

COVID-19 Pandemic and Performance: Empirical Study of Integrated Remote Site Management Services in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

SENAJ AVDIC

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3795-7482>

avdicsenaj@outlook.com

Catholic University of Murcia, UCAM
Spain

HOSAM AZAT ELSAMAN

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5554-8052>

hossamezzat101@gmail.com

Catholic University of Murcia, UCAM
Spain

LIZA GERNAL

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6451-8066>

Liza.g@westford.org.uk

Westford University College
United Arab Emirates

Originality: 100% • Grammar Check: 97% • Plagiarism: 0%



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ABSTRACT

Generally and in the UAE, businesses worldwide are particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SME companies in Dubai UAE faced a very tough challenge to deal with the new circumstances of lockdown and curfews in running the international business. The purpose of the current study was to

analyze the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Business Performance. The theoretical frameworks for this study are Process Theory of Internationalization (PTI), Uppsala-model (the U-model), and internalization theories and the link with IB theories applications nowadays. The quantitative study applied a nonexperimental, deductive approach and explanatory correlation design, and Snowball sampling was used to select stakeholders of integrated remote site management (IRSM) services in Dubai, UAE. Data was collected at a single phase using a cross-sectional survey instrument and analyzed using inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS. The survey results revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic did not significantly change the efficiency performance of the IRSM stakeholders. Stakeholders' confidence in their strategic leaders did not decrease while working under the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study did not account for any changes in employee or leaders' behavior over time. This Empirical study findings add value to the limited literature on the correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategic leadership of international businesses. The paper's practical implications would be further study on strategic leadership in IB and efficiency performances during global pandemics.

Keywords — Business Management, Remote Site Management services nonexperimental, deductive approach, explanatory correlation design, UAE

INTRODUCTION

“Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions taken depend on the ideas lying around” (Friedman, 1982). The specific aims were to analyze the extent to which international business (IB) stakeholders were prepared to work under stress, constraints, and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; to determine the extent managers and leaders of IB efficiently navigate during uncertainty, and to evaluate the confidence of IB strategic leaders of IRSM during and after COVID-19 pandemic.

IBs have always been coupled with a certain degree of risk and uncertainty as it compels former domestic firms to abandon their secure market zones in search of new and greener pastures in overseas markets (Sharma, Leung, Kingshott, Davcik, & Cardinali, 2020) While risk is typically described as erratic but probable and to a certain degree measurable occurrence or circumstance connected with the internationalization of business that might harm the organization (i.e., national,

political, cultural, and foreign exchange risks). Uncertainty, in the context of IB is subjective and denotes a complete lack of knowledge about anticipations of future events that may affect the firm (Eduardsen & Marinova, 2020; Sharma et al., 2020).

COVID-19, as a global health and economic pandemic, falls into an uncertain and unprecedented crisis category, novel to modern human history, affecting economic standards and social norms, sparing no country of its effect for the last twenty months. Strategic leaders of IBs have encountered new and extraordinary challenges to mitigate and manage the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business performance and underlying strategies in line with the global reputation economy (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020). Both developed and developing economies are experiencing the worst economic recession since the great depression, emphasizing significant disruptions in countries particularly reliant on travel, F&B, tourism, logistics, and entertainment (Gopinath, 2020). The COVID 19 pandemic has altered people's lifestyles, businesses, and communication. Limitations caused by quarantine, social distance, and lockdowns forced IBs to evolve to keep pace with the criteria of the new normal in the digital and low-touch economy (Iza, 2021). Besides the global GDP decline, societal and generational division is more significant than ever, resulting in social concerns and behavioral conflicts at all levels of society.

The modern IB organizations emerged after the global crisis caused by World War II. Since then, IB strategy has been developed on the foundation of four concepts, as stated by Verbeke and Yuan (2021): "The firm-specific advantages (FSAs), country-specific advantages (CSAs), benefits of subsidiary integration, and a requisite tradeoff between international and product diversification."

