

Assessment of Some Basic Strategies towards Managing COVID-19 Crisis in Micro/Small Sized Businesses

Damiete Onyema Lawrence¹ & Sir Anthony Wakwe Lawrence²

¹ Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

² Sustainable Development and Management Research, Community Inter-Relations and Conciliation Initiative (CIRCI), Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Correspondence: Damiete Onyema Lawrence, 7 All Saints' Street, UPE Sandfill, Borikiri, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
E-mail: damietelawrence@gmail.com

Received: April 4, 2021

Accepted: May 7, 2021

Online Published: June 26, 2021

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v16n8p21

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v16n8p21>

Abstract

This research is aimed at finding out if micro/small sized business owners/managers apply business planning processes and how they survived the impact of COVID-19 in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. We interviewed 568 enterprise units covering 11 classes of businesses that represent most of the micro and small-sized businesses. We applied statistical and graphical methods to analyse the data obtained. Businesses adopted creative measures like online advertisement, online marketing and home delivery where possible to remain afloat after the restrictions imposed by government. Some diversified their businesses into other areas where the market is flourishing like selling sanitizers and face masks. We also observed that a good number of these micro-sized business owners/managers do not adopt structured business plans, review the performances of their businesses, have guiding policies and do not understand the importance of having such policies. These are weak links towards sustainable growth of such businesses. Businesses that do not plan and do not know if their businesses are performing well and if they are beginning to make profit from what was invested is groping in the dark and that is not safe places for businesses to be. Based on the findings/discussions/conclusions, it will be needful to embark on further research to identify the specific business skill gaps among micro and small-sized businesses and develop appropriate interventions to bridge such capacity gaps. Finally, we recommended a 9 points model as a tool for micro and small size businesses in assessing and managing crisis.

Keywords: micro-sized, small-sized, coronavirus-pandemic, business-plans, business-policy, performance monitoring, capacity-gaps

1. Introduction

The spread of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has already affected over 200 countries in a matter of months. Even though containment measures in China had reduced new cases by more than 90%, this reduction is not the case elsewhere, as the US, Spain and Italy had come worse-off by the spread of the virus, and there had been serious concern regarding the national health systems' capacity around the world and Africa, in particular, to effectively respond to the needs of infected patients, who require intensive care for the COVID-19 illness. As at March 2021, the effort to fast-track vaccination has given hope to those countries where the impact is most severe.

COVID-19 pandemic in every ramification is a crisis situation in a large scale impacting many nations and all facets of lives. Micro and small-sized businesses already face many challenges including lack of adequate finance to run and expand business, their exposure to bankruptcy with any little challenge. These small businesses were set up mainly to get funds for survival and may not prioritise the operationalization of business planning and performance monitoring which are required for business survival and growth. Desai (2000) notes that, business must undertake strategic intentions because their environments are constantly and increasingly becoming complex and unstable; suggesting that planning creates a viable link between a business' mission, vision, goals, objectives, strategic choices and its resources. Hence, strategic intention encourages the clarification of business goals, systematic gathering of information, unity in team work and corporate behaviour; which will position a business strategically, by striking a balance between how it operates and the requirements of the environment (Sandada, Poee, & Dhurup, 2015). No matter how small a business is, it must therefore plan,

monitor performance and be guided by business policies. There is a well-known adage that “failing to plan is planning to fail”.

This research was carried out in Port Harcourt, which is one of the key revenue generating cities of Nigeria and is equally very active commercially. Port Harcourt is a typical example of most cities in Nigeria. Small businesses (micro and small-sized enterprises) are the major source of employment of most Nigerians. Identification of their business skill gaps will be a basic step in how to propose interventions to bridge such gaps. Crisis is inevitable in life and understanding the level of application of business skills by these smaller-sized entrepreneurs is critical and also the strategies they applied to stay afloat during the peak of this COVID-19 pandemic will be useful. We had a search to accumulate some information through literature review and adopted a survey based research.

