

LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS IN A VOLATILITY, UNCERTAINTY, COMPLEXITY AND AMBIGUITY (VUCA) ENVIRONMENT, A CASE STUDY OF ZIMBABWE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY DURING COVID 19 ERA.

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Abstract: Organisations across the globe are experiencing highest levels of uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of which is unprecedented. Industries have been experiencing VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) frequently. The study sought to evaluate the leadership characteristics in a VUCA environment in with the hospitality industry during Covid 19 era. Researchers in their earlier studies have identified various VUCA factors and challenges that have influenced these organisations during various crisis situations such in other industries such as IT, (Information Technology) and other industries. However, there is lack of research that explains challenges faced in the presence of a Covid 19 pandemic in hospitality sector in Zimbabwe. The outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic in the year 2020 has led to industries crippling and hospitality industry is no exception. Therefore, this generates a need to identify various leadership characteristics in hospitality sector in the context of a pandemic environment. The literature in the paper has been enriched with different studies across the globe. The research used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the topic under study.

The study used both primary and secondary data. Questionnaires and interviews were used as part of the data gathering instruments for primary data. On sampling, both random and non-random sampling techniques were used to obtain data from participants who are employees of hotels in Zimbabwe. While for secondary data, documentary analysis of previous research done by other scholars, media circulations, internal circulars were used. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data obtained from the respondents. Use of SPSS for quantitative and Nvivo for qualitative data analyse were used, with correlation and regression analysis applied to evaluate the relationship between the preparedness and survival in the VUCA environment. The major findings of the study revealed that Zimbabwe's hospitality industry is in Covid 19 induced VUCA environment. The study established that possession of certain skills-set coupled with preparation enhance chances of an organisation's survival in a VUCA. The study recommended that hotels need to invest more in workshops and trainings of leadership personnel to acquire and there is need to improve on critical skills in business such as agility, flexibility, decisiveness amongst others. The leaders must be innovate and adaptive to the pandemic era. They must follow WHO guidelines and practice effective communication to staff and guests.

Key Words: VUCA, COVID-19, Pandemic, Disruptive technology, Hospitality Industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

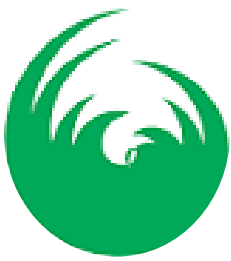
Leaders of organisations in the 21st century are faced with dynamic and profound change that is unprecedented with the acceleration, intensity and frequency of change rising rapidly to produce volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) operating environments (Rimita, 2019). VUCA refers to an operating environment that is constantly changing in conflicting, dramatic, and relentless ways to produce leadership and organizational challenges (Deaton, 2018). Covid 19 (corona virus disease 2019 according to World Health Organization (WHO)) era is one of the greatest examples of VUCA environment. The hospitality industry has been heavily hit by the corona Covid-19 pandemic with potential shock ranging between a 60-80% decline in the international tourism economy in 2020.

Hospitality industry in Zimbabwe experienced a drastic set back as a result of Covid 19, causing downsizing through

either closure of some hotels or wings, retrenchments and in some cases death. The industry is a beneficiary of international tourists, whose travel was marred by worldwide lockdowns and restrictions. The study seeks to evaluate the effects of leadership characteristics during VUCA environment as case study of hospitality industry in Zimbabwe during Covid 19 era to organisation and its stakeholders. Great leaders possess clarity, decisiveness, courage, passion and humility. The study elucidates how leaders of hospitality industry manage the existence of the pandemic across all faculties of the business, their preparedness, how to counter the effects and observation of keys learnings arising thereof.

The main research objective of the study is to evaluate leadership characteristics in Covid 19 related VUCA environment relating to hospitality and tourism industry.