For several decades, strategic management was absent from the FSAs and only in 2015 that a wider perspective of FSAs advocates for management quality as one of the fundamental components, as argued by Aharoni (2015, as cited in Verbeke & Yuan, 2021). Furthermore, Verbeke and Yuan (2021) suggest that mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic requires a broader FSAs definition regarding management quality. The argument is that IB governance should not be limited to the top management only (i.e., CEOs, CFO's, GMs) but also inclusive of the Board of Directors. Moreover, the acquisition, preparation, and retention of key staff, including top management and the board of directors, are critical to the firm's growth (Casson, 2018).

However, this area of study has often been separated from conventional IB studies and treated as multinational human resource management. Furthermore,

it is often overlooked that many major decisions in a company are made by individuals (entrepreneurs) who excel in making critical decisions that require the investment of vast resources under circumstances of considerable uncertainty. People are important not just because a company's policies affect many people, including consumers, vendors, shareholders, and workers (Casson, 2018).

The overreaching research question asked, "To what extent is there a relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the work efficiency of the IB stakeholders, including the level of trust they have given to their top management to mitigate uncertainty successfully." The research was designed to comprehensively investigate the IB academic theory on the role of strategic leadership as a foundation for the hypotheses development and apply the quantitative method to discover whether the relationship with the impact of COVID-19 was statistically significant.

The research problem investigated was the performance of IB stakeholders, emphasizing the level of confidence entrusted to the IB strategic leaders. The focus is on the IB stakeholders from integrated remote site management services (IRMS) in Dubai, UAE, and their response to the vicissitudes of the macro-economy. Academic literature on strategic leaders and internationalization has been scarce. Despite the fact that much has been written about leadership over the years, we have only recently started to focus on strategic leadership at the top of corporations (Hitt, Keats, & Yücel, 2003). This field has yet to be closely investigated in the context of our technologically advanced economies and the fact that the pandemic crisis is not yet over. Therefore, this current study aims to fill this gap in the literature by addressing the strategic leadership of IBs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to address the following objectives, (1) to analyze changes in IB Integrated Remote Site Management service efficiency during the COVID 19 pandemic in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and (2) to evaluate the level of confidence of IB strategic leaders of integrated remote site management services during the pandemic in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

FRAMEWORK

International Business: Research and Theories

International business (IB) as an academic discipline has been practiced worldwide for decades. The academic interest in IB arose after the global crisis

of the Second World War, primarily in the USA, as large, mature, powerful multinational companies (MNC) expanded their involvement in rebuilding the European economy and restructuring efforts (Roberts & Dörrenbächer, 2012). Theories related to IB were developed because orthodox neoclassical theories were unsuccessful in interpreting unexpected MNC growth in the post-1945 era (Rugman, Verbeke, Nguyen, 2011). Value of US foreign direct investment (FDI) increased sharply from \$11.8 billion to \$78.1 billion (Ajami & Goddard, 2014). Corollary, IBs had become involved more than ever before in the complexity of cross-border economic transactions involving currency, political risk, the interchange of position, and ownership in a global production system (Casson, 2018). Moreover, IBs had to engage in international cultural settings different from their own. They had to deal with international development variations, social values, trust, and ethics.

Consequently, research in the IB field by its nature espoused an interdisciplinary approach and, as such, became engaging and academically significant vis-à-vis other disciplines. Major topics of IB research have been focusing on trading blocs and international institutions (Casson, 2018), hence dominated by managerial issues of investing abroad, flows of FDI, and manufacturing productivity (Roberts & Dörrenbächer, 2012).

Casson (2018) argues that the most prominent contributor to the emerging IB theory and strategy research was John Dunning, who noticed higher productivity in the companies operating in the USA in comparison to their UK counterparts. It led to the creation of famous advantage terms, namely ownership advantages and location advantages. The third advantage to become part of the well-known *Eclectic paradigm* Dunning formulated was the internationalization advantage hence finalizing the three OLI factors: ownership, location, and internalization (Ferreira, Pinto, Serra, & Filipe, 2011)

The significance of the eclectic paradigm in IB theory rests in the formulated model, which explains why MNCs exist, why MNCs desire to manufacture overseas using OLI criteria, and why MNCs are more efficient in host countries than domestic companies (Casson, 2018). Therefore, the essence and foundation of IBs early frameworks guided MNCs to use their competitive advantages and utilize their investment to engage in international business activity. Subsequently, it was assumed that internationalization is unsuitable for SMEs or any other business establishment which was not MNC). The SMEs lacked the necessary resources to achieve competitive advantage for such ventures, hence perceived more like a threat than an opportunity.

