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# Handbook of Research on Entrepreneurship and Organizational Resilience During Unprecedented Times

## Lebanese Entrepreneurs' Adaptation to The Multilevel Crisis

### Lebanese Entrepreneurs' Adaptation to The Multilevel Crisis:

#### An Interpretation of Robert Greene's Strategies of War

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## ABSTRACT

*During a multi-level crisis: economic, health and security-post-explosion of the Port of Beirut, Lebanese entrepreneurs are opting for changes that allow them to survive. We studied the experiences of fourteen entrepreneurs during crises and carried out a qualitative analysis which made it possible to identify the different variables, highlighting the application of the war strategies as written by Robert Greene. The most marked variables are the date of creation of the entrepreneurial activity, the sector (nature of the activity), the availability of financial resources, the level of change, the subjective well-being, the work-life balance, and the entrepreneur's optimism regarding the development of the business in the future. These variables were reviewed through Robert Greene's strategies of war: the controlled chaos strategy, mind flexibility (management like water), the power of fire, the counterbalance strategy, fighting the present war and the detached buddha tactic.*

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*Keywords: Change, Adaptation, War, Lebanon*

## LEBANESE ENTREPRENEURS' ADAPTATION TO THE MULTILEVEL CRISIS: AN INTERPRETATION OF ROBERT GREENE'S STRATEGIES OF WAR

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## **ABSTRACT**

During a multilevel crisis, entailing the economy, health, and security following an explosion in the Port of Beirut, Lebanese entrepreneurs pursue changes that might allow them to survive. The experiences of 14 entrepreneurs during the crisis, as derived from a qualitative analysis, reflect the war strategies proposed by the author Robert Greene (2006). The most important variables for these entrepreneurs include the date of creation of an entrepreneurial activity, sector of activity, availability of financial resources, level of change, subjective well-being of entrepreneurs, work–life balance, and entrepreneurs' optimism about the development of future business. By reviewing these variables through Greene's strategies of war (controlled chaos strategy, mind flexibility, the power of fire, counterbalance strategy, fighting the present war, and the detached Buddha tactic), the authors establish new insights into entrepreneurial tactics for surviving crises.

## **Keywords**

Change, Adaptation, War, Lebanon

## **INTRODUCTION**

Lebanon is experiencing a multilevel crisis in several areas: health, economic, social, and political. The crisis is forcing Lebanese entrepreneurs to adapt their business models and rethink their internal organizations to survive. Accordingly, we ask: Might Lebanese entrepreneurs benefit from war strategies, used to adapt to the crisis?

According to a critique by Demers (1999b), most literature studies organizational change at the strategic, structural, cultural, and cognitive levels, without focusing on the particulars of the main actor of change—that is, the entrepreneur. Among the dimensions we study to understand the adaptation mechanisms of Lebanese entrepreneurs, we highlight their ambition, along with their personal constraints (e.g., work–family balance), which are rarely studied theoretical angles of analysis. We are interested in the particularities of entrepreneurs,

which are useful for understanding both the personal and business-related coping mechanisms they use in the face of crises. Therefore, we study factors related to the emotional and practical states of entrepreneurs: fear of the unknown, resilience, stress, coping orientation (i.e., emotion-oriented, task-oriented, or avoidance-oriented), psychological health management and emotional support, satisfaction of being an entrepreneur, quality of sleep, intensity of change, ambition and aspiration, and engagement of new employees (human resources).

We are inspired by the configurational approaches and analyses of Gartner (1985) and Cooper (1993), who consider entrepreneurial performance a result of factors related to individual, environmental, process, and organizational dimensions. According to Smida A., & Khelil, N. (2010), these factors or dimensions are elaborated by numerous models, such as those developed by Bruyat, 1993; Crutzen & Hernandez, 1999; Paturel, 1997; Schutte et al., 2020; Smida, 1995; Song et al., 2008, Van Caillie, 2008. To study key variables, including ambitions, availability of financial resources, and sector of activity, we collect quantitative and qualitative data and take an abductive approach, switching between theory and practice and interpreting the results according to Robert Greene's (2006) book, *The 33 Strategies of War*.

Our aim is not to embrace the logic of war or consider war as a solution; rather, it is suggest that entrepreneurs can imitate the personality of the warrior. The constant war in Lebanon does not produce a preference for the logic of war, but it has led Lebanese people to become warriors. By understanding the successes of war strategies, and underlining the characteristics of the warrior mindset, we can identify how they are compatible with entrepreneurial success, as it manifests during the ongoing, multilevel crisis. Furthermore, we adopt and reinforce the idea that nothing stands still, so we offer recommendations to Lebanese entrepreneurs to adapt to circumstances and situational changes, by turning to strategies of war and maintaining flexibility.

We apply Greene's (2006) strategies in particular for several reasons:

- The idea of the entrepreneur-warrior has been elaborated by many authors, including Ghallagher and Selman (2015) and Vivod (2017). They suggest entrepreneurs are critical to rebuilding economies, in which function they represent modern warriors. Our interviews with employees of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) confirm that they pivoted to creative solutions to obtain foreign money and refresh the economy. Authors such as Rouzeau (2015) also have applied Greene's (2006) strategies to management, and journalists, such as Clifford (2013), suggest their applicability to the field of entrepreneurship.
- Greene (2006) studies powerful people and breaks down the processes by which they achieved power, so that others can emulate them. In elaborating on the idea of war, our aim is to explain how military strategies develop and combat forces get trained and equipped. The strategies we retain focus on the warrior's mindset of flexibility, balance, and adaptability. In this chapter, we analyze Greene's strategies of war in light of our findings about the entrepreneur's mindset and cognitive capabilities, putting them in the service of Lebanese entrepreneurs.