2. METHODOLOGY



The research philosophy used was the pragmatism which is a combination of the positivism and interpretivism philosophies. Collis & Hussey (2009) and Rubin & Babbie (2013) suggested that the goal in pragmatism is to understand, interpret events, experiences and social structures as well as the values people attach to these phenomena. Positivism asserts that the world consists of social order (ontology) and the best way to study the world is through an objective approach (epistemology). Two sets of primary data collection tools were used, a self-administered questionnaire for the staff members and guides interview for the executives, giving room for explanation of necessary information, facts and phrases relating to the effects and mitigating factors on Covid 19 induced VUCA. Reliability and validity checks and balances were carried out. Key in the research was the consideration of ethics and confidentiality. SPSS for quantitative data and Nvivo for qualitative data) were carefully considered to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

This study will employ a descriptive cross-sectional survey design with both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. A cross-sectional survey based on a single examination of a cross-section of population from different participants from leading organizations in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe will be employed. Additionally, high reliability will be easy to obtain by presenting all subjects with a standardized stimulus which ensures that observer subjectivity is greatly eliminated (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The design will give guidance to the researcher in the analysis of observations, and drawing of inferences of the collected data. Furthermore, the design provides the researcher the methodical structure that will logically be implemented in order to execute the research since the design detailed the plan of how the research is to be carried out. Usage of cross-sectional descriptive survey design, will not only help to anticipate and specify the seemingly countless decisions connected with planning and carrying out data collection, processing and analyzing it, but it also presented a local basis for these decisions (Yin, 2003).

Delimitations

Though there are a number of impacts associated with leadership characteristics in VUCA, this research focussed on the Zimbabwe hospitality industry during Covid 19 era, with help of WHO, Ministry of Health Child Welfare in Zimbabwe and various stakeholders.

Limitations

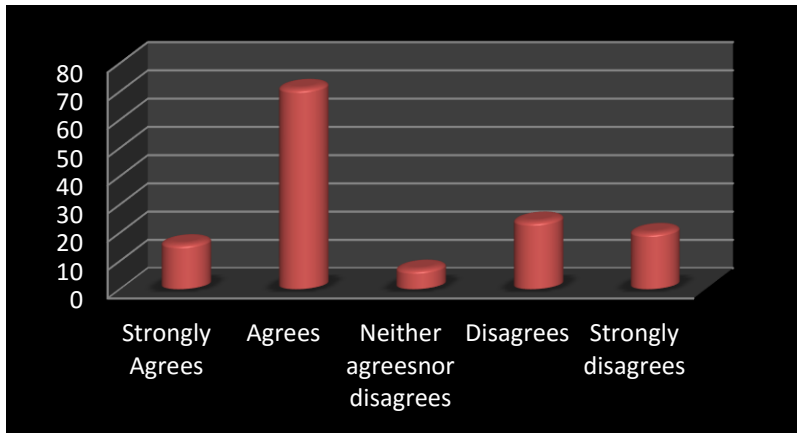
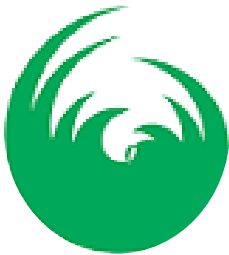
The sensitivity of this study also poses a limitation in that participants (hotel managers) may be not forthcoming with

helpful answers. However, assurance that all acquired data would be handled confidently with confidentiality and pledged to encourage provision of relevant and factual information.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To ensure that the analysis was undertaken in a systematic manner, an analysis plan was created first. Results were analysed using a variety of statistical methods ranging from simple graphing to the use of statistics. These helped to enable analysis of relationships of a number of independent variables, controlling other factors, including analysis. The data was presented using descriptive statistics where possible. The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysing quantitative data and Nvivo data analysis for qualitative primary data collected. This process includes identifying similar word(s) and relationships between cases (respondents) as well as identifying similarities and differences between This represents a synthesis of responses that were elicited through the data collection tools. The findings have been presented in a narrative form. Nvivo clouding was used to identify the most frequently used word. Study of demographics was done to assess the understanding, results of which established that the majority of the employees in the hospitality industry are in the age bands of 41- 50 years giving credence to their responses as they were responding from an informed position. As for average length of service in hospitality industry, a total of 51 respondents representing 37% have worked in the hospitality industry for between 15-20 years, whilst 34 representing 25%, between 11-15 years. This shows that the respondents experience is considerably adequate to note changes or lack thereof brought by the VUCA environment.