Evolution of Strategic Leadership in IB theories

Dunning and his contemporaries excluded non-MNCs from the IB domain and also failed to include and investigate the role of strategic leadership and senior managers (entrepreneurs) in the process of decision-making on internationalization. Situations confronting the firm were considered the primary determinants of management practices and corporate consequences in the 1960s and early 1970s. Managers were thought to have no power to make decisions that would impact the firm’s success compared to factors in the firm’s external climate (Al–Aali & Teece, 2014).

Nevertheless, the development aspect of internationalization continues to be a subject of detailed studies (Casson, 2018) argues that those studies are still assuming that internationalization should be built on economies of scale and huge MNCs. The most prominent model, Process Theory of Internationalization (PTI), called the Uppsala model (the U-model), initially was developed by Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul in 1975 and complemented the model was a continuation of Hymer’s analytical approach of firm-specific advantages (FSA), (Rugman, Verbeke, & Yuan, 2011) adopting longitudinal research approach of Nordic companies, containing four different and gradual stages of corporate internationalization: FSAs can be maneuvered via direct export or agencies, as well as employ FDI into wholly-owned subsidiaries or international joint.



Figure 1. Process Model of Internationalization (Laine & Kock, 2000).

The significance of PTI for IB leadership scope of the study is not only an intelligent way to analyze MNCs entry mode selection, but it also puts a greater focus on MNCs network thinking, strategic management process challenges, and the roles of parent company managers (Autio, 2018; Rugman, & Verbeke, (2004) Consequently, as Rugman et al. (2011) suggest, the role of international subsidiaries emerged as the next primary focus of many IB authors, and the most prominent place belongs to Bartlett and Ghoshal (1986), authors of the book ‘Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution.’ Their work was characterized as the brand-new area of international strategic management, and Rugman et al. (2011, p. 758) stated: “Therefore, it has been argued that an MNE national subsidiary facing a specific external environment with unique

challenges, and commanding an idiosyncratic set of competencies, should be managed differently from other national subsidiaries.”

According to Chhotray, Sivertsson & Tell (2018), managerial tasks in all types of organizations are quite similar; nevertheless, it appears that IB executives have mainly entrepreneurial attitude, greater dependency on the working team members, and higher risk tolerance in order to be competitive at the international markets. Stojadinović-Jovanović, Krstić & Marković (2020) argue that managing international business operations regularly is more complex than managing business operations within national borders because changes in business circumstances and environments, particularly those associated with recessions and crises, make it more complicated, hazardous, and uncertain.

Impact of Globalization on IB Theories

Worldwide economy and globalization have had a key impact on IB agenda since the 1980s, and the views on corporate competitiveness became accentuated (Buckley & Casson, 1998; Rugman & Verbeke, 2004). The more blatant stance of national governments concerning contending in a global economy resulted in an emphasis on competitiveness and the expansion into new markets of the former socialist countries. Buckley (2002) argues that more systematic models of global strategy were required to replace the irregular, add-hoc, externally oriented approaches to international strategic planning (ISP). The author further argues that the numerous ways of doing IB, in particular, strategic alliances and international joint ventures (JV), had to be apprehended by an all-inclusive theoretical approach. Subsequently, that era was marked by extensive ‘transition’ studies of socialist nations’ integration into global capitalism (McDougall & Oviatt, 1991). Moreover, numerous Western entrepreneurs were engaged in knowledge transfer (Western expertise and economic savoir-faire) to Eastern Europe and other emerging markets, utilizing even popular business press to write about entrepreneurial experiences in the USA (McDougall & Oviatt, 1991). Corollary, IBs FSAs amalgamated managerial expertise as an exclusive advantage of IB in emerging markets, as Adarkwah & Malonaes (2020) pointed out. The scholars stated, “to cope with competition in uncertain and constantly changing environments; there should be easy access to cheaper capital; a stronger commitment to networks, such as those with diaspora communities; and political connections.”