- Danger, uncertainty, and chance are elements that constitute the “climate of war” that marks the current Lebanese setting. However, this chapter is not a call for war or chaos but a call to mind flexibility, balance, and optimism.
- Clausewitz’s (1780) trinitarian war and Galula’s (1964) moral attacks and psychological effects eventually became obsolete; we instead apply Greene’s (2006) laws. Greene represents the only recent contribution to understanding the warrior’s mindset since Sun Tzu’s (544–496 BC) *Art of War*.

Furthermore, through the dimensions we use to study the reaction of Lebanese entrepreneurs to the current multilevel crisis, we highlight that the mind is an army. It must adapt to the complexities and chaos of modern warfare by becoming more fluid and flexible. At its height, this new type of warfare is guerrilla warfare that exploits chaos by transforming the unexpected and disorder into a strategy. There is no room for rigid tactics; the Lebanese entrepreneurs that we interview have studied key phenomena from different angles and situations, and they have learned to remain in motion. They are adapting their business models, creating master classes when possible, targeting international markets and new foreign clients, hiring and firing personnel, and increasing their prices.

A careful reading of Greene’s (2006) strategies of war teaches us seven lessons. First, Lebanese entrepreneurs should fight the present war by being detached from the past and thinking like children who have flexible minds and who consider each situation to be new. Second, they should adapt like water—by mobilizing their financial resources to attain their objective, which is to survive in both Lebanese and international markets. Third, they should not be overwhelmed with emotion and circumstance and should remain cold-blooded; this crucial tactic prevents the development of cognitive biases and highlights the importance of finding solutions despite turbulent circumstances. Fourth, innovation requires speed and adaptability; speed is a war strategy that we highlight. Fifth, sectors of activity shape the identities and activities of enterprises, thereby affecting entrepreneurs’ adaptability to their environments. Sixth, there is a counterbalance strategy that stipulates entrepreneurs must be able to maintain work–life balance to avoid missing chances. Seventh, the optimism and abilities of Lebanese entrepreneurs to see beyond the clouds help them come up with original ideas and solutions. Therefore, we highlight the importance of the entrepreneur’s mind to surviving the present battle. Such survival is critical, because history has never known such a multilevel crisis. An entrepreneur who is easily overwhelmed by emotion, who is rooted in the past instead of the present, and who cannot see the world with clarity and urgency will create strategies that miss the mark.

This chapter is structured as follows: In the first section, after presenting some background and Greene’s (2006) strategies of war, as they relate to entrepreneurship, we explain our research methodology. In the second section, we detail our literature review, then describe the Lebanese context and our sample. Thereafter, fifth section, we analyze seven variables that affect the coping mechanisms of Lebanese entrepreneurs during the current crisis, according to Greene’s strategies of war.

## **BACKGROUND**

War is not a domain, separate from the rest of life in society. It is an eminently human concept, in which the best and the worst of our natures are expressed. Lebanon's war started in 1970, so Lebanese entrepreneurs have learned to survive during this multilevel crisis.

Greene's (2006) 33 strategies of war reflect the status of strategy, as a system of expedients. It is more than a science; it is the transmission of knowledge in practical life, the improvement of thought capable of modifying the primitive guiding idea in accordance with constantly modified situations, and the art of acting under the pressure of the most difficult circumstances. Our aim is to study the adaptation mechanisms of Lebanese entrepreneurs, their abilities to improve traditional business models, and their strategies to cope with the current multilevel crisis. Then we can explain how they fight with the resources they possess to get what they want—survival.

According to Greene (2006), a strategist aims for long-term objectives, knows how to differentiate useless fights from those that are inevitable, and learns to control and channel emotions. Moreover, a good strategist manages to break the opposing army mentally before it surrenders completely. Throughout this chapter, we underline the importance of entrepreneurs looking at things as they are, not as their emotions perceive them. Entrepreneurs must recognize that the influence of emotion is inevitable; they must be aware of it and to know how to compensate for it.

The real strategy—especially during an unprecedented multicrisis—is not to rely on simple solutions or what seems to have worked before; it is not the accumulation of wealth, resources, numbers of allies, or the most recent technologies. Rather, it is psychological—a matter of intelligence, not force. If the entrepreneurial mind is rational, it has the capacity to survive even during tough times. In the light of our results, we invite entrepreneurs not to repress their doubts and fears but rather to improve their abilities; gain courage, confidence, and experience; seek challenges, and go to battle—because life is a battle.

### **About Robert Greene**

Robert Greene is a U.S. author of books on strategy, power, and seduction. He has written six international bestsellers: *The 48 Laws of Power*, *The Art of Seduction*, *The 33 Strategies of War*, *The 50th Law*, *Mastery*, and *The Laws of Human Nature*. This chapter performs a careful reading of *The 33 Strategies of War*, written in 2006. It has sold more than 200,000 copies, offering a “guide to the subtle social game of everyday life informed by the military principles in war.” It features discussions and examples of offensive and defensive strategies practiced by a wide variety of people in different conditions; it applies them to social conflicts such as family quarrels and business negotiations.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

Our empirical study draws from 14 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1) conducted with Lebanese entrepreneurs who have survived the crisis and made organizational or technological changes. Before conducting our interviews, we administered a questionnaire with close-ended questions (see Appendix 2 for measurement scales) to identify dimensions such as level of change, fear of the unknown, and subjective well-being. We used the most recent measurement scales for all dimensions. The quantitative data that we obtained guided our interviews. With this method, we can compare scores across respondents while leaving



room for the contextual explanations necessary to understand the key phenomena. The data collection period was from May 2020 to May 2021:

- **May 2020–July 2020:** Collection of quantitative data
- **April 2021–May 2021:** Follow-up interviews with entrepreneurs

We shared the questionnaire online on LinkedIn. Of the 21 entrepreneurs who completed the questionnaire, 14 agreed to be interviewed; the interviews lasted 45 minutes on average.

