

2024

## The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Non-Profit's Organizations Culture, Change, and Financial Stability

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### Recommended Citation

Hazzan, Joyce O.; Hazzan, Afeez A.; and Norman, Elton (2024) "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Non-Profit's Organizations Culture, Change, and Financial Stability," *Journal of Fundamental & Applied Business Research*: Vol. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/jbr/vol2/iss1/4>

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**Type of article:** Applied Research

**Title of Article:** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit's organizations culture, change, and financial stability

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## Abstract

Factors such as organizational culture, unplanned change, and financial instability can negatively affect organizations' bottom line and competitiveness. Specifically, organizations that do not have a healthy culture, consistent decision-making process, and financial stability may be unable to compete in the marketplace during periods of economic uncertainties. Also, it is important to understand how these factors affect non-profit organizations since they are usually relied upon to perform critical roles during periods of crises. The recent COVID-19 pandemic represented an important shock for most non-profit organizations in the United States. As non-profit organizations change to accommodate these new realities, it is important to understand how their viability is affected. The study examined the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations culture, change, and financial stability. The main research question was, how did the recent COVID-19 pandemic affect non-profit organizations culture, change, and financial stability? Using a qualitative methodology, stakeholders were interviewed to obtain their perspective on these and other relevant topics. Analyses of the interview transcripts revealed several critical themes including: (1) financial impact of the inability to achieve highest standards of client and employee well-being; (2) non-profit healthcare organizations' dependence on government and outside organizations for sustenance; (3) revenue diversification and the elasticity of revenue portfolios are key factors in financial resilience; (4) financial management tools helped build financial resiliency during economic shocks; (5) communication is key; and (6) unity and cooperation within the agency and collaboration between nonprofit organizations builds financial resilience. The implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* Non-profit organizations, economic shock, COVID-19 pandemic, organizational culture, change, financial stability, qualitative methodology

## Introduction

This study examined the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations culture, change, and financial stability. Research has shown that economic and financial instability negatively affect organizations' bottom line and their competitiveness (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020; Kober & Thambar, 2021). This is particularly important for non-profit organizations since their revenues come from earned income, donations, government funding, and investment income. Importantly, federal government's grants and contracts to non-profit organizations are greatly reduced during periods of economic uncertainties (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020; Kober & Thambar, 2021). This creates additional challenges for these organizations as they attempt to achieve their vision, mission, and goals with increasingly limited resources.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic necessitated programming changes for some non-profit organizations such as the addition of new programs and the discontinuation of existing programs (Ma & Beaton, 2024). Further, the role of accounting and finance practices within organizational practices such as budgeting became more critical as non-profit organizations adjusted their operations to cope with the impact of the economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kober & Thambar, 2021). If done correctly, the application of financial resilience framework could help organizations maintain services during economic crises (Johnson et al., 2021). Research has shown that effective financial management, including the development of operating reserves, can help nonprofit organizations survive economic shocks (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020; Kober & Thambar, 2021). Therefore, it is important for organizations to implement financial best-practices when faced with financial risks and uncertainties during an economic shock. The study utilized a qualitative approach to investigate the impact of the recent

COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations culture, change, and financial stability. Quantitative demographic data were also analyzed to provide context. Findings from this study could help non-profit and similar organizations to cope with the impact of future financial shocks on their operations both in the short and long runs.

### **Background of the Problem**

Generally, non-profit organizations rely on grants from government entities, funding from individuals, as well as financial contributions from for-profit organizations to remain operationally viable (Johnson et al., 2021). This is particularly important during periods of economic shocks when resources may be limited. The recent coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic caused severe economic disruptions for nonprofit organizations to generate revenue and provide services to their clients (Johnson et al., 2021). For organizations that provide critical services to their clients, these economic disruptions could have serious consequences for individuals, families, and communities if prolonged over a long period of time.

Research has shown that the most important issues facing nonprofit organizations are financial resilience and economic shocks (Ahrens & Ferry, 2020; Maher et al., 2018). Most non-profit organizations are simply not prepared to weather the storm brought upon by unforeseen circumstances such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic stressed the budgets of several nonprofit organizations, with many unable to survive the financial losses (Kober & Thambar, 2021). Another implication of the recent pandemic is the impact it had on non-profit's organizational culture. Kähkönen (2023) reported that many employees transitioned from in-person to partial or full-time remote work. The change in employees work culture has both positive and negative implications for organizations. On one hand, remote employees may feel less connected to the organization and on the other hand, employees could

value the flexibility of working from home. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations culture, change, and financial stability. Biblical and Christian perspectives are also discussed.