Considering the importance of micro and small businesses to the economy of the nation, and, using Port Harcourt as our area of study, we aimed to address the following research objectives:

1. Finding out if micro/small sized business owners/managers make monthly or annual plans for their businesses
2. Finding out if micro/small sized business owners/managers carryout regular performance review
3. Finding out if micro/small sized business owners/managers have conscious/formal guiding policies for their businesses
4. Finding out if micro/small business owners/managers understand the importance of business policies
5. Gather information on the strategies micro/small business owners/managers employed during the peak of the COVID-19 for the survival of their businesses

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

2.1.1 Strategy

Enitilo, Ajayi, Famuagun and Adelugba (2018) explained that the methods employed by organisations to determine and implement policies in order to compete favourably in its market, aimed to secure sustainable competitive advantage are strategies. In other words, the core of strategy is to deliver a unique mix of value - choosing to execute activities differently and to perform them differently than competitors (Henrik & Mark, 2008). Mintzberg (1978) described strategy as a pattern in a pool of decisions used to bridge a gap, with a view of just basic planning. This description is not far from that of Monroe (2012), who stated that, strategy is a complex and participative management technique of scanning the environment and the formulation of mission, vision and policies in order to improve the corporate performance, hence its competitiveness in the market. In essence, we refer to strategy as a plan, map or action designed to achieve an overall aim.

There are numerous literatures on strategic decision and leaders' values, beliefs, varied personality and characteristics (Adams, Licht, & Sagiv, 2011; Warren, Howat & Hume, 2011). Warren, Howat and Hume (2011) maintained that organizations are political systems in which people pursue their personal interest, also influenced by external factors such as the marketplace, technology and society. It is the role of strategic thinkers to fully recognise both the internal and external factors and their impact on the organizations future. Similarly, Adams, Licht and Saqiv (2011) found that directors' personal values played major roles in their decision making – which can hinder or maximise productivity.

Dansoh (2005) found that the common basics of strategic planning included evaluating the environment, goals, allocation of resources, long-term view, competitive advantage and course of action. This was supported by Dincer, Tatoglu and Glaister (2006), and Brand (2010), who stated that the key aspects of strategic planning were corporate mission statement formulation, objectives creation, crafting and implementation of the strategies, monitoring and controlling progress. So, strategic planning is the setting up and scheduling of corporate units, process, tools and people in order to achieve an intended target. Therefore, strategic intention begins with a thought and ends with planned out map to achieving desired outcome.

2.2 The Meaning and Nature of Crisis Management

Organizations are well thought-out as open system working within a confined geographical space to achieve certain goals. Gabriel (2018) and Wobodo and Oparanma (2019) opined that, as organization interact constantly with external forces within their environment such as government agencies, supplies and many more, the environment provides the organization with opportunities and its basic inputs resources such as manpower and raw materials which the organization in the end rollout to the society as products and services for consumption.

Studies have shown that by nature every organization is goal-seeking and the environment determines the extent to which goals are achieved. In other words, a crisis in the organization's environment is a direct and indirect crisis to the organization, which if not effectively managed can slip the organization into early entropy that can threaten its survival; Karam (2018) explained it to be a low probability-high impact phenomenon. Crisis can manifest due to ineffective leadership or as a result of natural phenomenon such as earthquake, flood, pandemic etc (Wobodo & Oparanma, 2019).

Heath (2010) opined that, the integrity and authenticity of any organization is central to its theme of crisis, insinuating that, an organization must have a strategic business plan from initiation which entails crisis prevention, mitigation and communication response. Wobodo and Oparanma (2019) also explained, an organization response to a crisis situation is dependent on how the organization is prepared to manage crisis prior to, during and after the crisis incidence. Crisis management is a process designed to prevent or reduce the impact and damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders. Crisis could start out by an effortless piece of gossip, news or information being circulated through media outlets, social networks, or even word of mouth then it spreads through recipients at large, which leads to the state of anxiety, agitation and uncertainty within the target of the crisis. In view of this, crisis management has been defined as actions that cover the urgent response to an adversity, recovery efforts, mitigation, and preparedness efforts to reduce the impact of possible future crises (Mehrotra, Znati & Thompson, 2008). Organization leaders must appreciate the root cause of the crisis situation, in order to achieve a successful crisis management, adopting workable strategies that suit the crisis; hence, some crisis can be avoided while others can only be managed.