We adopted matrices provided by Miles and Huberman (1994) as our qualitative analysis method, such that we crossed the cases of interviewed entrepreneurs with 23 factors, 7 of which we retained. Thus we could reduce data quickly, without requiring transcription software. Because most Lebanese entrepreneurs are bilingual, we collected the data in French and English, which made it complicated to translate and transcribe their input into a single language using one software program.

We constructed a matrix to assess the importance of the factors for each entrepreneur, with the goal of establishing an entrepreneur/factor matrix that could highlight the importance of each of the factors studied by illustrating a qualitative or quantitative appreciation. We ruled out the following factors: gender, age, fear of the unknown, resilience, stress, coping-emotion-oriented coping strategies, coping-task-oriented coping strategies, coping-strategies of avoidance-oriented adaptation, psychological health management and emotional support, satisfaction of being an entrepreneur, quality of sleep, intensity of change, ambition and aspiration of the entrepreneur, and engagement of new employees (human resources). Instead, we retained the following dimensions: date of creation of the activity, sector of activity, availability of financial resources, subjective well-being, work–life balance, and optimism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

We incorporate Greene’s (2006) laws, because the strategies he extracts from real-life situations highlight and encompass the dimensions we have retained to study the adaptation mechanism of Lebanese entrepreneurs during a multilevel crisis. These variables are not a call for war, and the war is not the goal of our research; we seek science, not destruction. The Greene variables that we retain represent the warrior’s mindset: mind flexibility, facing fears, counterbalance strategy, detached Buddha tactic, fighting the present war, and controlled chaos strategy. Such an application of Greene’s laws to the field of entrepreneurship is rare.

Literature on organizational change has studied factors such as well-being, stress, and coping mechanisms, but it has not highlighted the ambition of entrepreneurs, their sleep quality, or their levels of work–life balance. These represent the main theoretical contributions of this chapter, along with a revision of the change mechanisms adopted by Lebanese entrepreneurs, as interpreted through the 33 strategies of war elaborated by Greene (2006). We study three dimensions (Schutte et al., 1995) to understand the adaptation mechanisms of entrepreneurs:

- **Ambitions and aspirations:** According to the theory of intention (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989) cited by Khelil and Smida (2010), intention is the most important dimension of a business strategy.

- **Means and resources:** We classify the entrepreneurs according to their availability of financial resources. However, we do not retain “engagement of new employees (recruitment)-or human resources.”
- **Context:** We select a sector of activity variable, because the crisis has affected some sectors more than others.

Next, we highlight the emotional well-being of Lebanese entrepreneurs during the multilevel crisis. The choice of strategy is influenced by personality, emotional intelligence, and social identity (Smollan, 2017). We highlight the following variables:

- **Gender:** A gender-based productivity disadvantage exists in manufacturing but not in service firms or small firms. Because our sample comprises very small firms operating in all sectors of activity, it is crucial to study the impact of gender on the adaption mechanism of entrepreneurs during the multilevel crisis.
- **Age of entrepreneurs:** We study both the age of entrepreneurs and the date of creation of their enterprises (Begin & Chabaud, 2010). However, only the date of creation of the enterprise is the only dimension we retain.

Authors who have studied the relationships of fear, stress, and coping strategies with organizational change include Fugate and Kinicki (2008), Lachman et al. (2010), and Regory Prussia (2008). We asked entrepreneurs to rate their fear of the unknown (Carleton et al., 2007) and crossed this score with the other studied dimensions. Fear is an emotion; it is a consequence of an analysis of danger that allows the person to flee or fight. According to Carleton et al. (2007), fear is intolerance of uncertainty and reflects a tendency to consider the possibility of a negative event as unacceptable.

Emotions can cause stress and feelings of emotional or physical tension. Stress is the body’s reaction to challenge or demands. We are interested in studying the level to which the current Lebanese crisis makes entrepreneurs feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. A scale to measure stress from Warttig et al. (2013) also can be used for secondary evaluation; it reveals the frequency with which life situations are experienced as threatening.

Studies of stress also consider adaptation to stress and coping mechanisms. We study three dimensions or strategies: emotion-oriented, task-oriented, and avoidance-oriented (Cosway et al., 2000). For this purpose, we collect and analyze three scores and their impacts on the change mechanisms that entrepreneurs adopt:

- **Emotion-oriented:** We ask the Lebanese interviewees how often they have engaged in the following activities: blaming themselves for procrastinating, daydreaming of better times or places, and worrying about what they are going to do in the future.
- **Task-oriented:** We ask the interviewees about their abilities to make intuitive decisions, identify and adjust their priorities, analyze their problems before acting, and delegate tasks.
- **Avoidance-oriented:** We examine whether the entrepreneurs have been taking breaks, exercising, talking to others, asking for help, taking alcohol, drugs, or medications, or dining out to reward themselves.



