



Organizational Resilience of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) in Port Harcourt During COVID – 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigated the resilience of Micro, Small and Medium scale Enterprise (MSME) in Port Harcourt during the Covid – 19 pandemic. The pandemic affected the ability of many industries to adapt to natural disasters and its attendant challenges. The study deployed narrative approach which is a qualitative research method. Findings indicate that the factors of organizational resilience such as robustness, agility and integrity can help organization manage challenges emanating from Covid – 19 Pandemic such as rise in the cost of raw materials, job lost, price spike of essential goods and health and safety of work places. This study recommends managers of these enterprise to put in place structures enabling the survival of pandemic or further natural disasters.

KEY WORDS: Organizational resilience, Agility, Robustness, Integrity, Micro, Small and Medium scale Enterprise

1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic is one of the most turbulent crises affecting the world after world war. The swift and massive shock of the Covid-19 pandemic and its subsequent shutdown measures have plunged the global economy into a severe contraction. World Bank forecast (2020), opined that the world will be plunged into the deepest recession ever, with declines in per capital output, shrinks the global economy by 5.2%, economy activity will decline by 7% with severe disruption in domestic demand and supply, trade, finance etc. Nigeria among other countries of the world plunge into recession, the worst of its kind as its GDP contracts by 3.62% in third quarter of 2020 (Adesoji, 2020). The pandemic has brought with it about 12 million infections, 550,000 deaths, hundreds of millions of jobs lost and the sharpest decline in per capital income (Guterres, 2020). This will lead to about 265 million people facing acute food insecurity, high levels of poverty, persistent gender inequality and massive gaps in finance.

The results of International Labour Organization (ILO) score programme survey MSME 2020 indicate that micro, small and medium sized enterprises are struggling to survive the effects of Covid-19 since they contribute about 70% of global employment and 50% of GDP. Many small and Medium Enterprise are finding it difficult to operate due to considerable decline in the demand for goods and services orchestrated by the different phases to lockdowns and closure of business premises. The MSME have limited ability to counteract the involved risk of Covid-19 infection or afford the costs of business due to showed business activity, lack of funds and liquidity. Most private and public businesses were unable to pay salary of their workers, compile with the financial commitment to their suppliers thereby leading to serious downsizing of workers and reduction of tax revenue for public finance (Syriopoulous, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to micro, small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Demand for goods and services has fallen drastically and manufacturers either have shortages or are overwhelmed by the situations. Nigeria borders were closed preventing influx of imported goods, the country came under quarantine orders so as to limit spread of the virus. People have to limit spread of the virus. People have to change the way they live by having maximal contacts with others, wearing face mask and frequently washing of hands. Nigeria's high dependence on Chinese product aggregated its vulnerability because of the restrictions imposed on cross border trade. This has significantly distorted supply chains for manufacturers and high cost of goods and service for consumers. Manufacturers need to realize that their response to the novel Covid-19 pandemic will have significant impact on their business. There is need to rise up to the occasion by seeking innovative ways of dealing with the situations so as to remain profitable and resilient.

Organizational resilience is a strategic imperative in today's dynamic world. Resilience theory has been researched across many disciplines; Psychologist defined resilience as the ability of an individual or organization to bounce back and withstand hardship by repairing itself (Higgins, 1994). In the field of human development, resilience was the ability to withstand and successfully cope with adversity (Werner & Smith, 2001). Social scientist describe resilience as the ability to recover from negative life experiences and become stronger by overcoming them (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Therefore, organization resilience is a continual effort of organization to achieve holistic strength on which to base business success (Howard, 2019). According to BSI index report (2019), organization resilience is the capacity of organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to sudden disruption or crisis with a bid to survive and prosper.

Organizational resilience theory had many dimensions in it but this research work will use the three dimensions posed by Kanter and Say (2015) which include robustness, agility and integrity. Robustness dimension deals with ability of organization to resist changes, agility deals with the ability to adapt to changes in the external environment while integrity dimension specify the need for cohesion among employees in case of crisis.