Accordingly, Lerbinger (2012) categorized eight forms of crisis that are likely to befall an organization namely natural disaster, technological crises, confrontation, malevolence, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence, terrorist attacks.

1. Natural disasters are crises such as: flood, earthquake, hurricane, volcanic eruption, tsunamis, windstorm etc. caused by nature, they are environmental phenomena. This is because it happens naturally without any human stimulus. The insinuation of either of the listed events on the organization is often dependent on their harshness; however, some scholars explicitly declared that they are usually destructive. As such, organizations are required to always be crisis prepared in order to swiftly ameliorate their damaging effect (Wobodo & Oparanma, 2019). Those incidents can be managed through insurance covers.
2. Technological crisis are caused by technological accidents as a result of organizations trying to meet up with the latest technological gadgets as well stay competitive in their industry. This crisis occurs with the human application of science and technology; when technology becomes complex, coupled with inaccurate application or compilation of a system as a whole, this can lead to a technological breakdown. This type can be managed by regularly scanning the industry to understand new inventions and how they apply to the company and the industry.
3. Confrontation crisis are caused when there is a conflict escalation between two discontented parties and both parties are expecting to win acceptance of their desires; this conflict can be between groups and organizations. Exposing staff to conflict management courses can be a way to reduce or manage this type of crisis.
4. Crisis of malevolence has to do with opponents or scoundrel persons by means of criminal means or other extreme tactics for the purpose of expressing hostility or anger toward, or seeking gain from a company, country or economic systems perhaps with aims of destabilizing or destroying it. Effectively team working with law enforcement and installation of security appliances can manage this type of crisis
5. Crisis of organization misdeeds occur when management takes action or inaction which will directly cause harm or put their stakeholders at risk without adequate precaution, this can be observed when management values favour short-term economic gain and neglect broader social values and stakeholders investments; concealing and misinterpreting information about itself and its products in its dealing with consumers and others. The inference here is that if nothing is quickly done to remedy the situation, the company may end up losing customers' patronage to their closest rivals because of negative public perception about the company's practices (Wobodo & Oparanma, 2019), by the society or conflicting party. Regular external auditing of the firm and carrying out of performance management exercises can help manage this type of crisis
6. Workplace crisis occur when a worker or former employee commits violence against other employees on organizational grounds. Enforcement of company rules on punitive measures to be applied on unruly staff will help here.

7. Rumors as crisis, also known as smouldering crisis, occurs through falsification of information to hurt an organization's reputation; by creating false information about the organization's products and services, such as linking an organization to radical or terrorist groups. As observed in Oparanma and Wechie (2014), these types are characterized as disturbances that can cause injuries to lives and properties through some acts of illegal carelessness such as intentional acts of omission which can arise from several intents. Effective communications can help reduce misinformation and rumors.

8. Crisis leadership is classified as either acute crises or chronic crises. These crises are sensitive and emotions related, so that when exposed to the public can steer controversy, inviting negative stakeholders' reactions and thereby cause potential harm to the reputation, the financial well-being or the survival of the firm or some portion of it. This follows that engagement of competent managers is critical to having a crisis free organization

2.3 Crisis Management

Today's crises bring new challenges to be addressed and the theoretical frameworks developed by scholars in the past may no longer be appropriate in dealing with them (Topper & Lagadec, 2013). Crisis situations are very unique, which make the term 'crisis' mean different things to different people, as they guide managers and leaders in deciding what to do in a crisis situation (Khaled & Tevhide, 2014). Crisis management is a key tool that clearly gauges the extent an individual has developed in knowledge, experience and understanding. The consequential effect of ill-managed crisis can be very catastrophic as it directly distresses the entirety of the organization (Amesi & Augustus, 2015). Effective crisis management may be divided into three fundamental phases namely: pre-crisis phase, crisis phase and post-crisis phase (Taneja, Pryor, Sewell, & Recuero, 2015).

1. Pre-crisis phase is considered as the phase prior to the emergence of crisis, organizations are advised to proactively engage in activities geared in the direction of isolating potential crises or it's triggers, throughout this phase; thus manoeuvring the tendency of a full blown crisis (Wobodo and Oparanma, 2019).