We study the impact of resilience and commitment to an entrepreneurial career on the adaptation mechanisms of Lebanese entrepreneurs. We adapt a scale from Carson and Bedeian (1994), who conceptualize career commitment as a motivation to work on a chosen vocation. (The resilience scores we collected also comprise quantitative data.)

To score the psychological health management and emotional support of entrepreneurs, we use a measurement scale that includes psychological health management, ability to manage stress, psychological load, facing the psychological burden of life as an entrepreneur, managing the balance between the different spheres of entrepreneurial life, breaking the isolation felt as an entrepreneur, and having good self-knowledge (Saint-Jean, 2020). We also examine concepts of well-being, wellness, or quality of life. A 5-item scale of well-being published by the World Health Organization (WHO), or “WHO-5,” serves to measure entrepreneurs’ sense of what they intrinsically value. The well-being of entrepreneurs affects their abilities to find solutions and adapt to the multilevel crisis. We choose this scale because it has been adopted by the WHO to measure well-being.

Stress, well-being, emotions, psychological health, and coping mechanisms also affect entrepreneurs’ quality of sleep. Therefore, we use the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) (Buysse et al., 1989; Carpenter & Andrykowski, 1998), which measures sleep quality and sleep disturbance retrospectively over a one-month period, using self-reports. Sleep is a malleable behavior that may be improved by individual and organizational changes (Brett Litwiller, 2017).

Because our approach is abductive, we interpret the seven retained variables (see Section 5) through Greene’s (2006) strategies of war. These strategies orient the interviewed entrepreneurs on survival paths during the multilevel crisis.

## **LEBANESE CONTEXT**

The effective independence of the Lebanese Republic took place on November 22, 1943. In 1945, Lebanon became a founding member of the League of Arab States. The departure of foreign troops from Lebanese territories was completed by December 31, 1946. For the next 30 years, Lebanon became a melting pot with a cultural and diversified heritage. It received large waves of immigration from its neighboring countries, which were unstable; it attracted thousands of workers who provided a qualified work force, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs. The country’s economic activity turned mainly around these entrepreneurs. Moreover, the demographic traditions of Lebanon, its attachment to freedom of expression, and its educated people have allowed the Lebanese Republic to become a cultural, academic, and medical center in the region.

However, the year 1975 marked the outbreak of an internal and external conflict, since which Lebanon has experienced an extended period of instability and insecurity. After 15 years of war, which tore Lebanon apart (1975–1990), reconstruction of the country was associated with the assassinated former Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri (Corm, 2004). A conventional economic image of Lebanon describes a Switzerland of the Middle East, and its capital Beirut is the “little Paris” of the East. The Lebanese economy is essentially a service economy, centered around its banking system and the good quality of tourist facilities on offer. However, the country also faces public debt and continues to live dangerously. Although it is rid of heavy Syrian influence, it grew destabilized again by a difficult, tense regional

situation. The impacts of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon have resulted in losses since 2012, measured in terms of the decline in economic activity, income, and access to and quality of public services, according to by the most recent reports published by the World Bank.

Its chaotic framework also continues to influence its economic situation. In early 2020, the cessation of payments of all state obligations in foreign currency was a first in the country's history. The drying up of Central Bank reserves led to a devaluation of the Lebanese pound and an inflation rate of 25% for 2020. Geopolitical tensions in the region are partial causes of this economic collapse. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has set far-reaching reforms as a condition for the disbursement of any aid to Lebanon. Lebanese consumers also have lost much of their purchasing power, and poverty and hunger are on the rise. According to the World Bank, nearly 50% of the Lebanese population lives below the poverty line, and more than 20% fall below an extreme poverty line. Civil society has mobilized by seeking financial assistance from the Lebanese diaspora. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also form an integral part of the community system.

In terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, after August 18, 2020, Lebanon ordered a two-week confinement. Then, on October 4, 111 towns and villages were placed in lockdown until October 12. On October 12, 169 towns and villages were placed in confinement for a week, many of which were already confined. On November 2, 115 cities and towns were locked down, and a nationwide curfew from 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. also came into effect. In February 2021, Lebanon started receiving the first doses of vaccines.

Lebanese companies have seen their fortunes decline further following new measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. In Beirut's popular shopping districts and nightlife hubs, cafes, bars, and shops were forced to close. Lebanon had never experienced this type of crisis, even during the 2006 war. According to the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (2021), around half of private-sector sales stopped between 2019 and 2020. But because the country operates at a deficit, no government support measures have been granted to individual persons or businesses. An obvious reality—despite the absence of any official statistics—is that emigration is emptying the country of its human capital.

In addition, protests that began in 2019 had consequences:

- Distribution channels were disrupted during the protests by road blockages.
- Banks closed, causing a delay in the execution times of certain types of transactions.
- The closure of the banks boosted demand for foreign currencies on the secondary market.
- There has been a drying up of the amounts of currencies used by several non-banking financial institutions, such as money transfer companies.