This research work will deal with the effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on micro, small and medium enterprise, different methods that can be used to reduce effect of the crisis on ability of business to survive.

2. Statement of the problem

Globally, coronavirus pandemic has affected every country's economic progress and had taken everyone including the government, entrepreneurs and managers of micro, small and medium enterprise by surprise. Chinese business actually has been slowed down affecting their position as the global industrial supply chain. Covid-19 pandemic was first discovered in Wuhan, china and spread steadily from there to other parts of the world thereby disrupting the world social order.

Coronavirus outbreak cause global health emergencies, global economic slowdown affecting trade investment and employment and the crisis will have an impact on the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (Guterres, 2020). The sectors most affected by the outbreaks are trade, tourism, sport, education, health, transportation and entertainment industries among others (Abulesau, 2020). The micro, small and medium enterprises are the most threatened group because they do not have the resources to survive the crisis. Micro, small and medium enterprises experienced price shocks, food shortage for consumer, inability of organizations to assess impacts such as arm products and they were unable to repay their loans (Adekoya and Aubangbee, 2020).

According to Aref-Adib and Martin (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated lockdown led to a slump in global oil prices affecting the revenue generated through this means. The entertainment industry which is the second-largest employer of labour in the nation was also severely affected leading to loss of money (Oji 2020). The Micro, small and medium enterprises which produce most of the consumer goods especially food and beverages, pharmaceutical, home personal care contributes 17% of total value of equity to Nigerian stock exchange market showing the importance of the sector (Nigerian Stock Exchange Report 2019). The lockdown of major cities in Nigeria and current foreign exchange devaluation due to drop in crude oil price orchestrated by the Covid-19 pandemic severely affected MSME leading to production activities, higher cost of imported raw materials, price spike of essential goods, job losses and worsening security situation in the country (Obi, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the economy, postponement or closure of sporting activity, religious, political and cultural activities (Turner and Akoiremi, 2020). There is disruption of trade and commerce in many industrial sectors. Retailers and organisations face a lot of challenges in maintaining the health and safety of their workforce, cash flow, supply chains, surge in consumer demand, sales and marketing. Hospitality and tourism sectors were shut down and no income is being generated from them while online shopping, online banking and online entertainment had witness immense urable growth since the pandemic (Donthum and Gustaffsson, 2020). People invest more in social media and internet during the lockdown due to the restriction imposed on physical gathering and interaction (Hewcnd, Neeka and Cacippo, 2018). Larger firms will be able to survive shocks more than MSMEs due to the huge financial resources (Verbno and Ventan, 2013). The risk that COVID-19 crisis had exposed MSMEs to can threaten their existence or serve as opportunity for their survival.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE CONCEPT

The concept of organizational resilience has emerged as a complex dynamic system in a number of disciplines until it finally entered in the business and management literature (Conta, 2002; Lengnick – Hall et al (2011) it is increasingly viewed as a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary concept (Ponomaror and Holcomb, 2009) but still lacking in its theoretical content (Sutcliffe and Vogus 2003). There is need for organization to continuously reinvent their business strategies so as to attain zero trauma, remain competitive and this forms the core for building organizational resilience (Hamel and Valyngas (2003).

Organizational resilience is a broad concept used loosely to account for a set of different phenomena (Hirsch and Levin, 1999). It has been defined by many scholars giving different meaning to this important construct. Horne and Orr (1998) defined organizational resilience as an essential quality an individual or organization possess so as to respond positively to changes or disruption without involving in a long period of regressive behavior. Sommers (2009) saw organizational resilience as a potential an organization possess to anticipate risks, take proactive measures to curtails its effect on organizational survival. Lengnick-Hall et al (2011) saw Organizational resilience as capability of firms to absorb shocks. These assertions indicate that organizational resilience is a continual effort of organization to achieve holistic strength on which to base business success.

