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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## The Shifting Stage of Business to the “New Normal”

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper dealt with the shifting stage of businesses in Baliwag City, Philippines, to the “New Normal” post-pandemic era. It analyzed how businesses, particularly based in Baliwag City, Bulacan responded to the following problems which arose due to the pandemic: safety protocols being implemented, shortage and inflation concerning raw materials and other supplies, offered products' and services' demands, experiences in terms of keeping customers and attracting new ones, cashless transactions, government support and the level of preparedness in case there will be waves of the pandemic. This research used a stratified sampling technique with 350 respondents who are registered business owners in Baliwag City. Based on the data gathered, most of the establishments do not follow the safety protocols released by the IATF, such as hand sanitizing, checking of body temperature, I am safe scanning, and the presentation of vaccination cards anymore. In addition, the study shows that the supply of raw materials and products and services demand has returned to normal, and the government gave ample support to businesses; however, inflation kept on rising. Undeniably, Baliwag City is gradually embracing the new normal as the actual stage of business in the 21st century.

**KEYWORDS**

Business, New Normal, Baliwag City

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### 1. Introduction

The catastrophic one-two punch from COVID-19 upended political, social, and economic life globally and left governments scrambling to respond on multiple fronts. As countries ease tentatively and uneasily to recover to life before the pandemic, a key question consistently raised is this: recovery to what? Should the outpouring of resources, efforts, funds, and time be aimed at a business-as-usual economic recovery? Or should they be targeted at recovery to a new normal beyond growth-centric revival? Winston Churchill's famous quip, “Never let a good crisis go to waste,” is a reminder that crises and dislocations home on social, economic, and political weaknesses all too often sidestepped or pushed to the backburner as a result of single-minded pursuits of master plans of growth or development. Recovery from crises to a new normal, then, typically means seizing the opportunity to reprioritize society, politics and the economy; for many countries, this entails expanding medium- and long-term social policies that address underlying social, political, or economic weaknesses that preceded and, likely, exacerbated the crises or dislocation. Meanwhile, a return to previous normalcy following such crises generally refers to a focus on growth-centric policies aimed primarily at an economic rebound. In practice, return to business-as-usual, then fixates on economic normalcy; social policies, where adopted, are stop-gap measures that do not substantively address underlying shortcomings. Such a course leaves way for weaknesses to amplify and further corrode or even fracture their foundations. Despite the promises of recovery to a new normal and the corresponding perils associated with business-as-usual economic normalcy, reprioritization with a new normal remains largely unrealized, even as a growing body of literature shows such a revamp improves economic fundamentals, political support and social relations for growth, particularly in the medium- and long-term (Stiglitz 2000; Bernanke 2009).

The paper revises the ample empirical and theoretical literature on sustainable organizational growth and strategic leadership relating to the critical aspects of the ongoing pandemic, including organizational and managerial innovation. Drawing from available COVID-19, management, and sustainable leadership publications released from 2020 to 2021, this paper considers influential studies exploring core business concepts, principles, philosophies, and activities for accelerating, stimulating, and nurturing social and corporate sustainability. The Researchers shed light on the significant influence COVID-19 has had on financial, operational and organizational health to elucidate expectations and implications for businesses concerning the long-term financial and functional impact of COVID-19. An overview of the relevant studies on the individual, organizational, and external factors relating to novel disease’s relation to sustainability is provided. The Researchers emphasize the need for digital transformation following the COVID-19 upheaval and throughout the upcoming years. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2022, 19(3), 1592; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031592>

Six months after the March lockdown, the Philippine economy has moved to the recovery stage, but micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are continuing to confront a sharp drop in demand and revenue. We examine the initial impact on MSMEs of the ECQ and lockdown measures using evidence obtained from a rapid nationwide survey conducted from the end of March to mid-April 2020 and derive policy implications. (Shinozaki and Rao 2021)

Also, according to Sarkis J. (2021), The COVID-19 crisis is emerging and evolving. It is not clear whether short-term changes and responses will result in a new “normal.” Adjustments to current theories or new theoretical developments may be necessary. This pathway article only starts the conversation – many additional sustainability issues do arise and cannot be covered in one essay. Organizations have faced a major shock during this crisis. Environmental sustainability practices can help organizations manage in this and future competitive contexts. Broad economic, operational, social and ecological-environmental sustainability implications are included. Emergent organizational, consumer, policy and supply chain behaviors are identified.

The East and Southeast Asia region is interesting for study: countries in the region are generally considered to be strong economic performers, so the populace in East and Southeast Asian countries may be inclined to welcome a growth-centric, business-as-usual recovery, more so than people in other regions. In particular, these countries have earned accolades for their economic success, such as the Asian tigers of South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, and the next Asian tigers of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Indeed, a key pillar of the East Asian Development Model (EADM)—a growth model ascribed to countries in the region—is that economic achievements underpin citizens’ acceptance of less-than-democratic regime rules and processes to enable the government-led economic success in these countries, often pursued with the aid of illiberal rules, processes, or practices (Shrestha 2013; Cha and Yap 2020).