Since 2019, Lebanese banks have imposed illegal and informal banking restrictions on depositors' accounts, preventing them from freely accessing their own money. However, the international press claimed that between US\$5.5 and \$6 billion had been sent out of the country, whereas the same banks that have made such transfers do not allow depositors to withdraw \$100. This situation is made possible by a legal vacuum: Lebanon has not adopted laws that establish formal capital controls or guarantee private property. Banks, faced with the multiplication of queries, offer depositors the option of bank checks, which are cashable only

in Lebanon. Banks release themselves from their responsibilities by issuing bank checks drawn on the Banque du Liban; financially, the value of the bank check on the market does not represent the amount of the deposit. Transfers abroad are limited to “urgent” expenses that depositors must justify. The ceilings on banking facilities granted to companies have been limited or even eliminated. Housing subsidized by the Banque du Liban has been frozen since 2018, and the traditional banking financing circuits risk coming to a standstill until the financial and monetary system is stabilized for the long term.

In November 2020, the Association of Banks in Lebanon inaugurated the concept of “fresh funds” amounts in foreign currency deposited in special accounts set up for the occasion and not subject to any restrictions. On the market, there are multiple quotations of the Lebanese Pound[LL]/U.S. dollar [USD] exchange rate, which justifies the existence of a “black market.” The value of a bank check is exchanged for a fixed value of 3,900LL against 1USD, but the purchase of fresh dollars is made at an exchanger’s at the black market value (variable) against—for example—12,000LL in May 2021.

### **SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

We interviewed eight male entrepreneurs and six female entrepreneurs who work for a diverse clientele in various industries, including consulting (dietary, sports, legal, financial), hospitality (boutique hotel), apartment subletting, home delivery, printing services, and sales of software and hardware. The particularity of our sample is that it brings together entrepreneurs working in many sectors of activities, thereby underlining the impact of the multilevel crisis on different areas in Lebanon, including consultants and product sellers. This analysis shows the multilevel crisis has affected some sectors of activity and contributed to the development of others.

Our sample is made up almost entirely of very small enterprises (VSEs). Our interviewees range from 26 to 51 years of age and created their businesses between 2008 and 2020. Most have MBAs or PhDs.

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: RESPONSES REFLECTING ROBERT GREENE’S LAWS**

The 14 entrepreneurs we interviewed have chosen to adapt or rethink their businesses to survive, according to several circumstances and variables:

- Level of change
- Sector and nature of activities
- Availability of financial resources
- Date of creation of enterprise
- Level of optimism
- Subjective well-being
- Level of work–life balance

#### **Controlled Chaos Strategy: Level of Change**

Through this dimension, we highlight the sensibility and mind flexibility of Lebanese entrepreneurs. Speed and adaptability are crucial skills for fighting a war. To adapt, Lebanese entrepreneurs have been able to move with flexibility and make fast decisions. They must move fast to face uncertainty.

The war is constantly renewed, and high-level strategists are particularly sensitive to danger and opportunities. To adapt, the entrepreneurs that we interviewed demonstrate flexible minds. Eight of the entrepreneurs have decided to target foreign customers or markets outside the country (e.g., Cyprus), change their business models, or—following the Port explosion—expand their activities to regions outside Beirut. Exporting has become a condition for escaping banking restrictions, because the “fresh dollar” is partly saved. However, the other six entrepreneurs have innovated less; the changes they have adopted are limited to layoffs and recruitment or price increases and decreased supplies.

Through this dimension, we emphasize that the future belongs to those who know how to be flexible, fast, and unpredictable. It takes great strength of character to give way to chaos and uncertainty. We take the example of an entrepreneur who has chosen to internationalize by investing in several regions outside Lebanon (e.g., Cyprus, Europe) and outside Beirut (especially after the Beirut explosion). He has chosen to give the various bodies a clear mission in his global strategy and to allow his company’s directors carry out the strategy as they see fit, because small teams are faster, more creative, and more adaptable. In the end, this fluidity will bring him much more power and control than total domination over a single territory that is immersed in a multilevel crisis.

After the explosion, we invested outside the capital.... We changed our strategy. This requires a lot of resilience. We are in the process of creating another real estate investment management company.... The future of our company is promising because the company is expanding in several countries (in Cyprus soon) it will have a structure. (Roland)

Other entrepreneurs have created new business models to survive.

We have created a new business model, that of assisting clients to open offshore. (Talal)

I see my business in 5 years being worth a billion dollars. We are targeting the whole Middle East and Europe. (Christopher)

Our distribution services have developed; activity has increased throughout Lebanon. New offices have been created in Sayda and Sour. We recruit every month, and we improve the platform. (Yusr)

### **Sector and Nature of Activity**

The sector and nature of activity obviously influence the survival of Lebanese entrepreneurs during crises, especially because they are forced to avoid losing their customers and product offering as imports and maintenance costs increase. The health crisis has affected some sectors of activity and contributed to the development of others. Consulting, for example, is a form of entrepreneurial activity that does not require a supply of raw materials, and its imports and operating costs are minimal (especially during the economic crisis) compared with other entrepreneurial activities in which entrepreneurs are forced to maintain their machines and obtain supplies to meet customer demand. These economic activities have strong capitalization.

The changes in Lebanon are new; organizations in vulnerability are faced with a “VUCA” environment: volatile (unstable), uncertain (unpredictable), complex (multiple), and ambiguous (fuzzy). Teneau (2021) proposes that the main factor in the modification of the environment is organizational identity, an organizational component related to structure and strategy.

### **Management Like Water: Availability of Financial Resources**

Water adapts its shape to the flow, pushes rocks out of its way, polishes obstacles, does not stop, and never takes the same shape. The faster it is, the clearer it is. Eight of the entrepreneurs we interviewed have, in principle, sufficient financial resources because their entrepreneurial activities attract investors, especially during crises when they perceive opportunities and possibilities for expansion. For example, during the pandemic, there was an increase in the subletting of apartments because of the expansion of internal tourism during the crises and in home delivery. However, the six other entrepreneurs suffer from a lack of accessibility to financial resources.