Organizational resilience concepts employed many dimensions but this research work will use the three dimensions posed by Kantur and Say (2015) which include robustness, agility and Integrity. Robustness dimensions deals with ability of firm to resist change, agility entails ability to adapt to changes in the external environment while integrity dimension specify the need for cohesion among employees in case of crisis.

This research work will deal with the effort of Covid-19 pandemic on micro, small and medium enterprises. Based on these deductions, the different method that organization can employ to reduce effect of the crisis on their businesses will be discussed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Dimensions: Kantur and Say (2015)

And develop appropriate responses tailored towards transforming business activities so as to achieve organizational survival. Resilience organization possess qualities that enable them to adapt, integrate and make use of organizational resources and competencies to combat disruptive surprise or turbulent situations. These qualities are seen by some scholars as strategic offence (Limnos, Mazzaro Ghadouar and Schilizzi, 2014) dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano and Shuer, 1997), strategic resilience (Vaelokangas and Romme, 2013).

Organizational resilience is achieved at collective levels through employees and team. This assertion suggest that an organization can only be as resilience as its employees. (Horne, 1997, Malle 1998a). The way individual are treated in organization also have a great impact on organizational resilience (McCog and Elwood (2009) sees it as psychological contract: Individual resilience and organizational resilience greatly influence and reciprocate each other (Riulli and Savicke, 2003) because organizational resilience is an addictive composite connection of individual actions and abilities (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011. Horne and Orr (1995) argued that just having strong resilient individuals will not always gear towards achieving organizational resilience since too many strong resilient individuals can constitute a blockade to implementation of shared vision of organization. But, Gittel, Cameron, Lim and Rivas (2006) insisted that social relationship among employees will help achieve resilience.

3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE DIMENSION

Organizational resilience has been studied by many scholars through the years and each scholar had come up with different dimensions. The theoretical study done by Lergnick-Hall and Lergnick-Hall (2011) on human resources management as a factor affecting organization resilience developed cognitive, behavioral and contextual dimensions. Teixeira and Werther (2013) in their qualitative study found out that resilience is an important quality that ensures organizational survival by helping them maintain competitive advantage through its proactive, reactive and anticipatory innovation dimensions. Limnios, Mazzarol, Ghadouai and Schilizzi (2014) developed a quadrant of rigidity, transience, adaptability and vulnerability organizations in resilience. Mallak (1998) also studied organizational resilience and dimensionalize it into six components; goal –direct, solution seeking, avoidance critical understanding, role dependence ,source relevance, resource access and develop a scale.

Furthermore, Tierney (2003) studied resilience construct with dimensions of robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness and rapidity. Despite the growing interest of scholars to dimensionalize organizational resilience, there is no consensus reached on the accepted measure of this construct. Therefore, Kantur and Say (2015) in their research work on measurement of organizational resilience develop a scale with dimensions of robustness, agility and integrity.

This study will employ their dimension so as to map out strategies organization can use to overcome or recover from turbulent situations.

3.2.1 ROBUSTNESS

Robustness is a dimension of organizational resilience which help its elements, system and other unit of analysis withstand numerous stress and demand without caving in or loss of function (Tierney, 2003). It is an inertia quality which help reduce probability of organization to disintegrate when hit by a disaster or crisis. Robustness measures organizational ability to resist crisis, preserves against unfavourable circumstances and formulate diverse solution to the problem at hand so as to survive (Kantur and Say, 2015). According to Kendra and Wachtendarf (2003), it can be seen as ability of organization

to withstand a shock or disruption without completely deteriorating. So there is need for every manager to improve on the robustness strategies of its organization in order to withstand disturbances.