2. Crisis phase can be considered the period in which the organization is in crisis; the organization at this stage, must be responsive and reactive enough to apply the crisis management plan prepared during the pre-crisis phase in order to mitigate or lessen the outcomes tied to the crisis.

3. Post crisis phase can be denoted as reactive or resilient phase; during this phase the organization is perceived to be recovering from a disastrous attack. In doing so, the organization must recognize the root cause of the predicament and carry out proactive measures to eliminating future happenings through workable solutions

2.3.1 Crisis Management Strategies

Reactive Strategy - Being reactive is having the ability to confront challenges you encounter in real time. In relation to crisis management, Karam (2018) conceives, it is the situation in which planning decisions take place during and after the crisis situation. So, a reactive crisis manager will typically wait for crisis to take place before making necessary steps to control and eradicate it in order to achieve continuity in business operations (Wobodo and Oparanma, 2019). This entails allowing decisions made completely and only in response to a crisis situation or opportunity. No wonder, Bailey (2016) posits this strategy to be a quick thought through process which is logical and planned to turn things around in the organization's interest. Though, the reactive thinkers may find workable solutions for the current distress, they may also be short-sighted in analysing what future requirements are; neglecting preventive measures against problems (nothing new or different is considered) unless and until a circumstance of crisis extent is reached.

Proactive Strategy - This can be attributed to people or group of people who are prone to take actions to impact their surroundings (Robbin et al., 2011); the possibilities of hitches are examined. Proactiveness, measures the degree to which an organization is self-moving within and outside a crisis situation; creativity is encouraged. This strategy can be considered as a die-hard strategy, because it is actively influenced and engaged in potential crisis situation and how to avoid them. Proactive organizations counter and face difficulty and change head-on (Wobodo, Asawo and Asawo, 2018); which gives them the capacity to control their own fate (Rotter, 1966). In light of this, Frankl (2013) in Wong (2014) also alleged that, proactive inclination enables organizations to successfully preserve their strength and confidence in the midst of challenges, irrespective of the impact of the chaos; this makes individuals and organizations more future oriented - resulting in improved organizational foresight and sustainability (Lawrence, Agbeche, Odili and Amadi (2020).

2.4 The Concept of Crisis Management as a Result of COVID-19

Crises make routines, established methods, rules etc. of businesses to become non-productive. Many circumstances wreak such havoc on small businesses. Some examples include injury to personnel, fire incident

affecting the business, theft of business property, impacts of diseases, death of staff, government and legislative actions, natural disasters, viral or microbial pandemic etc. Crisis in this case is often unexpected, unplanned for event that threatens the survival of a business. The core strategy of businesses during such crisis is to devise proactive and reactive interventions to stay in business.

Micro and small-sized businesses have less capacity to stay afloat in such crisis circumstances. The technical knowledge on how micro and small-sized businesses can stay afloat even after crisis is not available to these micro and small-sized enterprises often owned and managed by people with little assets and business skills. On the other hand however, since these smaller business owners have greater direct contacts with their customers, they tend to be more responsive to the needs of such customers (Herbane, 2013; Hong & Li, 2012; Lerbinger 2012; Irvine & Anderson 2006). Hong & Li, 2012; McConnel, 2011 submitted that some companies have better chances of recovery from crisis than others and that recovery from crisis is not entire and complete, this is more so for micro and small-sized enterprises due to their resource constraints and relatively weak market positions.

Every business is vulnerable to crisis but micro and small businesses are more exposed. Alves et. al (2020) in their paper reviewed the impact of COVID-19 on 6 businesses in the Macau area of China in the months following the COVID-19 outbreak. A good number of the firms adopted flexible human resource management and increase in product diversification, exploration of new markets and increase in the capacity building. Small businesses that have a good crisis plan are likely to survive from crisis than those that do not (Irvine & Anderson, 2006).