### **Business Problem Studied**

The business problem addressed in this article is the negative impact of economic shocks such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations. The specific research question was, how did the recent COVID-19 pandemic affect non-profit organizations' culture, change, and financial stability? Previous research has highlighted the impact of the pandemic on several aspects of non-profit organizations' operations. For example, Johnson et al. (2021) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed the revenue sources of most non-profit organizations, thus creating financial instability within these organizations.

Further, Kober and Thambar (2021) argued that the COVID-19 crisis has had a major operational and financial impact on most non-profit organizations, resulting in a loss of competitive advantage for some. In addition, Kim and Mason (2020) concluded that the COVID19 pandemic has had significant impact on non-profits' operating reserves, revenue streams, and the financing of their programs, thus reducing the organizations' revenue and competitive advantage. Therefore, the article specifically examined the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations culture, change, and financial stability.

We hope the findings from this study will help business leaders and other stakeholders to better counteract the impact of future shocks on non-profit organizations. The pandemic also necessitated change in most organization's work culture. According to Kähkönen (2023) the pandemic led to organizational work culture change and to an extensive COVID-19 remote for many employees. Employees sometimes perceive change as a threat and are often quick to resist

due to the fear of disruptions to their status-quo (Fugate et al., 2012). On the other hand, change has also been reported to hinder efficiency in organizations performance (Kähkönen, 2023).

### **Methodology**

This study utilized qualitative methodology. The research paradigm for this study is pragmatism (Kelly et al., 2018). Generally, pragmatist researchers explore several approaches, methods, designs, and then choose the most appropriate research method in answering their research questions (Kelly et al., 2018). For the study, the pragmatism paradigm enabled the investigation of the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations' culture, change, and financial stability.

Further, this study was conducted with a flexible design. Specifically, a single case study design was used to address the research question. This type of design is appropriate for this study because it allows the investigation of research phenomena in their natural settings (Rashid et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Overall, 16 participants were interviewed for this study. The 16 participants were employed in the single case organization that was used for this study. The pragmatic paradigm utilized in this research aligns with a single case study design. Qualitative analysis enabled the researcher to evaluate the research problem based on multiple realities. Also, a qualitative approach helped provide a rich exploratory study of how the potential inability of non-profit organizations to achieve financial stability due to the impact of the pandemic.

Further, a single case study design permitted the incorporation of multiple data sources to understand the research problem in real-life contexts (Rashid et al., 2019). Flexible design was appropriate for this research study because it enabled the researcher to change the variables in the research study based on the feedback received or preliminary data analysis conducted

(Allaverdi & Browning, 2020). The data collection methods for this study included participant interview, demographic survey, and internal document review.

According to Rashid (2017), triangulation of data sources generally leads to an overall stronger and richer data. Also, data triangulation helps to increase the validity and reliability of a research study and its results. Therefore, for this study, publicly available data were reviewed and analyzed for data triangulation purposes. Specifically, published financial records were reviewed and analyzed. The demographic survey and internal document review yielded important quantitative data. Finally, data triangulation enabled the researcher to use multiple sources of evidence to elaborate the study's findings. The study also received IRB approval and participants provided informed consent.