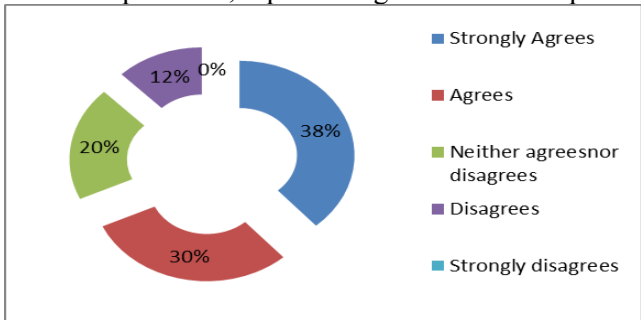
Research results indicated that most of the executives had common understanding of the VUCA environment as depicted by the most commonly used words like unpredictable, challenges, and extreme, critical, complex and ambiguous. They were in agreement that there are certain characteristics critical in surviving the VUCA environment, these includes good communication skills, open mindedness, dynamism, flexibility, agility, adaptive, considerate, formulating strategies, cognitive and must be informed. The test of Normality was carried out showing that the responses for the hospitality industry were skewed as shown by both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov p and the Shapiro-Wilk p-values which were both 0.00. Such results resulted as the majority of the respondents were of the view that certain skills-set impacts positively an organisation during this Covid 19 era.



Histogram on Normality of Data

In assessing preparedness of leadership in VUCA, there was need to check how Covid 19 had altered the hospitality industry. As such the majority of the respondents were in agreement that Covid 19 had induced a VUCA in the hospitality industry as 53 strongly agreed and 41 agreed of the 138 respondents, representing 68% of the respondents

being in agreement that Covid 19 has caused a VUCA. On further probing on the leaders during interviews why there is a 12.3% of respondents who feel Covid 19 has no effect it was reviewed that most people in the hospitality industry are of the opinion that it is the deterioration of the economy which has caused challenges in the industry.



Management preparedness to Covid 19 pandemic

Correlation Analysis

It can be observed that there is a strong positive relationship by virtue of the Pearson correlation coefficient, which had a value of 0.78. The more prepared the organisation was the better and more effective the strategies used to survive as evidenced by having the

strategies being embraced by the employees. Also a Sig. value of 0.041, a value less than 0.05 shows that for the above two variables they is a statistically significant correlation. Conduct of regress analysis was conducted in SPSS.

Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.078 ^a	.608	.579	.852

a. Predictors: (Constant), To what extend does being prepared help to survive in a VUCA environment.

The R-value of 0.78 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between the variables and an R squared value of 0.608 indicates that 60.8% of the extent of how being prepared enhanced chances of surviving a Covid 19 induced VUCA environment. There is a link between being prepared and surviving a VUCA environment, which is in agreement with findings of other researchers such as Kombe and Wafula (2015) who found out that being prepared for a VUCA enhances chances of the organisation surviving such an environment.

Regression coefficients results show that when there is no preparation, which is when its effect is zero, the likelihood of surviving will be at a value of 2.381 and that for every unit increase in preparation the chances of surviving will be enhance by a factor of 0.238. A Sig value of 0.034 which is less than the alpha value (0.05) shows that the

underlying hypothesis which states that the variables are independent is violated and thus we reject it and retain the alternative hypothesis which states that the two variables are associated to each other. ANOVA analysis shows that the p-value is less than the alpha value(0.05) hence we reject the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis, that is they is some association between being prepared and surviving VUCA.