Sarasvathy (2008), who elaborates on the effectual approach, argues that given sets of means can achieve different goals that are not necessarily known in the beginning but can lead to certain points being anticipated; according to work with successful entrepreneurs in medium-sized companies, the author shows they focus on the possibilities of using existing resources in their companies or money that is accessible in the ecosystem as instruments to define their goals gradually.

Such cognitive action raises the general question of “how?” It is no longer a matter of entrepreneurs knowing what they know from “what?” or “who?” questions (causal approach); rather, they must know what their organizational practices are, take the environment into account, and recognize what they know or imagine. Thus, an effectual approach—instead of considering the means implemented, whatever they may be—converges on the same goals, yet given sets of means can produce different goals. The financial resources the entrepreneurs possess determine their abilities to adapt to the multilevel crisis.

### **The Power of Fire: Subjective Well-Being**

Sometimes death is only caused by a lack of energy. (Napoleon).

To measure the well-being of Lebanese entrepreneurs, we used the WHO’s 5-item index (WHO-5), which is a subjective measure of the positive dimensions of mental health. This measure includes five items with six response options. The higher the score, the higher the level of well-being. We detect a link between well-being and the survival strategy adopted by the Lebanese entrepreneurs: six entrepreneurs who have low well-being scores have chosen to recruit team members, fire some of their members, or increase their prices. The eight other entrepreneurs, who have high well-being scores, have innovated by changing their business models, digitalizing, or expanding their business activities. Table 1 summarizes the contrasts.

*Table 1. Relationship between well-being of entrepreneurs and mechanisms of adaptation to change*

<b>Well-Being Score and Adaptation to Change</b>	
<b>Scores of 12.6–25</b>	<b>Scores of 0–12.5</b>
Business model change	Recruitment

Expansion of activities	Layoffs
Acceleration of digital transformation	Price increase

Both the strategies of war and this dimension teach us that when entrepreneurs are forced to face their fears, they get used to them and their anxiety lessens; when they realize they can overcome their anxiety, anxiety diminishes and they regain confidence. The more they are confronted with conflict and delicate situations, the more their minds become accustomed to battle—especially the current Lebanese battle that began in 2019 and is ongoing.

### **The Counterbalance Strategy: Work–Life Balance**

Man can lose more life by thought than by the gaping wound. (Thomas Hardy)

Presence of mind plays an essential role in the realm of the unexpected. War is nothing but a superior ability to tame the unpredictable. In the heat of battle, the mind tends to lose its balance. Lebanese entrepreneurs confront a multilevel crisis, all at the same time: unexpected exchange rate variations, pandemic doubts, competition, pressure to keep team members safe and satisfied, and danger of responding emotionally with fear, depression, or frustration. It is vital to maintain presence of mind and preserve mental powers, whatever the circumstances. In particular, the entrepreneurs must actively resist the emotional pull of the moment, by staying decisive, confident, and aggressive no matter what happens. They must toughen their minds, by confronting to adversity and learning to detach themselves from chaos. Presence of mind steers them clear and keeps them on course.

We asked the 14 entrepreneurs to assign a score between 1 and 7 to the balance of time they spent at work and in other aspects of life; eight entrepreneurs, who assigned scores between 5.255 and 7, enjoy greater work–life balance and have innovated and expanded their activities more than the six other entrepreneurs, who assigned scores between 1 and 5.256

We highlight throughout this retained dimension that entrepreneurs have built themselves some security, even during tough times and crises. Entrepreneurs who have high well-being scores have been able to attract new investors, come up with new business models, and find new investing projects outside Beirut or internationally. They looked for international clients to get fresh dollars and initiate contacts with partners outside the country. Some interviewees have created new online master classes to attract international clients; the advantage of online platforms is that once they are created, they generate revenue with little effort. In contrast, the entrepreneurs with lower well-being scores have innovated less; the only changes they have adopted are increasing the prices of their products and services or hiring or firing staff.

### **Fight the Present War: Date of Creation of Enterprise**

It is difficult to erase the memories of the previous war. Previous fights remain a danger even if the warriors have emerged victorious. The conflict is still fresh in entrepreneurs' minds. If they have won, they tend to have used the same strategies, because success makes people lazy and smug; if they have lost, they may be undecided and nervous. Therefore, the best strategy or law of war is to not think about the past; the entrepreneur needs distance and detachment. They should do their best to erase the experience from their minds. Our research underlines the superior ability of new ventures to innovate and adapt to the current multilevel crisis.



At the heart of combat, a trained mind risks falling behind by focusing on what it has learned and not on what is happening during the battle. Entrepreneurs who created their enterprises between 2015 and 2020 have changed their business models, digitalized, and expanded their strategic activities. However, entrepreneurs who created their enterprises between 2008 and 2014 have innovated less. This finding shows that newly created companies are more flexible in adapting their business plans; they are open to new experiences and are able to get the most out of them, because education is easier than rehabilitation.

Therefore, we encourage entrepreneurs to be in tune with the times and adapt to them. Sensing and anticipating requires work and observation, as well as a certain flexibility to adapt to trends. As enterprises age, they must change their styles regularly to avoid the pitfalls of previous wars. Emotional control, internal discipline, and toughness are skills that come only through practice, experience, and even a little trial-and-error suffering.