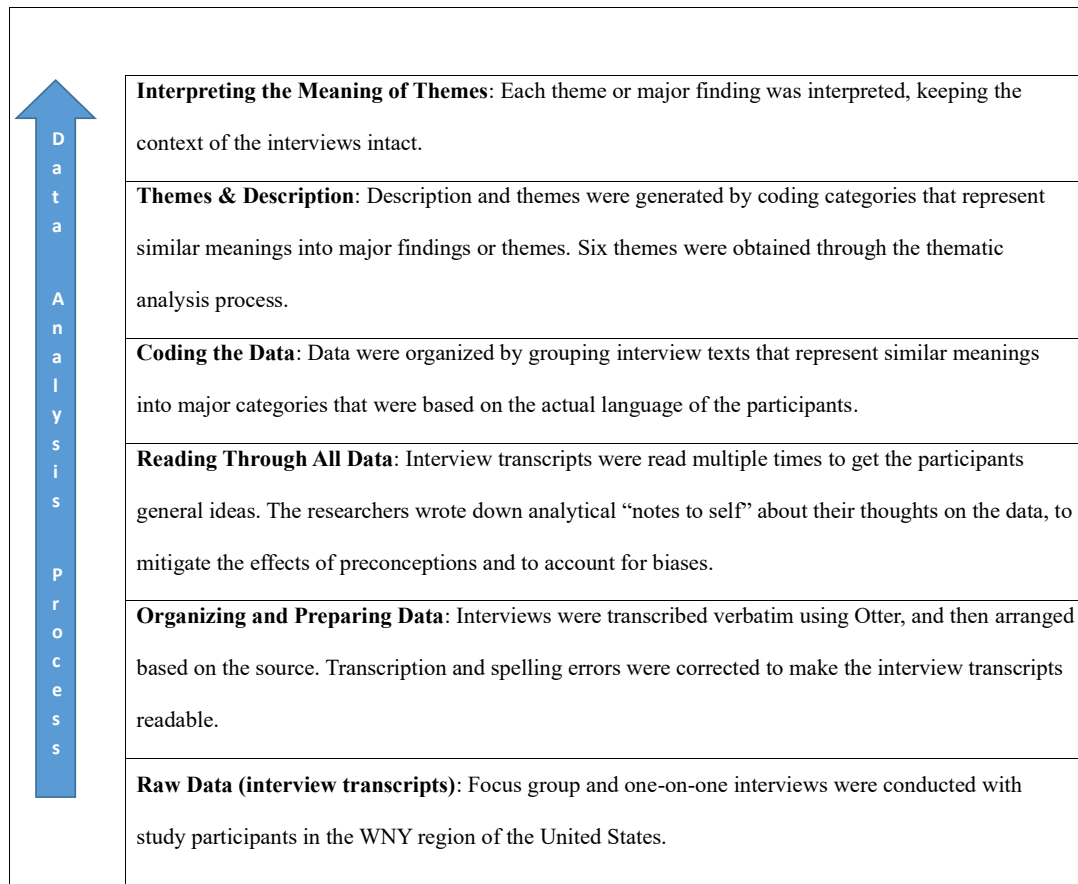
### **Data Analysis**

Data were organized into qualitative and quantitative data after collection. The data for this case study were gathered through face-to-face in-person interviews with study participants working at a nonprofit organization. Thematic analysis was utilized for the qualitative data obtained (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves the researcher reading through the data collected and using patterns in the data to develop themes (Roberts et al., 2019). Therefore, thematic analysis utilizes the researchers' subjective experience to make sense of the data collected for the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Roberts et al., 2019). The qualitative data analysis process that was utilized involved transcribing the data verbatim, cleaning to remove errors, and then reviewing the transcripts to identify the statements or words (codes) that addressed the research questions. Ultimately, the codes were grouped into categories that represent the major findings from the study (i.e. themes). Each theme or major finding was interpreted, keeping the context of the interviews intact



throughout the process. Once completed, the data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Study participants were asked a series of 10 questions (See Appendix A). The questions were aimed at investigating the study participants' views on the organization's financial situation and financial stability during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview guide was used to raise pertinent questions for the study participants to address. Specifically, two focus groups and seven one-on-one interviews were completed as part of the data collection process for this study. Specifically, 16 study participants were interviewed to collect relevant data. All 16 participants were over 18 years of age. Figure 1 shows a summary of the data analytic process of the study from raw data to theme interpretation. Data from the interviews with the study participants were transcribed verbatim using Otter (Hazzan et al., 2022; See Figure 1). Themes were developed from the interviews and qualitative data collected. Further, a statistical software known as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to organize and analyze the quantitative data obtained. The analysis and interpretation of the qualitative and quantitative data obtained yielded robust results to answer the research questions (McKim, 2017; Yin, 2018).

**Figure 1***Data Analysis Process Summary from Raw Data to Theme Interpretation*

According to Hazzan et al. (2022), reliability and validity helps researchers minimize study biases and errors. Therefore, to demonstrate the validity and reliability of this study, four steps were taken by the researchers including the validation of the interview questions, positionality, member checking and data triangulation. Also, the researcher ensured that an audit trail of all decisions related to the study's data collection, data analysis, and writing are kept. Content validity of the research questions and bracketing was used in this study to validate the qualitative analysis. Finally, analytical notes and a reflexive journal were kept throughout the research process.

