership can play a role in fostering resilience within the food service sector in Lebanon.

### **3.2. Methodological approach**

The principal research question raised by this study can be presented as follows: How Lebanese leaders build resilience during crisis time? According to Dubé and Paré [32] and Yin [33], how questions were most frequently posed in exploratory case research.

Thus, given the objectives of the study, a qualitative exploratory method is likely to be appropriate to explore successful practices and processes developed by Lebanese leaders to promote resilience in the food service sector. We adopted a positivist approach since we worked within a theoretical perspective [32] and used existing theoretical constructs (e.g., resilient leadership, crisis management) to guide our research.

Finally, we analyzed data generalized from semi-structured interviews by using deductive thematic analysis while comparing findings with the extant literature.

### **3.3. Sample**

The authors of the study conducted nine semi-structured interviews with nine small business owners/managers working in the food service sector in Lebanon. In fact, small enterprises play a crucial role in economic prosperity of the country, but they are usually most susceptible in times of a crisis [34] because of lack of preparedness, short-term and limited cash flows, and inability to mobilize resources strategically [35].

The study participants worked for organizations located in Beirut (capital of Lebanon) and Saida (second largest city in south Lebanon). They were selected using a sampling convenience strategy.

Since the economic crisis has strongly affected food service businesses all across the country, it was safe to presume that all respondents had experienced the financial crisis in one way or another. Eight of the nine owners/managers who took part in the study were males. Their ages ranged from 35 to 59 years old.

All study participants have had considerable experience in the food service sector. Two businesses had fewer than 10 employees and seven had 10–19 employees.

### **3.4. Data collection**

Study data collection was structured through a series of face-to-face semi-structured interviews between June 2021 and July 2021. The interview is a privileged technique of data collection in qualitative studies [36]. The interviews were based on an interview guide which we developed based on concepts from the literature of resilience and leadership with respect to the context and the phenomenon under investigation.

The interviewees were asked about the actions undertaken by them to face the unprecedented financial crisis that has coincided with the outbreak of Covid-19. The questions cover the challenges that they have faced and the changes that they have made to ensure the continuity of their business. Thus, they made their opinions about the actions that

have strengthened their resilience since the start of the crisis in October 2019, and they also talked about their setbacks and their mistakes and the lessons learned from this experience.

During the interviews, the interviewer recorded and took notes while trying to maintain the interviewees' terminology to improve his understanding of their experience [37]; these notes were extremely important during the analysis phase. The duration of the interviews was between 45 minutes and one hour.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

In the analysis of the study participants' responses, the interviews were first transcribed and then analyzed manually and organized into recurring themes using thematic analysis method [38]. Multiple rounds of data collection and analysis have been conducted until the codebook emerges fully from the data.

## **4 Results**

Results are structured and combined based on the phases of resilience in Duchek's model [18]. Thus, the practices and actions developed by owners/managers during the crisis fall into three main capabilities: Anticipating potential threats, coping with disruption, and adaptation to the new reality.

### **4.1. Anticipating potential threats**

The anticipation capabilities of resilient leaders are based on observation of the environment and preparedness to face major challenges [18]. Observation and identification capabilities help leaders to observe and react to changes before their full impact is felt. The study participants were observing the environment, but they were not able to carefully evaluate the importance and the potential effects of different adverse events happening around them.

"We all knew that the economic situation of the country has been deteriorating for many years. However, we were consumed by our work, and we didn't anticipate or maybe we will not have wished to know how hard this situation could be for all of us ».

"We had faith in Lebanon, we went through a lot of crises and overcame them, and we always had the best restaurants in the Arabic region. At first, I saw that it is a crisis like many others who have preceded it but gradually things are becoming clearer, and I realized that this disruption may threaten the existence of my organization ".

Furthermore, resilience to acute challenges is enhanced by preparedness and adequate planning [19]. Preparedness implies that leaders plan all what seems necessary to build trust and sense of purpose among their employees at work [39]. Almost all participants expressed no preparedness for these challenging times though some of them were better set than the others for these unprecedented successive crises. This is expressed by one participant: "In the aftermath of the crisis, we had at our disposal a team of the best technicians and a set of important equipment (AC, refrigerator for food...) since our restaurant is affiliated to a large pastry company. Thus, we used these resources and these multiple services to deal quickly with the crisis".

