

“A study on role of Leadership in Start-ups during Covid-19.”

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has been an epic test of character and determination for millions of people around the world. In the business context, founder entrepreneur had to cope with extraordinary demands: for them, the pandemic has been an ultimate leadership test. The paper focuses on the study of founder entrepreneurs in a start-up context. In the present research, we strived to understand leadership in start-ups and explore their approaches in delivering new results concerning Covid-19, with the major objective to study the impact of lockdown on start-ups in Hubballi-Dharwad region and challenges faced by leaders in start-ups during Covid-19. The study also attempts to understand the basic strategies of start-ups and actions taken by them to overcome the challenges faced. The present research is exploratory in nature and the research design is based on case study approach and it was based on primary and secondary data. Primary data has been in the form of case study of 5 start-ups in Hubballi-Dharwad region. Secondary data has been collected through research papers from major database like EBSCO and Google. Methodology is based on in-depth qualitative interviews. It was found during the research that entrepreneur leaders are coping with the covid-19 scenario in their own unique way. It was found during the study that entrepreneurs are arriving at the microhabits—daily routines and ways of working—that they have adopted to help themselves and their firms to survive this crisis and emerge stronger from it. It was also found how the leader entrepreneur decided cost cutting around 20-25% in yearly revenue which the companies would yield during the financial year end and the firms opted in following the government’s protocol by seeking grants from government. In addition, it was also found that leader entrepreneurs prefer to have employees who are like-minded, resilient in crisis situation and who strive for higher goals to continue innovation. Such approach is likely to help these firms achieve their vision and mission even in the crisis like Covid-19. It was overall found that leadership behaviour of entrepreneurs plays a vital role in crisis situations and their consistent efforts through effective survival strategies which results in success.

Keywords:- Leadership, founder entrepreneur, start-ups, Covid-19.

INTRODUCTION

At the risk of sounding pretentious: Leadership in start-ups is an important topic that has received far too little attention. It is a commonly held view that entrepreneurship and innovation are the engines driving economic development and spurring social change. Furthermore, it has also been argued that leadership plays an essential role in new venture creation. This is also reflected in the prototype shift from idea to execution. It is not the idea, but rather the execution that is paramount to the success of a start-ups. Therefore, on a socio-economic level, one can reasonable argue that leadership in start-ups is a worthy research topic.

The present study aims to address focus on the leadership behaviour of founder-CEOs in a start-ups context. In doing so, we sought to improve the understanding of leadership in start-ups and to deliver new results concerning the influence of leadership behaviour on organizational performance during Covid-19. This is a collective case study of 5 entrepreneurial leaders at the start-ups in Hubballi-Dharwad. Methodology is based on in-depth, face to face, one on one, qualitative interviews. We hope to discover indications of how leadership behaviour influences the functioning and development phase of start-ups in the crisis time such as Covid-19 and how this has altered with progression in the firm.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformational Leadership and Innovative Strategies Influencing Start-ups Performance. The start-ups which want to sustain in business environment should look out for opportunities to improve their leadership skills and innovative business strategies in their business venture. The Start-ups are innovative and favorable to the economic growth. Certainly, leadership, new business formation and innovation, are the key drivers of the growth of our economy. Starting up a business would not make a person as a leader. Leaders not only exists with more numbers of employees or followers, but a changeover in the economy makes them a leader. The impact of individual qualities of entrepreneurs qualities, opportunity recognition and management skills on their business performance. The study results indicated that opportunity recognition skills influenced business performance as a moderator between entrepreneur's skills and qualities. It is examined the effect of collaborative experienced and skilled entrepreneurial team and start-ups resources on their firm's performance. Based on the study findings, finance plays an important role on start-ups firms' profitability, but it has negative impact at the early stage of starting a venture. The study concluded that small size start-ups firms yield good returns than large organizations. the transformational leadership and the impact of innovative strategies on start-ups performance. The study findings showed the factors influencing start-ups business performance. Therefore, it is also showed that start-ups business success depend on their leadership skills, innovative business strategies and business performance.