## **Findings**

To better understand the research problem, a healthcare human services organization located within the northeastern part of the United States was used as a case-study. Sixteen study participants were asked a series of 10 questions. Analyses of the interview transcripts revealed several themes that relate to the focus of this study. The quantitative data obtained through the demographic survey also provided a context for interpreting the data. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of study participants. Most participants were between the age of 45 and 54 (37.5%), and the majority were female (87.5%). Also, most participants had at least an undergraduate degree (81.3%), and the majority identified as non-Hispanic white (93.8%). The length of time working at the case organization vary from 18 to 324 months. Further, the six themes generated from the analysis of the qualitative data are discussed below:

### **Financial Impact of the Inability to Achieve Highest Standards of Client and Employee Well-Being**

Many non-profit organizations suffered significant impact due to their inability to provide the highest standard of care during the pandemic. As organizations changed in response to the pandemic, there was a noticeable impact on their culture and financial stability. This was highlighted by a participant in a one-on-one interview as described below:

In terms of the department that I work in, it affected us significantly. We lost, you know, 60 or 70% of our staff. That impacted us significantly. Staff loss was huge.... So, that (employee turnover) made it difficult to support the individuals in our homes. (One-on-one interview #3)

This suggest that the financial implications of retraining new staff because of the pandemic could be dire. The increased spending on employee training and development as well as recruitment

takes resources away from programmatic purposes. Hence, there is an increase in the use of resources for purposes not directly related to organizational mission or vision. Below is a quote from another study participant: “When we lost those employees, we also lost their expertise and experience. So, that’s costing us money to retrain new employees” (One-on-one interview #6).

### **Non-Profit Healthcare Organizations’ Dependence on Government and Outside Organizations for Sustenance**

Government support is critical for non-profit organizations during periods of economic uncertainties. This could take the form of favorable policies, re-imbursements, financial aid that come directly from government organizations and external agencies such as foundations. Commenting on government’s financial assistance during the pandemic, an interview participant stated that “we didn’t really lose too much revenue because OPWDD stepped in” (One-one interview #6). According to another participant in a one-on-one interview, "On the other hand, the state stepped in with funds that helped us...this helped our bottom line and revenue base. The state’s funding helped keep our doors open to continue operating" (One-one interview #1). The review of internal documents showed that the case organization’s contributions from other sources including government and private agencies increased by 75% in 2020 compared to 2019. Further, in 2021, there was a 78% increase in contributions compared to 2019. A participant also attested to the fact that contributions from federal and state government helped the agency during the pandemic. According to a participant “we didn’t really lose too much revenue because OPWDD stepped in” (One-one interview #6).

## **Revenue Diversification and the Elasticity of Revenue Portfolios are Key Factors in Financial Resilience**

Non-profit organizations that receive revenues from diverse sources are in a better position to cope with shocks. Hence, these organizations are able to maintain a more robust organizational culture, more resilient to change, and maintain financial stability despite the uncertainties of the economic shock. According to a participant, “Having multiple revenue streams helped us navigate the pandemic. So, it is important to diversify revenue streams” (One-on-one interview #2). Below is a quote from a participant in a focus group interview. “We also have our fingers dipped in everything. Diversification helped us.” (Group interview #1). This is consistent with the evidence in the literature. Maher et al. (2020) reported that in coping with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, most non-profit organizations diversified their revenue sources and minimized their overhead expenses. Further, Johnson et al. (2021) argued that non-profit organizations whose revenue sources are not diversified are more susceptible to financial disruptions that arise from economic instabilities compared to organizations with a diversified revenue source. Therefore, nonprofit organizations’ limited revenue sources and lack of revenue diversification impacted their ability to fund their operations during economic instabilities. According to the literature, public health restrictions compelled most nonprofit organizations that provided face-face services to either shut down their services, reduce capacity, or move their programming or services online (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020, 2022). This led to changes in some nonprofits’ organizational culture.