### **4.2. Coping with disruption**

The coping capabilities consist of dealing with critical events to prevent business collapse and ensure its continuity. Each participant shared varying strategies to adapt their business

activities to the overlapping crises (the pandemic, the economic crisis and the political conflict) affecting the country.

However, the problem for Lebanese restaurant owners/managers lies in facing varying types of risks within a short-time interval. As one study participant stated: “At first, we were so concerned about the impact of the October 2019 revolution on our work. Then the pandemic appeared and motivated us to focus on hygienic practices in preparing foods and establishing the social distancing and the respect of the rules set by the ministry in this area. Finally, the economic collapse put us right in front of impossible missions regarding the procurement of the necessary raw materials to run the business. All is new for us, and we should get used to this new reality”.

The coping capabilities developed by Lebanese leaders are mainly based on the following capabilities: improvising and solving problems creatively, making critical prompt decisions, using relational connections, and meaning- making.

#### *4.2.1. Improvisation and solving problems creatively*

The ability to creatively improvise and to solve problems is an important element of the sensemaking process [40]. According to Boin et al. [29], crisis management scholars put a premium on the ability to improvise since organizations cannot rely on plans and procedures to address a major crisis [41]. Leaders have therefore to look for alternative solutions to face a set of unprecedented challenges and risks.

“I did not want to interrupt my activities, thus, I replaced some of my ingredients that have become so expensive after the crisis by local ingredients, for instance, we replaced the maples syrup by carob molasses which has a good taste, and it is of course cheaper since it is produced locally”.

According to Hao et al. [42], the entrepreneurial orientation of leaders can promote improvisation and facilitate the integration of innovative ideas in the operational processes. Leaders have initiated many creative solutions and have turned crises into new and sustainable solutions in order to survive and thrive.

“After the crisis broke and the sharp rise in the prices of all necessary raw materials for our dishes -most of which were imported-, we struck a deal with a local farmer to meet throughout the year our needs for mushrooms, Rocca tomato and others by producing them locally under the best conditions. This solution prevents us from supply chain disruptions and ensures the sustainability of food production as well and the development of the local agricultural sector”.

“The multiple crises that we have faced during the last year incite us to look for creative and new options and to reinvent the restaurant services. It was so challenging but inevitable. Thus, we developed digital marketing through social media, and we introduced the digital menu. Furthermore, we stopped serving the buffet during Sunday lunch and we got new comfortable benches which allow our customers to work on their pc while taking their breakfast”.

#### *4.2.2. Making critical decisions*

Boin et al. [29] argues that making good decisions- at the strategic or the operational level – could sometimes play a pivotal role in managing the crisis. All The participants pointed out that the economic crisis has forced them to make many hard decisions in order to continue to deliver their services to their customers. They didn’t have much time to deliberate their decision or to discuss the consequences with the stakeholders.

“We have decided on a set of cost-cutting measures, and we have quickly taken many steps. For instance, we closed unnecessary areas in the restaurant, and we stopped purchase of costly plastic storage boxes used in packaging”.

The cost cutting measures have been extended to the staff. This issue has been shared by all the participants. “We were forced to lay off or let go of more than 50 % of our staff. For other employees, we reduced the schedules and implemented shift swap policies. It wasn’t easy at all but there are only two options: reducing the staff or closing the business”.

#### *4.2.3. Using relational connections*

Doerful et al. [43] argue that the development of social relationships and communication networks may play an important role in the recovery of the organization after adversity. Thus, actions and the interactions between leaders, followers and environmental agents promote coordination and trigger resilience during challenging times [18] [30].

“We organized many training sessions for the staff to initiate them about the hygiene measures for covid-19 crisis. Then, when the economic crisis intensified in the country, we increased the frequency of our meetings as things moved around us. It was so important to share information with the staff members because they need to know what is happening and how we can get out of this adversity”.

Furthermore, the crisis has forced leaders to tap into their business network and connections. This turned out to be useful in a number of situations. “There was someone with whom I have worked in Abidjan for 10 years. We have been through a lot together and we believe that when the economy is down, it may be an opportunity to flourish. I convinced him to become my partner since I needed his logistic and financial support and it went really well, much better than we expected”.

#### *4.2.4. Meaning- making*

Effective leaders are those who spread genuine hope and inspire confidence among their organization’s members during hard times [43]. Many participants have tried to reach out to their staff and to communicate to them their own perception of events and what they intend to do to “restore a state of normalcy” [29, p.7]. This meaning-making process was expressed by many participants in different ways: “I am convinced that the skilled and motivated staff play a key role in the food service industry, so I tried to improve their morale and to explain to them the challenges posed by these testing times. Thus, we communicated during this last year more than we did for the last ten years.”