Leadership in Start-ups: A Penniless Powerless Approach A Collective Case Study of 20 Entrepreneurial Leaders from MINC. Entrepreneurial leaders go beyond just giving people an opportunity to better themselves, they actively drive and coach people to fulfil their full potential. Such efforts seem to be steering people effectively towards achieving self-actualization and are supported by the mentality and culture that entrepreneurial leaders establish. On a general level, the vast literature on leadership focuses on the ability of leaders to influence a group of followers and highlights the relationship among three key factors: the leader, the followers, and the landscape (Gupta, MacMillan & Surie, 2004). Start-ups operate in a unique context which is characterized by lack of financial capital, human resources, and

hierarchical authority. It is the leadership that will build the core vision and assemble the necessary resources towards achieving that vision.

Leadership in Start-up It is been outlined a model of when, why, and how founder-CEOs' leadership behavior influences start-ups performance. The results indicate that transformational leadership has a significant positive effect on start-ups performance. The study further implies a transformational leader, however, does not only create and communicate a vision, he also represents his belief that the vision can be achieved through common engagement with great conviction. As start-ups develop, additional employees are hired, which implies that the task to lead becomes an essential duty of the founder-CEO. Nevertheless, leadership in the context of start-ups has only been explored by a small number of empirical studies. It finally concludes taking the results into consideration with the fact that the context can vary among the start-ups, the leadership behavior of the founder-CEO can significantly influence the performance and the associated survival of start-ups.

Start-up Stage in Entrepreneurship Process There are five stages to firm growth: start-up stage, expansion stage, consolidation stage, diversification stage and decline stage. In the early phase of start-up, the firms are small and highly centralized in the founder entrepreneur. Inconsistent growth rates make these firms vulnerable. These start-up firms are informal with few policies and little formalization. The major business tasks in this stage are identifying niche business domains, garnering resources for the firm, building prototypes and setting up task structures. The firm in the 'start-up' phase is yet to stabilize in terms of growth rate and constant business. Struggle is for survival and retaining the limited clients/customers. The firm is striving to find its ground. In the early stages things are more in a flex and systems and processes are yet to find concrete shape. Strategies, systems and processes are minimal and still evolving. Capital is mainly attained through the owner (entrepreneur) and dependence on family, friends and close associates is profound.

Start-ups Start-ups are increasingly been seen as the engine bringing economic progress and change. According to Eric Ries "A start-ups is a human institution designed to deliver a new product or service under conditions of extreme uncertainty" But starting up a venture is only part of the story. As the real challenge lies in surviving and creating successful and sustainable business.

Challenges faced by Start-upS According to study, three out of four start-ups fail. Similarly, in a recent study it was found that only about 25% of all start-ups efforts finally succeed. Entrepreneurial firms in general are vulnerable because of their 'newness and smallness'. One of the reasons for the vulnerability of these small firms is limited resources they possess. Because of limited resources even if entrepreneurs have brains and plans, they cannot completely execute their plans because they lack support system when compared to large firms. New emerging firms may lack the resources which large established firms may have in abundance. They try to overcome this by gaining access to a variety of resources and making most of them. Some major challenges faced by start-ups are: lack of capital, lack of management and business skills, physical Infrastructure, legal requirements etc. Identifying resources and utilising them appropriately is the key to any entrepreneurial success. All they need is a sound ecosystem which enables them to meet the above challenges and provides them management guidance and an overall enabling environment to nurture the starups in their early stages. These challenges become even more critical in developing countries like India because of undeveloped R & D environment, unfavorable government policies, poor institutional support etc. Many of the above

challenges require an ecosystem which understands the specific needs of entrepreneurs and provides a nurturing ground for start-ups to grow.

Need of Leadership in Start-ups For a start-ups to succeed, it's not enough to have a good business idea. Resilience, passion, flexibility, focus, trust and people skills are just as important for success. But success should not only be measured in terms of numerical gains; an enterprise's social and environmental contributions also should be considered, according to Shiv Khemka, executive chairman of The Global Education and leadership Foundation (TGELF), an organization in India focused on bringing up leaders with ethical and altruistic values.

