

Chapter 6

Lebanese Entrepreneurs’ Adaptation to the Multilevel Crisis: An Interpretation of Robert Greene’s *The 33 Strategies of War*

Lina Saleh

Ascencia Business School, France

Thierry Levy-Tadjine

University of Paris 8, France

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. The authors studied the experiences of 14 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.

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 orga-

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nizations 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 Gallagher 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.

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