Robustness is a central issue that had been discussed in many scientific domain ranging from computing to biology, through ecology and finance (Kaufman, 1993; Lewontin and Goss 2005). Robustness is usually being confused with resilience in its definition. (Pavard, Dugdall, Saoud, Daray and Salembier, 2008). Intuitively, a robust system has the ability to adapt its behavior in response to unforeseen situations by modifying its environment and internal structures but a resilient system responds to perturbations or disturbances by trying to return the system affected to its initial functioning (McDald, 2006). Robust systems are characterized by resistance to accidental events, restoration of functionality and retention of original stability (Asbjornstett and Raus and, 1999). They have the ability to withstand external and internal shocks (Chandra and Grabis, 2007), does not yield to any damage either in form of loss or function (Agarwal, Blockleg and Woodman, 2007) and effectively cope with changes in competitive environment (Ferdows, 1997).

3.2.2 AGILITY

Organizations are always looking for ways to survive turbulence, crisis, natural disasters, economic meltdown and shutdown of commercial activities as is the case of many countries since COVID-19 pandemic erupted. Therefore for organization to survive they must strive to maintain their business performance by remaining agile (Arokodare and Asikhia, 2020). Agility can be seen as the ability of an organization to develop foresight to assess trend and forecast the future response in case of any disruption (Tende and Ekanem, 2018). Akhigbe and Onuoha (2019) opined that organizational survival will depend on how agile, responsive, dynamics and capacity to adjust a firm is not necessarily on how fit they believe they are. Agility is seen as ability of a firm to recognize opportunities, change direction and avoid collision (McCann, 2004).

Future responses in case of any disruption (Tende and Ekanem, 2018). Akigbe and Onuoha (2019) opined that organizational survival will depend on how agile, responsive, dynamic and capable to adjust a firm is not necessary on how fit they believe they are. There has been many attempts by scholars and the years to explain the concept of agility or what really makes an organization agile. This has arisen due to global rivalry among business that necessitate maintaining competitive advantage or complete restructuring of business order (Davis, 2009). Agility is defined as ability of organization to rapidly formulate a method in case of adversities (Soheila and Sayged, 2013). It is also the ability of system to answer and react positively to uncertainty in its changing environment (Umoh, Amah and Wokocha, 2014). Kantur and Say (2015) saw agility dimension as the capability of organization to take action rapidly or develops alternatives so as to benefit from a negative situations.

There is need for every organization to build on agility and resilience so as to perform effectively in turbulent situations. Agility is seen as the capacity of firms to move quickly, flexibly and decisively in expecting, formulating actions to take advantage of opportunities and threats in adversity so as to avoid negative outcome (McCann, Selsky and Lee (2009). To build up an agile organization, human resources practices such as eliminating job and management layers, expanding job scope and team play can be employed (Peterson, Pay and Mannix, 2003). Organization can also downsize and develop policies that help them speeds up response times to reacting to issues of disruption in their companies (Goldman, Hagel and Preiss, 1994; Pal and Panteleo, 2005). Many practices that promote agility already exist in organization but human resource managers should devise a means to identify, improve and align it to overall capacity-building strategies.

3.2.3 INTEGRITY

This is a dimension of organizational resilience that emphasizes the importance of unity among employees whereby they are engaged to carry out tasks that will bring the organization out of a crisis. According to Kantur and Say (2015), Integrity measures the level of cohesion among employees in an organization faced with unfavourable situation. They are expected to build on resilience by being transparent and clarified in their actions and behavior at all times so as to assess how it is aligned to the companies vision and mission (Sykes, Osborne and groves, 2013).

The purpose of every organization lies on its values, vision and mission. The purpose serve is the Leader's responsibility to ensure that employee are united towards achieving these goals. Selznick (1994) saw integrity as a concept that shows a level of faithfulness to self defined organizational values and principles. it entails the leadership to create a connoted embodiment of purpose which stresses on staying the same, keeping the familiarity in organization and protecting values.