Baliwag, or Baliuag, officially the City of Baliwag, is a 1st class component city in the province of Bulacan, Philippines. According to the 2020 census, it has a population of 168,470 people.

Baliuag was founded in 1732 by Augustinian friars and was incorporated by the Spanish Governor-General on May 26, 1733. The city was a part of Quingua (now Plaridel) before.

Through the years of Spanish domination, Baliuag was predominantly agricultural. People had to depend on rice farming as the main source of livelihood. Orchards and *tumanas* yielded fruits and vegetables, which were sold in the public market. Commerce and industry also played important contributions to the economy of the people. Buntal hat weaving in Baliwag, together with silk weaving popularly known in the world as Thai silk; the manufacturer of cigar cases, piña fibers, petates (mats), and Sillas de Bejucos (cane chairs), all of the fine quality became known in many parts of the world. The local market also grew. During the early part of the 19th century, Baliwag was already considered one of the most progressive and richest towns in Bulacan. The growth of the public market has significantly changed the model of the economy of the city.

In 2018, the Sangguniang Bayan filed a resolution to request Bulacan 2nd District Representative, Gavini Pancho, to file a house bill to convert Baliuag into a city.

ACT-CIS Partylist Representative Eric Go Yap and 1st District of Davao City Representative Paolo Duterte filed House Bill 7362, seeking to convert Baliuag into a city in the province. House Bill No. 7362 was filed last August 12, 2020, for the conversion of the municipality of Baliuag into a component city in the province of Bulacan.

House Bill No. 10444 was concurred by the Senate and submitted to the President for signature on June 29, 2022, a day before the end of the 18th Congress.

The bill lapsed into law on July 30, 2022, as *Republic Act No. 11929*. The plebiscite was originally set by the Commission on Elections on January 14, 2023, but its date was later moved to December 17, 2022, following the postponement of the December 2022 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections to 2023.

Despite having a low voter turnout, the majority of participating voters ratified the cityhood, making Baliwag Bulacan's fourth component city and the country's 148th. <https://placeandsee.com/wiki/baliuag>

This study aims to find out if the businesses in Baliwag, Bulacan are ready to transition to the "New Normal" or back to normal. Furthermore, the study also aims to confirm the following: if the business owners of Baliwag, Bulacan are still implementing the IATF policies and regulations; if the supply and demand have returned to normal; and if the businesses have fully adapted to the Pandemic.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

1. How do the IATF policies and regulations in business be described:
  - a. Years in Operation
  - b. Safety Protocols
    - Social Distancing
    - Sanitizing procedures
    - Body temperature checking
    - I am safe QR code
    - Vaccination Card
2. If the businesses experiencing a shortage and inflation in supply/raw materials?
3. To find out if the demand for the product/services returned to normal.
4. To know if the business is experiencing difficulties in keeping, retaining, and attracting customers.
5. The business adopted/used cashless transactions during the pandemic.
6. The support of the government to the businesses in Baliwag, Bulacan.
7. The preparedness of business for the possible next wave of the pandemic.

### **2. Method**

The quantitative research method was used by the researchers. This study made use of surveys and questionnaires on a single page in which to be filled up by the respondents. The respondents were the registered business establishments in Baliwag, Bulacan that were affected by the (COVID-19) pandemic.

A sample size of 350 businesses was sampled using a stratified sampling technique that regarded both men and women guided by postulations from Gay (1976), who observed that a sample size of 10% is considered minimum for large populations and 20% for small populations. The number of registered businesses in Baliwag, Bulacan, as of June 06, 2022, is 3,498. To get the sample size, 3,498 was multiplied by 0.1, which equals 349.8. Rounding off and the sample size will become 350 respondents. The Researchers used a convenience sampling method that relied on the needed Sample size stated above.

The questionnaire comprises fifteen questions that include a predefined list of answer options. After the researcher disseminated the questionnaire to the respondents, the researcher personally collected the survey right after it was totally filled up. The data collected were encoded directly to see the result of the data analysis. After the data were already gathered, the said data were tabulated and tallied through the use of Microsoft Excel for easy tabulation and accuracy of answers.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

After conducting the survey on 350 registered businesses in Baliwag, Bulacan, The Researchers then tallied, analyzed, and interpreted the data gathered from the cooperative respondents of this research study.