During the multilevel crises, small enterprises must shake themselves off; they must be liberated from the past by going against the flow of what they commonly or usually do, because this multilevel crisis is unprecedented. We encourage them to place themselves in unusual circumstances, such as by innovating their processes; reinventing their business models; repairing from scratch; digitalizing; or looking internationally, because the locals no longer can help. In these situations, their minds must deal with a new reality and come back to life. The mind is like an army that must adapt to the complexity and chaos of modern warfare by becoming more fluid and flexible.

Constant movement must be the entrepreneurs' new model. Rigid tactics are discouraged; SMEs are encouraged to look at the problem from different angles according to the situations they are in, to remain in motion, and to avoid being the targets of their competitors/enemies.

In summary, this retained dimension, as well as Greene's (2006) strategies of war, teaches us that entrepreneurs should have childlike minds that never stop. Children's minds are open to new experiences. All great strategists behave a little like children. The reason is simple: High-level managers see things as they are and are particularly sensitive to dangers and opportunities.

### **The Detached Buddha Tactic: Optimism**

Being able to control one's imagination at intense moments is a crucial skill. We asked the 14 interviewees to rate their levels of optimism regarding the development of their business for the next year on a scale from -10 to +10. Entrepreneurs who are more optimistic have innovated more, and they estimate the probability of positive events as greater than the probability of negative events. Good entrepreneurs, similar to pilots, do not waste their time worrying about economic situations they cannot control. They focus on themselves, try to adapt, and adjust their planned routes by innovating. Above all, with optimistic minds, they focus on a determination to find proper solutions by adjusting their business models or overall strategies. Both readers and entrepreneurs can take this information forward by adopting a warrior mindset, which is optimistic, positive, agile, and innovative. The optimistic entrepreneurs we interviewed have changed their directions in the whirlwind of unexpected events, because they operate in a context in which it is impossible to predict how the wind will blow.

## CONCLUSION

Our study aims to understand the mechanisms of adaptation of Lebanese entrepreneurs during the current multilevel crisis. We conducted semi-structured interviews with, and administered a questionnaire to, 14 subjects, including entrepreneurs and heads of Lebanese VSEs, to understand how they are adapting to change in the face of a multilevel crisis. We classify the factors that affect their mechanisms of adaptation: date of creation of activity, sector of activity, level of change, availability of financial resources, subjective well-being, work–life balance, and optimism regarding company development over the next year. We interpret these factors through Greene’s (2006) 33 strategies of war: sensibility and mind flexibility, management like water, power of fire, counterbalance strategy, and the detached Buddha tactic.

The contribution of our work is that it addresses the question of resilience and adaptation to change by highlighting the particularities of entrepreneurs (especially their ambitions and personal constraints) and their usefulness for better understanding coping mechanisms in the face of crises. Throughout this chapter, we connect the warrior’s mindset as presented by Greene (2006) to the entrepreneur’s ability to find solutions and adapt to the multilevel crisis.

At the practical level, our results propose that it is important to concentrate on entrepreneurs as the main actors and encourage support for them at the psychological level, which could be provided by experts such as business or even life coaches. However, all great generals, from Julius Caesar to Patton, have at some point lost their nerve and been stronger for winning it back. The more they have lost their balance, the more they know how to right themselves. Following this study, we are interested in conducting a longitudinal study to follow up on the survival and adaptation strategies of Lebanese entrepreneurs during 2022.

Being “cold-blooded” is like riding a bicycle; once you learn it, you never forget it. Therefore, a research perspective that we propose would follow up on this study with entrepreneurs who were optimistic in 2020 and 2021 (our period of data collection) to investigate their abilities to survive and remain steady during the multilevel crisis, in a context that grows ever more turbulent.

Furthermore, historical figures known for their composure, such as Alexander the Great, Ulysses S. Grant, and Winston Churchill, acquired such composure through adversity, by trying, and by making mistakes. Even if these figures were particularly strong, they still had to work hard to acquire this quality. If the current Lebanese situation is regarded as an exercise and a means for Lebanese entrepreneurs to toughen up and control their emotions, our main questions for the future are: What have Lebanese entrepreneurs learned from this difficult exercise, and what skills have they acquired?

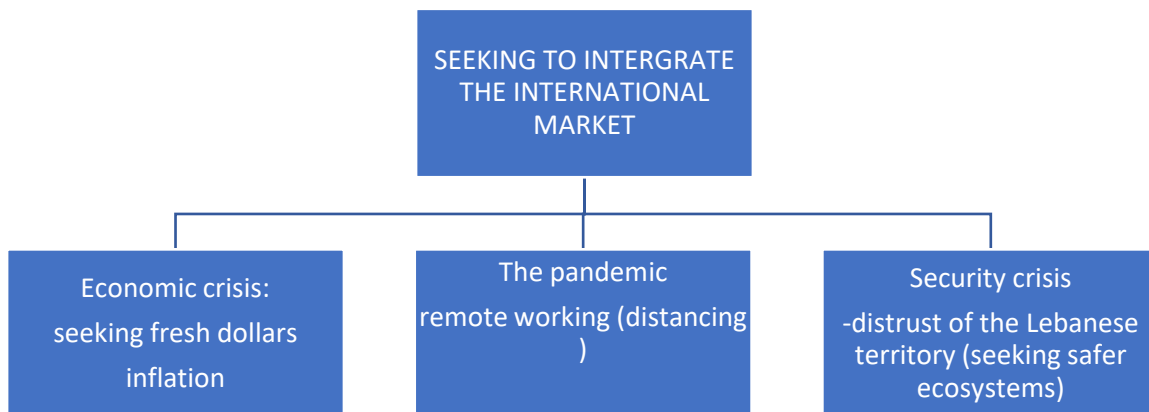
The strategies of war teach us that nothing is worse than feeling dependent on others. Dependency makes us vulnerable to all sorts of emotions—betrayal, disappointment, and frustration. It is disastrous to mental balance. Therefore, according this lesson, we are interested in studying how Lebanese entrepreneurs rely on their teams to survive and continue. How did they improve their abilities and trust their own judgment?