3.3 EFFECT OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON SMALL MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

The word coronavirus disease started in Wuha, China in December, 2019 and spread rapidly to almost every part of the world. (Aifuwa, Saidu and Aifuwa, 2020). The outbreak of the disease has brought an alarming health crisis which government of different countries are battling to control. By 27th February, 2020, Nigeria recorded its first case of Covid-19 through an Italian citizen who travelled into the country (WHO, 2020) in a bid by the government to curtail its spread, restriction of movement and total lockdown was enforced in Nigeria. These affected the economy of the nation most especially micro, small and medium enterprises (Tashanora, Sekerbay, Che, Luo, Zhao and Zhery, 2020).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) score programme survey MSME 2020 indicate micro, small and medium sized enterprises are struggling to survive the effects of Covid-19. The restriction on transportation of people and goods negatively affect the supply of goods, personnel and services (June, Park, Hory and Hyun, 2016). The small and medium enterprise experienced price shock, food shortage for consumers inability of business enterprises to

access inputs and offset the loans (Adekoga and Aubangbees 2020). The associated lockdown due to COVID-19 led to a slump in oil prices which lead to scarcity in oil products.

According to ILO (2020), COVID-19 has impacted the world across three key dimensions (a) quantity of jobs both unemployment and underemployment. (b) The quality of work (wages and access to social protection) and (c) Specific groups that are vulnerable. The crisis has already transformed into an economic and labour market shock impacting supply (production of goods and services) and demand (consumption and investment). All business are facing significant decline in revenue insolvencies and job losses in specific section. The travel bans, border closure and quarantine measures has affected ability of informal and casual workers to access their workplace resulting in loss of income. Consumers in many economies find it different to access or purchase required goods and service. Given the turbulent environment occasioned by uncertainty and fear, enterprises are likely to delay investment, purchase goods or hire workers.

Buoey (2020) is of the opinion that not all retail sectors experienced losses. He stated that an international consulting company in Kantar report shows that while businesses relying on physical space and shops such as food markets, restruants, car dealers, movie theatre, gym and bars suffered losses, local convenience stores and online markets flourished. It was also discovered that there is increase in sales of health related products like hand sanitizers, facemask, vitamins and supplement.

Therefore the risk of COVID-19 on micro small, medium enterprises can threaten their existence or serve as an opportunity for their survival.

3.4 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Davahli, Karwowski, Sonnoz and Apostolipalos (2020) carried out a systematic review to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry. They observed that the hospitality industry was affected in the areas of job loss, revenue loss, decrease in market demand, employment issues of their workers travel behavior and COVID-19 spreading patterns. They found out that the way government and corporate bodies respond to the pandemic will go a long way to influence the health and safety of its workers. They suggested the invention and application of new technology and equipment in the tourist industry to protect their guests and workers alike.

Ameji, E. H., Taiga, U. U. & Amade, M.A. (2020) study on effect of Covid-19 pandemic on small medium scale enterprises in Lokoja used a sample of 100 respondents who are business owners selected using simple random sampling. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Their study revealed that the income of some dwindle during the pandemic due to increase in prices of materials, low demand for goods and services leading to the layoff of some of their staff. The study recommend the use of zero interest loan, grants, tax reduction for SMEs owners so as to cushion the effect of the pandemic on them.

Emejale, G., Agbasi, O. and Nosike, C. (2020) carried out a study on how strategic agility can reduce the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on small medium enterprises. They adopted survey research design. Their population for the study was 1500 while sample size was 306 business owners chosen using Krejcie and Morgan formula. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using simple regression technique. The findings of the study revealed that policy of strategic foresight will help companies to be conversant with happenings in their external environment so as to be prepared for any crisis or adversity.

3.5 METHODOLOGY

This work critically reviewed the existing literature; journal, and international conferences and opinion survey of management scholars on the ability of small medium enterprises to survive the coronavirus pandemic in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Therefore qualitative research method in a narrative approach will be employed.

3.6 CONCLUSION

From the reviews done on previous studies on organizational resilience of small medium sized enterprises, we deduce that organization who prepares beforehand on how to tackle adversity or crises easily bounces back and survive even after crisis. Though many SMES closed down due to the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on them but so many still survive because they employed good survival strategies.

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