Leadership is influence. There are many different kinds of leaders, therefore there are no 'set' qualities that have to be present in all leaders. Rather an effective leader draws from a range of personal qualities to help them deal with different circumstances and challenges.

Part of growing strong as a leader is through expanding our personal qualities. When we are not strong in a particular quality it is also wise to seek the contributions of others who are strong in that quality. This asks for a complementary team. The well-organised person can help to complement the creative person, and the person with the sense of humour can complement the serious minded person.

Courage Does not hide from challenging or scary situations; speaks up for what is right even if there is opposition.

Creativity Thinks of many different ways to solve challenges.

Loyalty Stays true to friends and family or team members through difficult times.

Honesty Speaks truthfully; acts sincerely; takes responsibility for own feelings and actions.

Self-regulation Controls emotions and sticks to decisions; is disciplined.

Forgiveness Accepts shortcomings of others without anger; gives people a second chance.

Compassion Thinks of how others are feeling.

Intelligence Learns quickly and thinks of good solutions; has a love of learning.

Determination Focuses on goals and works hard to achieve them.

Enthusiasm Has lots of energy and excitement for life.

Humour Sees the lighter side of life and helps people laugh.

Fairness Treats people fairly and advocates for their rights; doesn't let personal feelings bias decisions.

Generosity Gives freely of time and possessions; demonstrates kindness.

Indian Start-ups Booming During the Covid-19 Pandemic At this time when the entire world is slumped by a COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide lockdowns and social distancing are hampering businesses. Companies are experiencing huge impacts no matter how established they are. This is

prompting them to re-look at how they manage and operate their business including re-visitation of their working business plan. The entire world is halted and everyone is talking about the economic slowdown and financial setbacks. But in this pessimistic scenario, there are few Indian start-ups that are growing well. These start-ups are on a rapid growth spree and setting a good example for other companies on how to fight with and survive in this lockdown period. A survey conducted in February, 2020 reveals that many Indian start-ups had prioritized growth over profitability, but after the COVID-19 era, this strategy for businesses could change. Many companies are fearing the after-effect of the COVID-19 virus which may continue for the better part of this fiscal year on their overall sales. Rising numbers of new start-ups in India, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists are turbocharging the development of the top technology-driven start-ups scene. According to a report by KPMG on the start-ups ecosystem in India, the number of start-ups has grown from 7000 in 2008 to 50,000 in 2020. To support the people of the country and bolster the monitoring system with tech-enabled innovations, many Indian start-ups are closely working with authorities at central, state, and district levels. During this COVID-19 pandemic, each state has its own set of issues to deal with. So many of them have turned to start-ups for their solutions, as we saw in the case of Kerala and other states in the early weeks after Covid-19 pandemic.

E-learning Start-ups Edutech or e-learning segment of Start-ups in India has been one of the least expected sectors to have had a positive impact during the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies such as **BYJU's, Whitehat Jr, Unacademy, Toppr, Vedantu** have gained up to a 3 times surge in usage since the first phase of lock down in March 2020. With respect to government policy, all the educational institutions like schools, colleges, universities and coaching centres in the country have shut down to prevent COVID-19 virus spread. These Start-ups are bridging this gap and **taking education to the next level across India**. Because of this usage of digital education has increased and these firms are anticipating to have an improved top-line this financial year. An analyst report further highlighted that e-learning firms, which have seen monthly visits of about 102.2 million, recorded around 128.8 million in the 28 days of lockdown period of April. The overall engagement of students and professionals has seen an increase of 8.5% during the lock down period. E-learning firms have seen a rapid surge in growth in terms of user engagement and new users during the COVID-19 lockdown. While **Byju's, Vedantu** and **Unacademy** and have been grabbing all the media limelight, **Toppr** also has seen a terrific surge in traffic during the lockdown.