“Employees were vulnerable, and they needed to be reassured about the future. It was their first experience with crisis and shocks whereas I have experienced many severe crises during my career especially the major financial crisis of the Lebanese civil war. ».

“We, me and my partners, have consolidated the family spirit that has been integral to our business since the beginning. Each one in the organization was ready to do any task in order to ensure the business continuity during these exceptional times. For instance, I do not mind sweeping the floor where necessary. This atmosphere has promoted trust and good communication between all the staff members and comforted them about the possibility of overcoming this situation together”.

### **4.3 Adaptation to the new reality**

Ticlau et al. [44, p.3] define adaptation “as the capacity of the individual to change in order to respond better to the requirements of the external environment”. This capacity of

adaptation depends on the extent and depth of the changes occurring in the external environment: The more changes seem disruptive, the more the capacity to adjust to them becomes more critical. Resilience enhances the capacity of the organization to handle future crises while trying to adjust to the current challenging conditions [30]. It can therefore be considered as an important source of learning and transformation.

#### *4.3.1. Learning from crisis*

Learning can be described as “ongoing process of reflection and action characterized by asking questions, seeking feedback, experimenting, reflecting on results, and discussing errors or unexpected outcomes of actions” [45] in [18, p.35].

In fact, this unprecedented crisis is being subjected to deep reflection among the restaurants’ owners/managers. Thus, they are convinced that this disruption will lead to a new operating mentality change and to a strategic planning change. Nevertheless, all these transformations remain actually unclear and ambiguous for owners/managers, though some of them were able to point out what they have learned so far from the financial crisis.

“We have learned to be more efficient and more effective in the running of our business. Before, there was a lot of money leakage. Currently, the crisis has forced us to be more attentive to all these details and to carefully control the different facets of our work”.

“I fully agree that the best lesson of this crisis is to learn how to work through our own resources without relying on banking loans since the latter have been suspended after the financial crisis outbreak. Actually, we are no longer dependent on banks, thus we become more autonomous and less exposed to bankruptcy risk”.

#### *4.3.2. Managing organizational change*

Resilient leaders should be involved in achieving a change management process in order to foster organizational resilience. To succeed in this task, they should be able to put into practice the knowledge base accumulated from their new and past experiences [18] and develop new norms and practices [22].

The change management capabilities of participants are mostly focused at the operational level since a strategic overall change needs a higher-level learning process. As one participant states:

“I don’t think we will ever work like before. The pandemic and the financial crisis have brought us to reconsider or cancel some procedures and routines that we have adopted for many years. These practices turned out to be useless during the crisis. Thus, we had to move on and make change happen”.

## **5 Discussion**

An assessment of the study findings and their comparison with the literature review led us to many reflections. Contrary to the dominant approach in literature that underscore the importance of preparedness during the anticipation phase of resilience [19,29], the majority of interviewees stated that they were not well prepared to face this major crisis. Furthermore, for them, preparedness wasn’t based on planning assumptions or formal procedures, it rather depended on leveraging social capital, having privileged access to some external information, and being able to mobilize financial and material resources that would appear useful after the crisis broke. These findings have been pointed out by Duchek [18] who argue that financial and human resources are vital to build organizational resilience and permit an effective anticipation of crisis. Furthermore, the implementation of suitable recovery plans,

vulnerability analysis drills and scenario exploration can enhance organizational resilience [19, 20].

However, Lebanese Leaders are not involved in these preparatory practices and don't give much attention to the development of cultural awareness in the workplace, although they are living and working in conditions of high uncertainty and complexity since the country has been through many crises and adverse events. Thus, the role of anticipation capabilities is merely limited in fostering resilience.

The Coping capabilities highlighted the importance of relational style of leadership in overcoming the crisis. During these challenging times, Leaders get used to work more collaboratively with their followers than in the past. They use and develop their network in order to find solutions for a whole host of unexpected problems. Hence, there are some differences in terms of resilience between organizations going through the same challenges but led by leaders more connected and more socially involved "We closed many branches while some of our competitors embark in an international expansion due to their connections inside and outside the country".