<b>Table 1: NUMBER OF YEARS IN OPERATION</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>1-2 YEARS</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>
	<b>3-5 YEARS</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>62.0</b>	<b>62.0</b>	<b>88.0</b>
	<b>6-8 YEARS</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

As presented in the table, most businesses existed for 3 years to 5 years (217 or 62.00%), and 26% existed for 1 to 2 years. This implies that businesses in Baliwag, Bulacan are still in the early stage of existence. The June 2020 survey among 270 national MSME entrepreneurs conducted by the International Council for Small Business (ICSB) stated that only 3% experienced growth, 11% survived, 71% experienced a decline, and 15% experienced unclear conditions leading to collapse.

<b>Table 2: IF THE BUSINESS IS STILL IMPLEMENTING THE 1-METER SOCIAL DISTANCING RULE</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>92.0</b>	<b>92.0</b>	<b>92.0</b>
	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>94.0</b>
	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>96.0</b>
	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The result presented in the table shows that a great number of businesses (322 or 92.00%) do not implement the 1-meter social/physical distancing protocols in conducting their business. These businesses cater to as many customers as possible to maximize their profits. Social distancing may limit the number of customers that enter their establishments, and fewer customers mean less revenue for these businesses.

<b>Table 3. IF THE BUSINESS IS STILL PRACTICING HAND SANITIZING PROCEDURES UPON ENTERING</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>92.3</b>	<b>92.3</b>	<b>92.3</b>
	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>94.3</b>
	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>95.7</b>
	<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The table above revealed that most businesses (323 or 92.30%) are no longer practicing hand sanitizing procedures. Due to limited manpower to cut operation costs, most small businesses have no assigned guard or personnel at the entrance to check if the customers complied with this. Although alcohol dispensers and sanitizers are still visible near the entrance door/gate, it is now at the discretion of the customers to sanitize their hands or not upon entering the business establishments.

<b>Table 4. IF THE BUSINESS IS STILL IMPLEMENTING BODY TEMPERATURE CHECKING</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>96.0</b>	<b>96.0</b>	<b>96.0</b>
	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>98.0</b>
	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The above table also shows that a greater number of businesses (336 or 96.00%) are no longer implementing body temperature checking. Though some businesses provide temperature scanning devices near the entrance, sometimes they are not functioning, and most often, there are no assigned personnel to check and monitor customers' body temperature.

<b>Table 5: IF THEY BUSINESS IS STILL IMPLEMENTING, I AM SAFE/QR SCANNING</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>99.7</b>
	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.3</b>	<b>.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 5 suggests that QR code scanning is no longer being implemented in most business establishments (349 or 99.70%). Since the local government is now more lenient in implementing QR codes or "I Am Safe" scanning, most businesses today are no longer complying with these protocols. Also, this procedure requires resources such as computers, internet connection and personnel/staff to check on every customer. So it may seem quite tedious and costly for most businesses to continuously implement it.

<b>Table 6: IF BUSINESS IS STILL REQUIRING THE CUSTOMERS TO PRESENT VACCINATION CARD PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NOT AT ALL</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>99.7</b>
	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.3</b>	<b>.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The table above also indicates the same results as the previous tables. 99.70% of businesses today are no longer requiring customers to present their vaccination cards. Customers can enter the establishments with or without having been vaccinated. The government is already preparing for the shift to the "new normal" as the country is now back to low-risk classification for Covid-19, acting Presidential spokesperson, Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles, said Tuesday. "Nasa low-risk classification na po ang National Capital Region at ang buong Pilipinas. Base ito sa tatlong metrics na ginamit (The National Capital Region and the whole Philippines are now at low-risk classification. This is based on the three metrics used) growth in cases, average daily attack rate per 100,000 population and health system's capacity," Nograles said during the Palace briefing.

<b>Table 7: IF THE AVAILABILITY OF SUPPLIES/RAW MATERIAL RETURNED TO NORMAL</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.0</b>
	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>
	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>98.0</b>
	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The above table shows that the availability of supplies for the majority of the businesses (308 or 88.00%) has now returned to normal. It suggests that the production capacity of most suppliers is also back to normal with confirmed availability of raw materials and other supplies.

<b>Table 8: IF THE BUSINESS IS EXPERIENCING INFLATION IN SUPPLIES AND RAW MATERIALS</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>
	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>88.0</b>
	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 8 suggests that prices of supplies and raw materials are higher after the pandemic, as experienced by 80.00% of the respondents. At the onset of the pandemic, prices had taken a dive due to a sudden drop in consumer spending and fuel demand. But since everything is almost back to normal, consumer spending is currently higher. Aside from the supply chain disruptions following the pandemic, Inflation is also brought about by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russia is a major supplier of oil, gas, and metals and, together with Ukraine, of wheat and corn. Reduced supplies of these important commodities have driven their prices up.

<b>Table 9: IF THE DEMAND LEVEL FOR YOUR PRODUCT/SERVICES RETURNED TO NORMAL</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>16.3</b>
	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>83.7</b>	<b>83.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The above table implies that the demand for products and services of most businesses has also returned to normal. With fewer restrictions, consumer spending is now higher than the previous year.