E-pharmacy Start-ups E-pharmacy has become the backbone of cities under lockdown to fight against the pandemic. **Online pharmacies** in India like **Medlife, 1mg and PharmEasy** are providing **contact-less home delivery of medicines** in bulk, different types of medicines on one platform, and also provide online **prescription services** with their registered set of doctors. Owing to these benefits more and more people are buying medicines and essential supplements from these platforms. Online pharmacies always store and analyze large amounts of consumer data across the nation which can be very useful for planning various public health policies. This, in turn, is beneficial for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME's). Ordering medicines online is has proven to be convenient and safe for people during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the onset of the technological era, there are a plethora of benefits making things more accessible than ever in online pharmacies. Moreover, consumers can check their enrolment materials available or the various health plan's website for information on how one can manage the pharmacy benefits online. Also all the **E-pharmacies like Medlife, 1mg and PharmEasy have their own respective app** that send **frequent reminders** for your medicines. This feature is quite helpful to keep track of your health on the go in these busy times.

Online grocery Start-ups India's biggest online grocers **Big Basket** and **Grofers**, have nearly doubled the number of **daily deliveries** compared to the last month as more and more consumers are hitting the internet to buy essentials amid the COVID-19 lockdown. The rapid surge has come despite shuttered warehouses in the early few days of the lockdown that began on March 25. Experts are **anticipating elevated consumer demands** but that will mean some consumers shopping online for groceries might have to wait for delivery slots. Another reason for having fewer delivery slots is because many migrant workers who worked at delivery stations of various locations in the cities have returned back to homes. But despite these obstructions, BigBasket has said that around 283,000 orders a day are being met, this was 150,000 before the shutdown. While Grofers said it was servicing about 190,000 daily orders against 100,000 before the COVID-19 lockdown. Both the online grocery Start-ups are ramping up their supplies from various brands and manufacturing partners to meet consumer demands. In the coming weeks both **BigBasket** and **Grofers** are expected to hire a new workforce to meet the increasing consumer demands. While BigBasket will hire 10,000 new workers, similarly Grofers will hire 4,500 workers in the coming days after having added 2,500 workers already. To survive these adverse times and to make sure that businesses and the economy thrive and spring back to their feet, the Government of India has been developing strategies and various action plans. Policymakers are not only focusing on business continuity and revival of sectors but also on improving ease of doing business within the country by promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To study the impact of lockdown on Start-ups in Hubballi-Dharwad city.
- 2) To study challenges faced by leaders in Start-ups during Covid-19.
- 3) To study measures and actions taken by Start-ups to overcome the challenges faced.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY The overall methodological design for the study is based on elements of the case-study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin1993, 2003). The cases built for the study are purely qualitative in nature. The empirical data is represented through case studies built under the overall framework provided by basic research objectives. The criteria for selection of cases are theoretical suitability and topical relevance rather than statistical generalization.

The proposed research is exploratory in nature and the research design is based on case study approach. The case study design is qualitative in nature. The study is based in Hubballi-Dharwad region which is emerging as a new 'Start-ups Hub' in north Karnataka. The study is done through interviews with 5 Start-ups founder entrepreneurs based, mainly at major incubation centre in Hubli-BVB CTIE (Centre for Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship) at BVB Campus, KLE Technological University, Hubli. Based on the interviews some small caselets have been developed. All the interviews are conducted as per the convenience of the interviewees (after taking prior permission from them) through telephonic interview, face to face interview is conducted according to the convenient. Main tool for collecting data is in-depth interviews. The interviews are recorded in audio-recording device. Note making was done along with the recording. The data from the recorded interviews are transcribed for further analysis As there is data collected through primary source i.e through telephone, we are unsure

of the respondent's state of mind, case studies prepared were quite brief (though the interviews were detailed) and limited sample size were considered which are some of the limitations of the study.

Following are some of the discussion on the case study's.

Role of communication the cases revealed One major factor deciding the challenges faced during the Covid-19 is the communicating with the employees, vendors and distributors, calling up with the clients and notifying the employees about the work progress. Mr. Suresh of Flipfresh proclaims,

"A well- functioning and dedicated team is crucial for the progress of any start-up. The ones who wanted to make it big were welcomed on board for the venture!"