According to Duchek [18], a deep social capital increases information sharing, resource exchange, and cross-functional collaboration. This could lead to a better resilience. These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role of a two-way symmetrical communication approach and effective use of relational connections in activation of crisis management and building resilience [30].

Moreover, Teo et al [30] argue that relational leadership produces meaning-making and increases organizational resilience by trying to understand and interpret a new phenomenon in order to reduce its negative consequences. In fact, the most experienced leaders, who have handled many crises in the past, were more able to produce meaning-making and to support their followers in these challenging times.

Furthermore, the decisions taken by leaders are primarily operational or technical in nature, whereas previous studies have underscored that effective leaders should focus more on strategic issues in crisis times [29]. In addition, leaders avoid sometimes taking a critical decision for fear of its negative repercussions. This would be sometimes fatal for the organization and as harmful to it as the crisis itself. Furthermore, some were more aware of what has to be done and more courageous to drop their usual tool in the face of ongoing challenges that call for new and innovative solutions.

Moreover, the findings reveal that the learning capabilities of Lebanese leaders are mainly based on informal interactions and discussions. There is a lack of a knowledge management process that could help organizations to learn lessons from past crises and apply them to the future. Furthermore, resistance to change is high, thus, it is not easy to put new knowledge into practice

Finally, we can conclude that the leader's role is more evident in the coping stage of resilience. According to Duchek [18], it is not enough to promote one of the underlying resilience capabilities or to focus on one stage in the resilience process. The three capabilities should be developed to build an effective response to crises and acute shocks.

## **6 Conclusion**

Based on Duchek [18] approach of organizational resilience and crisis management approach, this study aims to explore which practices and processes were developed by leaders in the Lebanese food service sector to enhance organizational resilience in response to Lebanon's major economic crisis. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the capabilities

displayed by leaders to face these unprecedented challenging times. For this purpose, a qualitative study has been carried out with owners/managers of small restaurants in Lebanon.

The findings from the interviews were discussed in terms of anticipation of potential threats, coping with disruption and adaptation to the new reality. Thus, results confirm the role of the three capabilities addressed by Ducheck [18] (anticipating, coping, and adapting capabilities) in promoting organizational resilience. They confirmed the dynamic nature of resilience since it is not relying on static elements but depends on a set of capabilities that leaders mobilize in the face of unexpected events.

In addition, the resilience capabilities developed by Lebanese leaders mainly involve the following actions and tasks: observing the environment and preparing to face disruption (anticipating capabilities); improvising and solving problems creatively, making critical decisions, using relational connections and meaning-making (coping capabilities); learning from crises and managing organizational change (adapting capabilities). However, results reveal that the anticipating and the learning capabilities play a lesser role than the coping capabilities in fostering leaders' resilience. Furthermore, the behavioral actions of Lebanese leaders outweigh their cognitive ones whereas the two should be in conjunction [18]. They are focusing on improvisation, taking prompt decisions and exploiting their relational connections rather than engaging in profound reflection and learning from the crisis. The findings emphasize a lack of planning to deal with the crisis for all participants and confirm the improvisational nature of the practices used by Lebanese leaders. However, previous studies pointed out that planning and improvising are both important for resilience [19, 29, 31]. In addition, results emphasize the role of relational leadership style in fostering resilience. Furthermore, results are consistent with those of Martinelli et al. [46] who argue that small businesses set short-term goals and adopt contingency and short-living practices.

Lebanese managers are focusing their efforts on managing the responses to the crisis rather than leading beyond the crisis toward a better preparedness for future disruptions. Thus, their coping capabilities play a key role in enhancing the resilience of their organizations. Their capacity to deal with adversity lies mainly in the mobilization of their social connections and the activation of relationships based on trust, cooperation, and effective communication inside and outside the organization. Therefore, they have to reinforce the learning and strategic dimension of resilience in order to improve their resilience capabilities. In addition, they should be more vigilant when receiving information from an external environment.

Finally, this study has several theoretical and practical implications. First, it is (to the best of our knowledge), the first investigative research to address issues related to leadership resilience in the food service sector in Lebanon by exploring the direct experiences of owners-managers of restaurants in response to the Lebanese crisis. Second, this research contributes to the extant literature on resilient leadership and crisis management. In practical terms, the findings may provide practitioners with relevant insights that would help managers to improve their managerial resilience which would be crucial for the revival of the hospitality industry in the country. Furthermore, Future research must be conducted on larger samples in the food service sector or in other sectors in order to build and elaborate on our findings.

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