Most executives agreed to the notion of diversification, reconfigure/ restructure business, closing some wings, or branches to survive thereby segmenting businesses and stay connected to the international arena. Covid 19 caused losses, low volumes, closure of hotels, staff cutting, adverse effect on revenues, death of staff and catastrophic pandemic. Experiences important in operating during VUCA- being proactive, impact on costs, downsizing,



availability of opportunities, loyalty to guest and staff, and intelligence, correct procurement and change. Successful strategies implemented during Covid 19 include downsizing, closing some of the business units, adapting to the environment, align and contain costs to revenues, following guidelines, staff connected were the common sentiments from the executives. Leader must be game changers, must possess skills necessary to foster business ahead, need for continuous training, versatile, be able to detect the storms and make corrective decision.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded there some skills-set that have a positive impact in terms of surviving a VUCA environment induced by Covid 19, this is in tandem with what other scholars on similar studies else way as posited by Collins & Hansen, (2011) who averred there are critical certain skills which help in navigating a VUCA. Consequently, current and future leaders are compelled to develop and cultivate new skills to keep pace with landscapes that are volatile and ambiguous; McCarty (2011) proposes that leaders must strengthen skills and strategies that combat the VUCA dangers. Although the hospitality is becoming challenging to lead during and after the pandemic, it is also rife with unique and innovative opportunities for those who are able to identify and exploit such waves of disruption.

It can also be concluded that leadership involves managing and guiding staff during change, especially in a rapidly iterating landscape, leaders are faced with a multitude of challenges. Leaders provide guidance and motivation during such uncertain times. This calls for leaders to be prepared and be able to craft strategies that instils confidence on the workforce and also ensures survival during VUCA periods, leaders in the hospitality industry need to have ad hoc capabilities with the ability to improvise, communicate, respond to and develop new norms, and make rapid, on-the-spot decisions (Williams et al., 2017). So, although the entire system may simultaneously be undergoing the kind of dramatic, disruptive change were seen in COVID-19 era, characterised by unstable situations they require consistent adaptation and agility in order to be responsive to the unpredictability in the change that is occurring (Hunt et al., 2007).

The link between preparedness for VUCA ecosystems and being able to craft strategies for survival which are agreeable to the employees who also participate in the success of the business was also highlighted in the study where it was established that there is a positive relationship between the two. Conversely challenges or lack of preparedness for any eventuality spell challenges in terms survival and support from subordinates.

To take on this century's great challenges, leaders must not only look at the world and its systems holistically, they must also identify and understand how to lead effectively in this new volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Brilliant, 2013)

Fundamental shift on leadership values is necessary always, to counter the effects of pandemic and other VUCA impurities. Being decisive, bold actions may conform to stereotypes of what strong leaders should do.

However in complex, rapidly changing situations with high risk and information is limited, this style is far inferior to one based on thoughtful decisions made carefully with humility and constant awareness of the unknown.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Hotels need to invest more in workshops and trainings of leadership personnel to acquire and improve on critical skills in business such as agility, flexibility, decisiveness amongst others. Leaders must embrace the challenges that have been and being brought by Covid 19, as it is the new normal characterised by disruptive technologies. As it stands then Covid 19 pandemic is not going anywhere sooner and evidenced by the new wave that affected the globe after the research period. The business (hospitality) must not completely shut down; rather find ways to mitigate cost effectiveness. Leaders must be highly innovative, thereby looking into ways to stay afloat and survive. Leaders must reevaluate strategies along with disruptive technology. Leaders must find new ways of moving with the trend, like what other businesses are doing, i.e. trading / transacting online, with hotel guest booking online, automatic check in. Leaders must protect their subordinates/staff and guests through following WHO guidelines and policies, among others washing of hands with soap and running water, sanitation, social distance and wearing of mask. Protection of employees also comes in as welfare, rather by retrenching, assign other staff members to thriving subsidiaries, and pay them from the investments. The government in turn also must provide a favourable environment for the industry to survive the pandemic, although through stringent measure such as testing and vaccinations. The community is affected especially when there is high unemployment, unprocedural disposal of Covid kits. Therefore Leaders in hospitality industry must ensure that that all are taken into account, through possessing characteristics that help stabilise staff welfare and community safety.

6. AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

There is also a need to study the aftermath, especially after the much talked about Covid 19.

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