## **Financial Management Tools Helped Build Financial Resiliency During Economic Shocks**

Effective use of financial management tools such as budgets, financial analysis, and cash flow analysis are important for maintaining organizational wellbeing during periods of economic

uncertainties. Such tools can help the leadership to better understand the challenges facing the organization as well as proffering solutions to them. This could be critical for maintaining a strong organizational culture and financial stability, while also helping the organization to change in a way that ensures long-term survivability. Below is an excerpt from a study participant:

Financial management tools helped us realize that it was unsustainable to continue waiving fees for clients when there was an outbreak. Once we stopped that practice, as a result of the financial tools we had, the organization started experiencing better financial outcomes. (One-on-one interview #1)

Speaking on the importance of budgets, a participant stated:

I think the budget worked. The budget helps us know what's expected and so it helped us keep track and try to stay on top of our budget and expenses...The budget helped in keeping track of what's being spent...I think that the financial tools helped us stay on track and for them to better understand how everything is affected like what they spend, what they can do better. (One-on-one interview #4)

### **Communication is Key**

Communication is important for maintaining a strong organizational culture and financial stability. Utilizing effective communication to keep stakeholders informed about the decision-making process also helps to avoid drastic organizational changes. This is particularly important during periods of economic uncertainties as employees may be unsure of what steps to take in the absence of effective and compassionate communications from upper-level management. According to a participant in a focus group interview, “There should be better communication within the organization” (Focus Group #1). Another participant stated: “You also need to have

better communication among leadership and your staff. You need to work together and be flexible” (One-on-one interview #7).

### **Unity and Cooperation Within the Agency and Collaboration Between Nonprofit Organizations Builds Financial Resilience**

It is important to maintain a high level of unity and cooperation within an organization during periods of economic challenges. An “all hands-on deck” approach can facilitate a strong organizational culture, financial stability, as well as synergistic collaboration with other organizations working in the industry. According to a focus group participant, “With the shortage of staff, one of our strategies was pulling together as a team. The agency and the department pull their resources together” (Focus Group #1). According to another study participant, “The strategy of us all bannin together made us stronger” (Focus Group Interview #1).

**Table 1**

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants*

Characteristics	Study Participants
Mode age group	45-54
Age range (years)	
18-24	0 (0)
25-34	2 (12.5)
35-44	4 (25.0)
45-54	6 (37.5)
55-64	3 (18.8)
65 and over	1 (1)
Gender, n (%)	
Women	14 (87.5)
Men	2 (12.5)
Education, n (%)	
Graduate Degree	3 (18.8)
Undergraduate Degree	10 (62.5)
Associate/Diploma/Some college	3 (18.8)
High School	0 (0)
Ethnicity, n (%)	
Hispanic or Latino	0 (0)
Non-Hispanic	16 (100)

Characteristics	Study Participants
Race, n (%)	
Asian	0 (0)
White/Caucasian	15 (93.8)
African-American/Black	1 (6.3)
Length of time working for nonprofits (in month), n (%)	
18	1 (6.3)
78	1 (6.3)
108	1 (6.3)
120	1 (6.3)
150	1 (6.3)
180	1 (6.3)
204	1 (6.3)
216	1 (6.3)
264	1 (6.3)
276	1 (6.3)
312	2 (12.5)
324	1 (6.3)
345	1 (6.3)
348	
Length of employment (in month), n (%)	
18	1 (6.3)
48	2 (12.5)
54	1 (6.3)
78	1 (6.3)
108	1 (6.3)
132	1 (6.3)
156	1 (6.3)
180	2 (12.5)
204	1 (6.3)
216	1 (6.3)
276	1 (6.3)
300	1 (6.3)
312	1 (6.3)
324	1 (6.3)

This study expanded the body of knowledge by investigating and understanding how economic instabilities could impact nonprofit organizations' financial stability, particularly the financial stability of healthcare organizations. The findings from this study have shown that nonprofit organizations' financial stability is impacted by economic instabilities such as the COVID-19 pandemic and it also showed that nonprofit organizational structures are affected. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed as well as the literature review analysis showed that economic uncertainties such as the pandemic negatively impact healthcare



organizations' operational and financial stability (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020, 2022).

This study findings provided evidence there is a financial impact to nonprofit organizations ability to achieve highest standards of clients and employee wellbeing (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020, 2022). This study confirmed that several organizations had to furlough some of their staff to reduce costs and in doing so, some nonprofit organizations lost employees with tenure and experience. The pandemic led to significant changes in nonprofit organizational structure and the way they conduct their business (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020, 2022).