Hence, potential operational and financial risks associated with globalization were identified, anticipated, and to a certain degree measured. However, the

broader influence and impact of unprecedented situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic remain uncertain (Sharma et al., 2020)

Progression of IB Strategic Leadership Along With Technological Innovations, Network Relationship, and Knowledge Resources

The entrepreneurial leadership qualities were further embedded into the IB field by Jones and Coviello (2005) with a dynamic model based on 'cyclical behavior' in which internationalization is viewed as a temporal entrepreneurial performance. Therefore, a company's success would be influenced by the entrepreneur's and firm's internationalization activity over time, moderated by the environment (Zolfaghari, Rialp, & Nowiński, 2013).

Casson (2018) suggests that the acquisition, preparation, and retention of key staff are critical to the firm's growth. Nonetheless, this level of study is often separated from conventional IB studies and treated as multinational human resource management. Furthermore, though often overlooked, many major decisions in a company are made by individuals (entrepreneurs) who excel in making critical decisions that require the investment of vast resources under circumstances of considerable uncertainty. People are important not just because a company's policies affect many people, including consumers, vendors, shareholders, and workers.

Strategic IB Leadership during a Crisis

The recognition of managerial and leadership roles in IBs gained its momentum in early 2000, and coincidentally, during the same period, numerous business crises (caused by political, health, natural disasters) have occurred, including major ones such as the bomb blast on September 11, 2004, Boxing Day Tsunami in Indonesia and 2009 Global Financial Crisis. Unlike COVID-19, all these crises were limited to individual organizations, restricted geographical locations, or a single industry. The pandemic phenomenon experienced, primarily as a health crisis, has become a global threat to the economy and business people are accustomed to. Both developed and developing economies are experiencing the worst economic recession since the great depression, causing significant disruptions in countries reliant on travel, hospitality, tourism, and entertainment (Gopinath, 2020). According to Waters (2013), scholars disagree about the leadership concept definition as it has different meanings to different people resulting in over 65 theories in the past 50 years. Gandolfi and Stone (2016) argue that very little attention had been given to more comprehensive analytical

studies of leadership practices during those critical times. Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee (2014) argue that leadership is a subject that is a concern to all businesses. Nevertheless, how to build leaders and leadership as quickly and efficiently as possible affects them the most, not whatever leadership philosophy or paradigm is “correct” (which can never be determined definitively). As a result, this is a vital area of academic study and practice, with many unresolved (and still unknown) questions to be addressed.

However, even if academics were more involved in such discourse, nobody would have an opportunity to study circumstances of such magnitude. The COVID 19 pandemic has been a threat for almost eighteen months, and according to all forecasts, the economic recovery to return to the pre-pandemic state will take more than three years.

In a survey by CultureWizard (2018) interviewed 1620 employees, both team leaders and team members, from 90 different countries about their experiences of working on global virtual teams in multinational companies. The results showed that team members are valuable team components and essential for virtual team success. However, only 22% of the respondents were trained to do their work in their geographically distributed teams, and 90% of them had team members from two or more different cultures. Team leaders' responses indicated that only 20% were trained to lead from a distance, while only 15% described themselves as effective. Many IBs had to change their business strategies instantly to stay alive. With social distancing and the inability to work from offices, the first decisions were to enable and manage their employees while working from home. This abrupt change created new challenges of distance working for leading IB teams. Hence, managers have had to decide on many important strategic issues over a brief period; who should stay in the office and work from home?; Organizational priorities, and how to communicate those priorities to employees in the best possible way? (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

In a world of globalization supported by fast, innovative technological progressions and progressively adaptable work courses of action, current workplaces are like never, described as virtual teams grouped toward a shared objective and whose communication is based on electronic media (Handke, Klonek, Parker, & Kauffeld, 2020) According to the Euromonitor International Voice of Industry research (2020), the COVID-19 has initiated tremendous demand for digital tools to increase corporate sustainability and lessen the impact of the pandemic. Across five different industries covered by the research, on average, 70% of surveyed companies are planning to have long-term work-

from-home strategies and consequently, more investments are allocated to digital solutions (EMI, 2020).