The group of entrepreneurs we interview are characterized by their orientation to the international market; they source foreign currencies by diversifying their bank accounts, which reduces production costs in Lebanese territory. Their will, and their vision, have been

facilitated by the COVID-19 crisis and the containment and curfew measures imposed on remote work everywhere in the world. In short, the crisis context in general encourages the vision of these entrepreneurs to be internationalized. Figure 1 depicts this entrepreneurial orientation.

*Figure 1. Entrepreneurs' orientation to internationalization encouraged by the multilevel crisis in Lebanon*

Source:



Source: the authors

In this study, we highlight the importance of the entrepreneur as the main actor. However, continued work could consider another actor, such as the environment or ecosystem and its representation by the entrepreneur (Julien, 1996). We are interested in studying the environment that appears as an open arena in which competitors compete and try to obtain a competitive advantage. We propose a contextual reexamination of this ecosystem (Henrekson & Johansson, 2010), in which Lebanese entrepreneurs who have chosen to internationalize and digitalize their entrepreneurial activities are obliged to compete with international enterprises that already have experience and resources. We can also envisage other actors of entrepreneurship, such as stakeholders who participate directly or indirectly in decisions as trajectories of action require.

The ecosystem plays a secondary role that may complement the seven dimensions that we study. The importance of networking could be added, when reality calls for it, to understand change as projects progress and to adjust to new needs and better cope with them, according to Razafindrazaka & Julien, 2019; Whispering & Dussuc, 2015 as cited by Schmitt, C., Pierre-André, J.(2020). Our future research projects aim to understand how partnerships can evolve into competitors and vice versa, and how Lebanese entrepreneurs who have chosen to

internationalize can survive the present internationalization trend encouraged by the pandemic.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Business Model:** Holistic view of how a business creates/designs value, delivers it to the market, and captures value in return

**Change:** To make the form, nature, content, future course, etc., of (something) different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone

**Entrepreneurship:** Dynamic process of vision, change, and creation of wealth by either an individual person or a team, that identifies a business opportunity and acquires and deploys the necessary resources required for its exploitation along with risks to be assumed

**Management:** Person or persons who control and direct the affairs of a business, institution, or other entity.

**Resource:** Source of supply, support, or aid, especially one that can be readily drawn upon when needed

**Small business:** Profit-seeking enterprise or concern that is independently owned and operated, has a limited number of employees, and is not nationally dominant in its field

**Strategy:** Plan, method, or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result

**War:** Conflict carried on by force of arms, as between nations or between parties within a nation; warfare, as by land, sea, or air

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Interview Guide**

1. Full name of the interviewee (entrepreneur)
2. Family status and number of children
3. Age
4. Last diploma obtained
5. Official company name
6. Nature of business activity
7. Date of creation of the company
8. Number of current employees in the company
9. Number of employees in 2019
10. What changes have you opted for since the protests and revolution started in 2019 (type of change: organizational/technological)?
11. Have you temporarily or permanently closed your business?
12. Have you been working remotely during the pandemic? If so, do you plan to continue working remotely?
13. What is the impact of the August 4 explosion on your business?
14. What is the impact of currency depreciation on your business?
15. Have you opted for an online consultation/sale since the pandemic?
16. Have you adapted your plans for the years 2020 and 2021?
17. Have you identified new business opportunities during the pandemic?
18. Has your business situation improved during the pandemic?
19. What are the weaknesses of your business today?
20. How do you see your business after the end of the pandemic and the end of the crises?
21. Are you more optimistic or pessimistic?
22. Have you thought about starting another business to overcome the crisis periods?
23. Are you afraid of entrepreneurial failure?
24. What do you fear the most?
25. Are you thinking or have you thought about giving up your entrepreneurial career?
26. Are you or do you plan to become an employee in a company?
27. How do you see the future of your business?
28. How do you see the future of your career?
29. What lessons have you learned from the pandemic and all the current crises?
30. Are you worried about your own health and that of your family?
31. How do you deal with stress and exhaustion?
32. Are you satisfied with being an entrepreneur?
33. How does your network of relationships and your immediate environment support you emotionally and psychically?
34. How do you balance work and personal life?

### **Appendix 2: Measurement Scales**

Table A2: list of variables and measurement scales



<b>Variable</b>	<b>Measurement scale</b>
Well-being	World Health Organization subjective well-being measuring (WHO-5)
Quality of sleep (PSQI)	Buysse et al. 1989; Carpenter and Andrykowski (1998)
Exhaustion subscale (MBI-GS).	Maslach et al. (1996)
Resilience (engagement in entrepreneurial career)	Adaptation of Carson and Bedeian (1994)
Stress (PSS-4)	Wartting et al. (2013)
Coping mechanism (task oriented, avoidance oriented and emotion oriented)	CMHA (2019) Cosway et al. (2000) Endres and Kleiner (1990)
Fear of the unknown	Carleton et al. (2007)