The findings of this study align with the literature. The literature suggest that thousands of non-profit organizations shut down their operations every year due to financial distress (Johnson et al., 2021). This study confirmed that the case organizations had to shut down one of their sites during the pandemic. According to a participant, "one center had to close for a month because we had no children attending and the other two centers had such a low enrollment" (One-one interview#1). This study also aligns with the literature by stressing the importance of revenue diversification and communication within an organization. Revenue diversification is important for the survival of an organization during periods of economic uncertainties (Johnson et al., 2021; Kim & Mason, 2020, 2022). The study findings show that the case organization was not heavily negatively impacted by the pandemic, partly because of the organization's revenue diversification strategies. Below is an excerpt from a participant's interview: "We also have our fingers dipped in everything. Diversification helped us. We have CDPAP, childcare, Residential, DHAB. We do the Community, have programs we have self-direction, we have childcare centers and when we have the foundation" (Group interview #1).

### Christian Perspective on the Business Problem and Findings

The bible encourages order in everything that we do, both as individuals and organizations. In 1 Corinthians 14:40, the bible states “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (NIV). In other words, organizations should plan for unforeseen contingencies and should have a well-defined culture in place to guide operations in different circumstances. Such orderliness could help ensure that organizations do not lose their financial stability when external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic happen. Also, there should be a clear leadership structure, with everyone taking responsibility for their decisions. Further, the parable of the wise and foolish builder is applicable to this study. According to Mathew 7: 24-27:

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.<sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.<sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>7</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (NIV)

In this parable, non-profit organizations with strong organizational culture and financial stability can be likened to the wise builder that builds his house on the rock. When unforeseen challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic happens, such organizations are able to remain viable. On the other hand, organizations that have not implemented proper protocol and financial structures can be likened to a foolish builder whose structure is unable to withstand external pressure. Such an organization may be forced to undergo radical organizational changes in response to an external shock and may be unable to maintain their long-term survival.

Finally, the bible has a lot to say about unity and cooperation. For example, Colossians 3:14 states that: “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (NIV). Therefore, above all else, organizations need to encourage greater level of unity, cooperation, and understanding among their employees. This is particularly important during challenging times when people may be undergoing stress and anxiety. Working together in unity will ensure that all hands are on deck and that everyone is working towards the same goals. This will not only be personally rewarding but could ensure seamless achievements of the organizational goals and objectives. For some organizations going through challenging times during periods of economic shocks such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, this may be the only way out of their unfavorable economic condition. “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand” (NIV). For non-profits to successfully overcome an economic shock, love, unity, cooperation, and understanding must occupy prime positions in their operations.

### **Conclusion**

The findings generated from this study help provide new perspectives on the impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on non-profit organizations’ culture, change, and financial stability. Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on non-profit organizations. Considering their high dependence on governmental organizations for their financial sustenance, these organizations need to imbibe specific organizational characteristics in order to maintain financial viability during and after the pandemic. Some of the themes that emerged from the interviews include revenue diversification, financial management tools, communications, as well as unity and cooperation, particularly during periods of crises. Overall, these themes were well supported by perspectives from the bible including the need for organizations to have order and

build proper foundations for their operations. Finally, there must be love, unity, cooperation, and understanding at the center of their operations.

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### **Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Guide Questionnaire**

1. In your opinion, how did you think the COVID-19 pandemic affected your organization?
2. Specifically, how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the organization's financial wellbeing (e.g., revenue, fundraising initiatives and ability to compete in the industry)?
3. What strategies (or decisions) do you, your division or team use in combatting the impact of COVID-19 on the financial well-being of the organization and its employees?
4. Please describe how effective these strategies were in combatting the effect of COVID-19 on the organization's operations and financial stability.
5. In your opinion, do you think the organization's operating reserve is adequate or inadequate? (b) How did it positively or negatively impact the organization's ability to withstand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic?
6. Do you think your organization's financial management and reporting (e.g., budgeting, financial meetings, financial communications or reports) play a huge role in equipping your organization or your department during and after the pandemic? b. Could you explain a little more or give me an example of how financial management tools might have equipped your department or team during or post the pandemic.
7. How prepared do you think your organization is in dealing with the impact of another financial strain such as the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. In your opinion what are the best practices or recommendations for other nonprofit human services healthcare related organizations regarding maintaining financial stability during and post economic shocks?
9. Post-COVID, what are the lessons learned and what would you do differently (e.g., financial and operational decisions).



10. Is there anything that we did not ask you that you would like to share with us about healthcare organizations financial stability during and post pandemic.