The same challenge is shared by all of the leaders. Mr. Ankesh. Jain of white sparks idea proudly proclaims that his family and staff have been a huge support especially during this time. He also tells how his staff was calm minded, and was always there for him and counted on him during their difficult times.

Such a responsible team building policy strongly equipped the company to face the storm of Covid-19 coming its way.

Role of work The second major factor deciding the challenges the companies had to face because of the Covid-19 pandemic were, not being able to use the machinery & equipment at their incubation centre, difficulty in procuring goods to stock up in their online store and management of drastic increase in the number of orders.

The same challenge is shared by most of the leaders. Overcoming it Mr Suresh of Flipfresh shares his strategy how the company adopted through the situation by acclimatization techniques which encompassed, optimization of their website interface and devising of new plans to get quicker and easier distribution from the manufacturers.

Role of government The third major factor deciding the challenges the companies had to face because of the Covid-19 was the cut in yearly revenue which the companies would yield during the financial year end around 20-25%. Which turned out to be a huge loss for the company.

"The company opted in following the government's protocol"

The same sentiment is shared by most of the leaders overcoming it .Mr. Ankesh. Jain of white sparks idea shares the major help he seeked was by getting fund from government worth 10lakh rupees.

In addition to the view of role of government Mr. Renuka of havenow foodtech also shares how the company seeked help of 20% of the outstanding loan which gave some cashflows to the company.

Role of networking This is the age when it is not sufficient 'what you know', one must also be good at 'whom you know' which means this is an age of networking and keeping meaningful relations going. Connecting with people and networking yields multiple results through their personal and professional relations with individuals and associations. Be it technological information or marketing related information or relationship with suppliers or vendors, relationship with customers, relationship with

angel investors or venture capitalists – one must be well connected in a web of relationship for leveraging these networks for business purposes. Mr. Ankesh. Jain. Jain proclaims,

As people say “*It was not so difficult getting the funds for the company*”, it turned out to be true, as the company has huge networking which gave the perks of getting work done smoothly. He strongly believes in leadership comes from the context or the network we stay in”.

Mr. Ankesh. Jain’s social background has clearly played a major role in his growth as an entrepreneur. Mr. Ankesh. Jain. hails from a social community (Marwari community) which is traditionally known as a business oriented community. He is aware of the initial grooming he had as a member of business family from this particular community and is grateful for that. In the words of Mr. Ankesh. Jain, business is like part of our day-to-day activity. I started developing a sense for business since the age of six when I became aware of my Dad’s business. I am associated with business since that time. It is quite clear that Mr. Ankesh. Jain has used the family members as well as friends and acquaintances to garner resources and other benefits. Mr. Ankesh. Jain describes himself as “*a very socializing kind of a person*”. Apart from his family member and close relatives, his association with many NGOs and professional bodies like Jain International Trade Organization, Hubli Round Table India, TIE’s (The Indus Entrepreneurs) Hubballi chapter etc has yielded rich dividends. All these have helped him get information crucial for business purposes.

Rethinking office spaces The coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent nationwide lockdown had a southward effect on office spaces business. For a hybrid model to persist, workspaces had to be designed keeping ‘new normal’ norms in mind.

This means coworking spaces and design Start-ups had to take into account hygiene and sanitation, social distancing, and contactless automation.

Commercial interior design Start-ups are leveraging the opportunity to provide home office solutions to employees who are uncertain about returning to their offices.

Upskilling and reskilling Rampant job losses and an economic slowdown mean that the job market is getting more competitive. One of the most effective ways of standing out is by adding more skills to one’s resume or getting better at the existing ones.

Similarly, Mr. Jeethendra. Kumar of Stek innovations quotes “ *he was successful enough to take immediate decisions within the 1st week of pandemic to start with required trainings needed for the employees.*”- which in turn helped him to get enough time to get resources.

Being Honest Remembering to lead by example-“A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.”- (John C. Maxwell)

One of the leadership qualities that define a good leader is honesty. When a leader is responsible for a team of people, it is important to be straightforward.