<b>Table 10: IF THE BUSINESS IS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN KEEPING CUSTOMERS</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>
	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>33.1</b>
	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The table affirms one common drawback of the recent pandemic. 234, or 66.90% of the respondents, declared that they are currently experiencing difficulty in keeping customers. Only 1.70% seem to sustain the number of customers they should have. According to Investopedia, the two-year pandemic has changed the buying patterns and spending habits of people. Most customers have switched heavily to online purchases. So those businesses who were not able to immediately adapt to new methods of conducting business may eventually lose some of their customers.



<b>Table 11: THE BUSINESS IS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN ATTRACTING NEW CUSTOMERS.</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>
	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>65.1</b>	<b>65.1</b>	<b>66.3</b>
	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

This table shows that there are quite a number of businesses (118 or 33.7%) that are struggling to bring new customers into their business. 65% were neutral about it. At the height of the pandemic, digital transformation suddenly accelerated, and consumer expectations became higher. Prospecting for new customers today required more creative strategies and an improved set of skills focusing on changing consumer behavior.

<b>Table 12: IF THE BUSINESS MANAGED TO KEEP/RETAIN ALL THE EMPLOYEES AMIDST PANDEMIC</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>
	<b>YES</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>94.3</b>	<b>94.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

This data showed that 94.30% of businesses were able to retain their employees amidst the pandemic. This is a good indication that Businesses in Baliwag have better employee retention schemes. The Philippine News Agency (PNA) Released a press conference that the unemployment rate in September 2022 stood at 5 percent, the lowest in more than two years, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported Tuesday. In a press conference, PSA chief and national statistician Undersecretary Dennis Mapa said the number of unemployed Filipinos in September fell to 2.5 million, or 183,000 lower than the 2.68 million citizens with no jobs the previous month.

<b>Table 13: THE BUSINESS HAD ADOPTED/USED E-COMMERCE AND OTHER ONLINE TRANSACTIONS</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>
	<b>YES</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>98.9</b>	<b>98.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

346, or 98.9% of the businesses had adopted and started to apply technology in transacting with their customers. The Pandemic has pushed these businesses into innovation and digital transformations. Staying competitive in this new economic environment requires new strategies and practices. Most businesses recognize the importance of technology as a critical component of their operations. Marketing and approaching customers through social media, conducting selling over different online platforms and using e-wallet/online payments are some of the new methods adopted by most businesses.

<b>Table 14: THE BUSINESS RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM THE LOCAL/NATIONAL GOVERNMENT</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The table illustrates how effective the Government is in providing support and giving assistance to business sectors. 100% of the respondents confirmed that they received some kind of support and aid from the national and local governments.

<b>Table 15: IF THE BUSINESS IS READILY-PREPARED FOR POSSIBLE NEXT WAVE OF PANDEMIC</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
<b>Valid</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 15 confirms that, generally, businesses in Baliwag are readily prepared for the possible next wave of the pandemic. Department of Health (DOH) Released a Memorandum No. 2022-078 issued last December 31, 2022, with the subject of Reiteration of Heightened Alert for COVID-19 Arrival from China. "Following the recent increase in COVID-19 cases in China, there is a need

for the country to intensify the monitoring and implementation of border control protocols for incoming individuals, especially from China, at all ports of entry.

## 5. Conclusion

1. The businesses in Baliwag City are still operating amidst the pandemic even though they experienced a hard locked down.
2. Almost all of the establishments did not follow anymore the safety procedures released by the IATF such as hand sanitizing, checking the body temperature, I am safe scanning, and also the presentation of vaccination cards.
3. The availability of supplies / raw materials returned to normal, but the inflation of the price arose, and also the demand for the products back to normal as well.
4. The entrepreneurs/business owners adopted cashless transactions such as Gcash and bank transfers (wire transfers) during the pandemic.
5. All the businesses received support from our beloved government, local/national, during the pandemic; also, all entrepreneurs are ready and prepared for the possible next wave of the pandemic.

### 5.1 Recommendations

1. Entrepreneurs/business owners must strengthen their business strategy to avoid declining and to survive the pandemic era.
2. The safety protocol must always follow the mandate by the DOH Manual in terms of the safety of the stakeholders.
3. The government must allocate more funds to help the businesses in Baliwag City by giving loans with small interest to the entrepreneurs to do a bulk buying of supplies/raw materials to lessen the price.
4. The businesses adopted cashless transactions; the Researchers recommended that future researchers should have a deeper study in terms of using cashless transactions in business.
5. The government must reserve an extra budget for the possible next wave of the pandemic to help businesses. And even the businesses are well prepared; they must use the "what if" strategy to ensure the possible shortcomings; also Researchers recommended to future Researchers study the preparations of businesses for the possible next wave of the pandemic.

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