

## Navigating Crises: Insights from Executive Leaders' Personal Journeys through the Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of executive leaders in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic, examining their resilience, adaptability, and crisis management strategies to extract lessons that can inform future leadership practices in times of crisis.

**Methodology:** This exploratory study employs a qualitative research methodology using online face-to-face interviews to gather narratives from executive leaders in higher education about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collected data is analyzed using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to identify patterns, themes, and complexities within the leaders' experiences, focusing on resilience, adaptability, and crisis management strategies.

**Main Findings:** The main findings of the study indicate that executive leaders in higher education relied on resilience, adaptability, and crisis management strategies to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their lived experiences reveal multifaceted leadership qualities, highlighting the importance of decision-making under uncertainty, organizational preparedness, and strategic adaptability. The study also extracts valuable lessons that can inform future leadership practices to enhance institutional resilience in times of crisis.

**Applications of this Study:** The study enhances leadership development, crisis preparedness, and decision-making in higher education by providing actionable insights from executive leaders' experiences. Its recommendations inform training, policy, and resilience strategies, equipping universities for future crises.

**Novelty / Originality of this Study:** The study's novelty lies in its exploratory qualitative approach, capturing firsthand narratives of higher education leaders during COVID-19 to reveal insights on resilience and crisis management. Unlike studies on institutional responses, it uniquely applies Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to uncover leadership adaptability patterns, offering practical lessons for future crises.

### Keywords

Executive management, crisis management, decision-making, Covid-19 Pandemic, Higher Education Institutions.