Mr. Renuka of Havenow quotes “being honest with the customers about the things that were happening was one of the major strategies that helped the company to overcome challenges”

The company and its employees are a reflection of a leader, and if the leader make honest and ethical behaviour as a key value, the team will follow.

Delegation of Authority Regardless of the situation and position you are in, a leader should always remember that he can't do everything on his own. Good leaders recognise that delegation does more than simply passing the task to someone else. It is trusting and believing that his employees are able to handle the task given to them.

Vaibhav of UTD proudly proclaims *"he has a team which consist of different logical thinkers"*-which makes best decision to customers to choose over several other competence and provide end-to-end solution for all kind of received orders along with best pricing stats and development offers.

The same sentiment is shared between other leaders too. Delegating to others shows that the leader has confidence in their abilities, and this can result in a positive morale in the workplace. Employees want to feel appreciated and trusted. So by giving them a task, they would generally feel honoured that they got selected and they would feel the importance of having them around.

Being Confident Another one of the leadership qualities, is having confidence. Admit it, there may be days where the future of your brand is cloudy or the monthly sales do not look promising. Any company or businesses would have gone through these issues before; so it is not something new.

Addressing the pandemic situation the founder-leader Mr. Jeethendra Kumar of stek innovations quotes- *"he considers himself to be having leadership qualities such as being agile in taking decisions"*- which helped and benefited him in being prepared to face the pandemic.

As a leader, it is your responsibility to maintain the team morale and keep moving forward. Keep your confidence level up and assure everyone that setbacks being looked into. Being prepared for everything has helped Mr. Jeethendra in this pandemic. He took immediate decisions within the 1st week of pandemic to start with required trainings needed for the employees. Which in turn helped him to get enough time to get resources. By staying calm and confident, the team would not worry as they put their trust in you.

Commitment and dedication Nothing shows commitment like getting your hands dirty with the rest of the employees. There is no greater motivation than seeing their leader working alongside everyone else. By proving your commitment to the company and especially your team, you will not only earn the respect of your team, but will also instil that same hardworking drive among your staff.

Mr. Suresh of Flipfresh quotes *"We have dedicated ourselves and formed the company to be customer friendly in all terms"*- so they have made placing order easy. They accept orders via website, On call, On Android App, On whatsapp, Door-step pickup whichever customer feels easy. Also they have provided flexible delivery slots as per the customer need. Showing commitment as a leader sets the example for others to follow, and leads to greater loyalty and respect for you as a leader.

"Set the tone of commitment, and others will follow suit"- Remembering this if a leader expects his team to work hard and produce quality work, one would need to lead by example.

Being an Enthusiast A good leader is enthusiastic about their work or cause and also about their role as leader. People will respond more openly to a person of passion and dedication. A Leader needs to be able to be a source of inspiration, and be a motivator towards the required action or cause.

In view of this Mr. Renuka of Havenow foodtech company quotes-“*People say survival is the new success, but he believes his company will survive come-what-may, and its about what next after the survival and how he aims to set goals accordingly*”

He proudly mentions about the plans he is going to carry forward and execute them as set pre-Covid-19 phase such as acquisitions and collaborating with other brands for scaling up ones the things go back to “*old normal*”. Although the responsibilities and roles of a leader may be different, the leader needs to be seen to be part of the team working towards the goal. This kind of leader will not be afraid to roll up their sleeves and get dirty.

Being Focused and purpose driven “People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader leads, and the boss drives.”-Theodore Roosevelt

A good leader is generally focused and is able to think rationally. Not only does a good leader view a situation as a whole, but is able to narrow down the cause as well as find the solution to the problem.

In view of being focused Mr. Vaibhav of UTD quotes "Back when I established my start-up, most of my friends were sceptical to take the risk of entering this venture with me. Things are different in today's scenario, the start-up culture has boomed and even tenth grade students are excited to establish their own start-ups." This shows how a Leader should also be self-driven to work harder in wanting to achieve better results for the company.