Jacques (2010) argues that nothing can harm an organization's status, standing, and financial stability more quickly and profoundly than the effect of a significant crisis. However, numerous organizations tend to designate leadership duty to the middle managers while the executives progressively monitor at the leadership table. According to Ernst & Young's (2019) global survey of 500 board members and CEO's only 20% of respondents believed that their organizations could ensure a quality response to a large crisis. Shortly after the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, 80% of respondents were justifiably particularly concerned regarding the financial resilience of their organizations, reliability of supply chain management and human talent concerns. The findings portrayed disturbance in social relationships by which business organizations are defined. Their accomplishments depend on successful collaborations between leaders and followers at every managerial level. Better social relationships within the organization will undoubtedly result in better outcomes. Therefore, the effectiveness of leaders is a function of organizational success and input are the determinant of organizational effectiveness (Sanders & Davey, 2011).

In search of the leadership model and theory for the answers and guidance on practices during the crisis experienced today, the literature review presented various categories and subcategories. The rationale of leaders' role to motivate followers to participate in achieving organizational activities willingly is sufficiently described in existing theories and models such as autocratic, democratic, charismatic, transactional, transformational, and others. However, the theories or models emphasized the need for followers to serve the leader without addressing the importance of collective work and leadership roles as an attitude of service to followers (Caligiuri et al., 2020)

The leadership function of management in IB has been the subject of numerous studies. The current emphasis is on developing emotional intelligence, empathy, a positive attitude to life, and diversity as key factors for leaders to create a nurturing workplace (Pinos, Twigg, Parayitam, & Olson, 2013)

The challenge for organizations is to provide holistic individuals who will consciously collaborate in the decision-making processes during or after the COVID 19 pandemic. It is attested for organizations to accept the change in the economic environment and turn around, so this global threat is converted into an opportunity to create better leaders for tomorrow.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research approach as the most accurate research method to understand the nature of the relationship between two or more variables and results can be generalized to a larger sample population (Saunders, Lewis, Philip, & Thornhill, 2019). Quantitative data is numerical measurable with specifically focused variables so that their correlation eventually be explored via experiments, surveys, correlation comparison, and quasi-experiments (Morgan, 2007).

The independent variable was perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the dependents variables were an employee working efficiency employee confidence in their strategic leadership. Because the variables

An axiological assumption of the present study is that social data findings have an objective authenticity separated from the subjective influence of the researcher has an external role in avoiding bias and impact on the findings. It is widely used in statistical analysis with a deductive approach in the research process, developing and testing inquiry from general to a specific outcome to back it up or reject it (Saunders et al., 2007).

This research applied a deductive approach to investigate the hypotheses and explain the relationship between variables. The quantitative investigation is predominantly guided by a close-ended questions survey (Morgan, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019). The process of data validation is guided by exterior standards such as statistics, previous investigations, and academic juries (Saliya, 2016).

The study adopted a positivist paradigm, predominantly exploiting literature as the main source to bring out research questions and hypotheses. Positivism is based on the view that the empirical scientific method of collecting observable and measurable data is the path in discovering the truth and copper-bottomed source of authentic knowledge (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Hence, the research methodology is executed by interpreting research data and evidence through reason and logic applicable to explaining different phenomena that are constant in time and context (Bryman & Bell 2011; Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Data Gathering

To collect data for the study, an online survey was used in accordance with positivist principles, notably objectivity. The online survey link was distributed

during April and May 2021 via social networks such as LinkedIn, applying convenience sampling from individuals working in IRSM. The final sample of 86 stakeholders was achieved, and they all have been working in virtual settings of Dubai, UAE. The upsides of utilizing online surveys for research design are cost-effectiveness, convenience, reach, and scalability. It is also anonymous, objective, accessible, time-saving, leads to rapid findings, mandatory or compelled completion of survey questions, and more accurate data. As responses are collected in an online database and free of manual manipulation by the researcher, as argued by Evans & Mathur (2018). Hence, the researcher maintained a value-free viewpoint by using the online survey without impacting or influencing survey participants.

Ethical Protocol

The researcher informed the participants in advance about the nature and requirements of the study. In addition, participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided through their participation. The data collected is available to authorized persons only.