Adding to it the dynamic leader Mr. Vaibhav says that “the biggest take away from the lessons learnt through his entrepreneurial journey was that 'being naive' does not work in the business”- which provided UTD the credibility from tycoons fetching the company with more clients across the globe. They are the driving force in the team and also someone the team could look up to and encourage the rest to work together.

Taking Responsibilities The last quality that defines a good leader is being responsible. The Founder of FlipFresh.in Mr. Suresh believes, “a well- functioning and dedicated team is crucial for the progress of any start-up. The ones who wanted to make it big were welcomed on board for the venture!”

Great leaders know that when it comes to their company or workplace, they need to take personal responsibility for failure. A good leader does not make excuses; they take the blame regardless and then work out how to fix the problem as soon as possible. Responsibility is definitely a key leadership attribute, such a responsible team building policy by Mr. Suresh strongly equipped the company to face the storm of Covid-19 coming its way.

FINDINGS-

1.*Communicate transparently with your customers* We are all in this together, so the ideal way is to stay transparent with the consumers about what the business is going through. Customers can empathize with companies facing a crisis, as long as the communication is transparent. Communicating with customers to understand their perception of the product/solution offered by the company.

2.*Maintaining healthy relations with the parties* It is understandable that it might be difficult to pay out vendors/suppliers during the lockdown. However, it would be helpful to give the vendors, suppliers,

landlords etc. sufficient notice in case there is going to be any delay in payments so that they can also be prepared and there is no bitterness in this already difficult time.

3. Managing employees and related For large companies considering layoffs, the primary option should be to cut the salaries of the higher paid employees to try to retain the people who can least afford to lose their jobs employed. However, when the time comes to make the tough call, the companies do it with compassion look out for government directives, and offer extra compensation as and when required. Such implementation should be carried out only once and not in stages such that it does not affect employee morale.

4. Keep your team engaged The team relies on the leader so to keep them updated about every development. As a leader, it is the responsibility to keep your team members engaged and stay connected with them through video conferencing tools like Zoom and Google Hangouts. It is very important to maintain high spirits within the team and understand the general mood within your remote workforce.

5. Communication to stakeholders Consulting with the investors or external experts to plan the right form of communication with stakeholders, most importantly customers and employees. Having an honest conversation on the situation and its impact on the business with the entire leadership team. Any negative message should be delivered with utmost empathy along with transparent reasons. In these difficult times it is important to stand united and help one another in whatever way the employees can. Stay safe and stay healthy. Remembering that a leader always believes some of the best initiatives are built in trying times. “Like all difficult situations, this too shall pass!” is the faith the start-ups are hanging on-to.

CONCLUSION Start-ups are the seeds that could one day change the world. This is how Google started. This is how Apple started. This is how Microsoft started. Maybe one of these Start-ups from Hubballi will someday join them. But the odds of succeeding are low. In this pursuit, leadership is an undeniably crucial element. It is the leadership that will build the core vision and assemble the necessary resources towards achieving that vision during times like Covid-19

Firstly, by selecting people who match them in vision and values, entrepreneurial leaders ensure high self-motivation. Secondly, entrepreneurial leaders appeal to higher needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization, by playing on their dreams and aspirations, allowing them ownership and freedom, coaching them to learn and develop. Thirdly, they use adept rhetoric and communication to when interacting with employees. Finally, they tie it all together by nurturing a powerful mentality and culture based on three mantras: 1) Don't limit yourself in your thinking, anything is possible. 2) Don't be afraid to try, mistakes are part of learning. 3) Never give up, it's all about your mindset. These tools/techniques are not discrete instruments, but rather function together as an ecosystem, reinforcing each other and accumulating into a synergistic magnetic force.

Over all, our findings suggest that founder/leader need to adapt their leadership behavior to the environmental conditions surrounding Start-ups. While crisis leadership is found to be an important predictor of Start-ups performance.

Taking these results into consideration with the fact that the context can vary among the Start-ups, the leadership behaviour of the founder-CEO can significantly influence the performance and the associated survival of Start-ups.

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