The survey questions were sent to 100 individuals, and 86 responded. For the questionnaire on leadership during the pandemic, responses to all items were collected on a five-point Likert-type scale. Responses on the rating scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Sampling

Trustworthiness, credibility, and quality of the study depend on a suitable paradigm, methodology, methods, information sources, and accurate research sample selection (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010). Regarding information sources for research, the main classifications fall into primary and secondary sources (Saunders et al., 2019). Linear snowball sampling was applied by selecting stakeholders of IRSM in Dubai, UAE, using a questionnaire.

Primary information is collected explicitly for the particular research (including a description of the methodology, data, and analysis of findings) in question, while secondary sources (i.e., books, position papers, literature reviews, etc.) are those which are readily available and collected for other studies (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, to accurately answer the research question suitable sampling strategy should be applied.

The suitable demographic was chosen based on the objective of the study; a research population is a well-defined group of people who share similar,

common, binding characteristics. In statistics, a sampling frame is a device or source material from which the sample is drawn.

Adults who met the study's eligibility requirements made up the sample: adults living and working in IB IRSM services companies in Dubai, UAE, were included. Therefore, anyone who did not satisfy these requirements was ruled out. As a result, the sample frame included 100 full-time, senior, and middle-level managers from IBs in Dubai, UAE. Participants, both non-executive and executive managers, were required to have a manager, or a higher-up, to rate in the survey.

Design limitations

According to Pedersen and Nielsen (2016), online surveys are associated with limitations involving response bias and the inability to confirm the accuracy of responses. Furthermore, because the researcher did not have direct contact with the participants, extra steps to validate the survey replies using independent data were impossible. Despite the limitations of online surveys design, collecting data from study participants through the Internet has become commonplace among academics (Saleh & Bista, 2017). The authors argue that faster response rates and cheaper survey facilitation costs are two primary reasons for the rise in online survey utilization. After evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of online surveys, it was decided to employ one in the current study while mitigating the possible drawbacks. Several design constraints were linked to the quantitative research design utilized in the current study. A limited number of components were assessed, so the study could not cover all aspects of leadership. The study was also unable to quantify abstract notions related to organizations' dynamic social interactions as qualitative research appropriate for the study area would be a more suitable approach (Jamshed, 2014).

Another drawback of the current study's methodology was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. The researcher only collected data at a single moment by using a cross-sectional survey instrument. As a result, the study did not account for any employee or supervisor behavior changes. In academic research, cross-sectional surveys are widely used (Spector, 2019). Therefore, this restriction was not predicted to influence the study negatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The excel sheets of inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS statistical software were used to analyze quantitative data results gathered via an online survey.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant change in IB IRSM service efficiency during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Table 1. Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances mean for employee performance [MEP] and mean for covid 19 [MC-19]

	Variable 1 MEP	Variable 2 MC-19
Mean	3.391304348	3.387681159
Variance	0.686132424	0.839221014
Observations	86	86
Pooled Variance	0.762676719	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	136	
t Stat	0.02436858	
P (T<=t) one-tail	0.490297165	
t Critical one-tail	1.656134988	
P (T<=t) two-tail	0.98059433	
t Critical two-tail	1.977560777	

The results indicated that P-value was above 0.05; hence the null Hypothesis H0 “there is no significant change in employee IB IRSM service efficiency during the pandemic in Dubai” was approved.

Hypothesis 2: there is no change in the confidence rate of employees in the IRSM services category towards leaders and managers during the pandemic.

Table 2. Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances mean for employee confidence [MEC] and mean for strategic leadership [MLEDS]

	Variable 1 MEC	Variable 2 MLEDS
Mean	3.51884058	3.504348
Variance	0.685080989	0.87954
Observations	86	86
Pooled Variance	0.782310315	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	136	
t stat	0.096243394	
P (T<=t) one-tail	0.461734472	
t Critical one-tail	1.656134988	
P (T<=t) two-tail	0.923468945	
t Critical two-tail	1.977560777	

Statistically executed by Author. 2021

The results showed that P-value was above 0.05; therefore, the null Hypothesis H₀, no significant change in employee confidence towards the senior management during the COVID 19 pandemic time, was approved.

Table 3. T-test of two samples of MEP and M-C19

		MEP	MLEDS
MEP	Pearson Correlation	1	.662**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	86	86
MLEDS	Pearson Correlation	.662**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	86	86

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically executed by Author. 2021

Results showed a significant positive correlation value of 0.662** between two variables, employee performance and proper strategic leadership style during

the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis confirms no obvious changes in the efficiency performance of IRSM during the pandemic.

Table 4. T-test of two samples of MEC and MLEDS

Correlations		MLEDS	MEC
MLEDS	Pearson Correlation	1	.970**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	86	86
MEC	Pearson Correlation	.970**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	86	86

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically executed by Author. 2021

The results on the correlation coefficient analysis was 0.970**. Therefore there was a positive correlation between the levels of confidence towards strategic leadership while working under constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The empirical research findings indicate a direct correlation between strategic leadership and the performance of IB stakeholders. Variables used in the research for IRSM are critical, not only for IBs. They are also applicable in various industries as employees’ readiness, motivation, and satisfaction with their leadership in the context of the unprecedented global crisis have been essential for the success of any organization. The study findings indicated a strong association among dependent variables of employees’ confidence, remotely working performance, and business efficiency and independent variables of leadership management style and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, it confirmed that strategic leadership has a critical role in improving employee performance and happiness. However, there is still a gap of 30% of critical neutral respondents in the survey affecting both hypotheses. Consequently, the longitudinal study on this field might lead to insights into their performance over time (as the pandemic is still in full force) which might deteriorate and negatively impact their perception of their readiness to work under duress. Similarly, their level of confidence in their management could turn either way.

Findings on stakeholders’ preparedness to work in a different environment (remote/home) due to COVID 19 pandemic showed that 38 or 55.9% of

respondents felt ready and comfortable with changes. However, 21 or 30.9% of respondents were unsure about sudden working adjustments caused by a lack of training and technical equipment required for their work. Therefore, further research is needed, especially on organizational readiness to adapt their strategies to respond quickly to major interruptions and implement changes. Research questions should be 'how do flexible work and organizational results relate?' and 'what are the limits of virtual collaboration: Is it necessary to develop new strategies for scaling up virtual collaboration in diverse models?'

Research results on stakeholders' efficiency level while working from home or any other remote location indicated that 25 or 26% of respondents felt satisfied with efficiency in their work. About 22 or 33.4% of respondents felt unsure about their level of performance attributed to the lack of feedback from their superiors. Furthermore, 21 or 39% of respondents recognized their underperformance while working remotely. It is probable that the home environment is unsuitable for work because family members disturb and interfere with employees in their regular work routines. Considering that most of the kindergartens and schools have adopted online learning during the COVID 19 pandemic, confinement of children at home and other family members considerably affects employees' efficiency. The result indicates that it is necessary to carry out research on efficiency in operational planning to drive an organization's growth during pandemic. The research question should be the extent of support practices provided to remote working employees in adjusting to various aspects of work-life during the pandemic.

Research findings on employees' perception of the transparency of their leaders and their ability to communicate action plans during a crisis showed that 33 or 58.6% of respondents were fairly satisfied with their management. However, 14 or 20.6% of respondents emphasized this area as the critical aspect in their performance, which directly correlates to previous data on efficiency level. However, 22 or 33.4% of respondents were reluctant to classify leaderships' performance on this issue. Based on the results, further research should be carried out on the function of leadership, talent development, and support from strategic leaders (or lack of it) feature in the way employees manage work demands during a pandemic. Furthermore, future investigations should establish the effect of global risks have on managing the global workforce.

Regarding the employee sentiment towards leadership's care on their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, 38 or 55.8% of respondents felt reasonably satisfied. However, 8 or 11.8% of respondents felt neglected and 22 or

32.4% of respondents were neutral and unwilling to classify the leadership's during the pandemic. The diversity in results is attributable to different expectations and relationships employees had had with their managers even before the pandemic. Further research on the crisis response plan during the pandemic should raise the question, "how can IBs acknowledge and reward strategic leaders who can generate a sense of shared humanity amid a pandemic?"

Limitations and Future Research

The allocated timeframe for the study did not allow the researcher to expand the number of survey respondents to the more significant and broader pool of IB professionals. However, the limitation of the study is a guide for further research. Stakeholders who lost their jobs due to the pandemic were not included in the research. Therefore, further study should consider employees who were either unable to work from remote locations or dismissed due to organizations' financial strains. Moreover, investigating stakeholders in other industries and geographical locations will provide valuable insights. Including participants in health care, logistics, and hospitality who were unable to work from home and under psychological stress would further strengthen research validation.

Strategic leadership is critical in improving employee performance and happiness, according to the findings of the current inquiry. Therefore, future research should also consider a mix-method research design, applying nonnumerical qualitative research methods (i.e., phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnographies, case studies) with a smaller sample but an opportunity to investigate the subject in more depth and over a longer period.

CONCLUSIONS

IBs have encountered an unprecedented crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way of life, work, and communicate communication. The objective of the study was achieved as the empirical findings strongly indicate a direct connection between strategic leadership and the performance of IRSM IB stakeholders during the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic period, IRSM businesses and their workers rely on clear evidence that the organization is taking the problem seriously and responding in a way that respects the rights of all persons involved. The current study advances knowledge on organizational behavior by increasing understanding of how strategic leadership improves workers' positive job outcomes. Positive job outcomes are fundamental in increasing workers'

motivation during the global crisis and organizational uncertainty. Researchers believe that enhanced drive is fundamental and leads to good work outcomes by boosting employee performance while decreasing burnout and job stress.

Even though the long-term consequences of COVID-19 are unknown at this time, there is little reason to think that its influence on organizational life will be brief. Literature review on strategic leadership during crisis points towards the general notion that strategic leaders of IBs are expected to perform miracles on the scale of superheroes. With their supernatural abilities, the leaders are obliged to restore employees' hope towards the future while facing enormous character tests. However, research investigation among IRSM stakeholders showed that the level of confidence in strategic leadership did not decrease to the minimum level in the current phase of the pandemic. Furthermore, study findings incite researchers to argue that strategic leaders should seize this opportunity to make a difference in the firm and the lives of those being served. Crisis management in the IBs may often be a good turning point for the organization. Considering all its limitations, the current study identified and suggested several areas for analysis and potential improvement. Strategic leaders should consider, in their organizations, building a stronger foundation for resilience. First, to what extent is the IB organization ready to adapt strategy to respond quickly to major interruptions and implement changes? Second, to what extent do leadership function, talent development, and support from strategic leaders (or lack of it) feature how employees manage work demands during a pandemic? Third, in the accelerated distressed environment holding on to old processes, documentation, and training programs has become a burden for most organizations. Therefore ethics as an integral part of sustainable development should be more in focus.

Besides the COVID-19 pandemic, in the last 50 years, the world has had the experience significant crises and developments, many of which are part of the IB study. The researcher reviewed the growth of the IB sector, explored the advancement of strategic leadership as an integral component of FSAs., The study's analysis indicates that IB research has been successful because of its organic development and the economic developments of the world economy. The analysis focused on a sequence of global events, starting with the end of World War 2, expansion of internationalization, global opportunities for foreign direct investments, and lastly impact of globalization from the Mid-1980s to 2000. New IBs emerged, such as International New Ventures and Born Global firms, and new theories developed, such as International entrepreneurship (IE), a cross-over between IB and entrepreneurship. As an academic topic, IB is a complicated

field. It addresses the internationalization process itself, the peculiarities of several functional areas of management in international contexts, variances in institutional settings and cultural surroundings, and, finally, the nature of businesses. However, the researcher agrees with Verbeke and Yuan (2021), who argue that moderation of the COVID-19 pandemic requires broader FSAs definition of IB strategic governance, namely study of higher involvement of the Board of Directors. In crises, the Board of Directors should be the leading authority in identifying effective and successful business responses. Therefore, the researcher's argument based on the literature review is that further research in the IB field should investigate the effect of the quality of governance of the board of directors on corporate social responsibility and sustainability?

Therefore, the significance of the study is both practical and academic. First, the broad audience of IB practitioners has access to hands-on research findings enabling them to learn and hopefully contribute to more efficient handling of their organizational duties under uncertainty. Secondly, IB research has identified an important research question on IB governance.

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