2.4.1 Strategies employed by businesses to survive COVID-19

Bartik, Bertrand, Cullen, Glaeser, Luca & Stanton (2020) reported a survey involving more than 5,800 small businesses and in their analysis suggested that the pandemic had already caused massive dislocation among small businesses just several weeks after its onset and prior to the availability of government aid through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in the United States of America. Nearly 50% of them reported to have temporarily closed mainly due to reductions in demand and employee health concerns. They equally reported varied impacts among the sectors with retail, arts and entertainment, personal services, food services, and hospitality businesses all affected. They however stated that finance, professional services and real estate-related businesses experienced less disruption, as these industries were better able to move to operate remotely. In-person industries like personal services or retail reported worse prospects for surviving the impact of the pandemic than professional services or other sectors with minimal need for face-to-face contact.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design Analysis

This research is aimed at finding out if micro/small sized business owners/managers apply business planning processes and how they survived the impact of COVID-19 in Port Harcourt. We interviewed 568 enterprise units covering 11 classes of businesses that represent most of the micro and small-sized businesses in Port Harcourt. We also interviewed the business owners or their managers to get first-hand information from them. We adopted both quantitative and qualitative analysis depending on the nature of the question. The quantitative data collected from the interviews were statistically treated to means, standard deviation and 5% confidence levels (Ahiazu & Asawo, 2016). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collated and analysed using appropriate graphical presentations to highlight the relevant issues (Genise, 2002)

Micro-sized and Small-sized businesses or enterprises are non-subsidiary, independent units with very few persons under their employment. The classification in terms of what is Micro, Small or Medium sized enterprise depends on the country in question. The size of the economy and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a nation affect such classification/definition. OECD (2005) had classified small businesses as those with less than 50 employees and micro-sized businesses as those with less than 10 employees. This aligned a little more with the methods used by Nigerian commercial banks for their operational purposes. The number of employees that constitute small business for big economies like the European Union, United States of America and Canada with those of World Bank/other international financial outfits is far higher.

For this research, we considered the level of businesses and the GDP of Nigeria in the classification of the businesses. In this regard we considered businesses with 8 or less employees as micro-sized while those having between 9 and 20 as small-sized. These two categories are the target sizes of businesses utilised by the research.

3.2 Data Collection

We conducted face to face interviews for these business owners and managers using the pre-set questionnaire developed for this research (Hennink et al, 2011). These interviews were conducted to understand how the

COVID-19 impacted their businesses from September to December 2020.

To answer these questions, we developed a set of objectives and generated questions to help us elicit responses that will address the research questions for business owners and managers on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their business.

The following are the questions grounding this research:

- 1) Do you make monthly or annual plans for your business?
- 2) Do you carryout regular performance review?
- 3) Do you have guiding policies for your business?
- 4) Do you understand the importance of business policies?
- 5) What are the main reasons why your business survived the peak of COVID-19 Pandemic?

The questionnaires were administered to owners and managers of 568 micro and small-sized enterprises within the Port Harcourt metropolis as follows:

1. Fruit sellers
2. Artisans
3. Online shops/Bloggers
4. Chemist shops/Pharmacies
5. Retail shops/Provision stores
6. Business centres
7. Petroleum product sellers/Filling stations
8. Meat and fish sellers
9. Drinks and Food shops
10. Retail Point of Sale System (POS) as a means of converting money in the bank to cash/Micro-Credit institutions
11. Betting shops

For questions 1 to 4 all the data obtained were analysed using Chi-square and p-values, and also converting the proportion of respondents that said yes to the questions to percentages of the whole and presenting graphically. Question 5 was analysed graphically comparing the proportion of people that responded to the various strategies adopted by the business owners/managers.

4. Findings

4.1 Monthly/Annual Plans in Place

Table 1. Summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and their monthly and annual plans for business

SN	Business	Monthly annual plan			Total	X ²	df	p-value
		NEUTRAL	NO	YES				
1	Fruit sellers	MSB	24	1	27	8.879	2	.012
		SSB	4	3	5			
2	Artisan/Skill workers	MSB	29	0	1	39.141	2	.000
		SSB	5	6	19			
3	Online Businesses	MSB	5	0	26	2.366	1	.124
		SSB	0	0	13			
4	Pharmacy/Chemists	MSB	9	0	21	2.403	2	.301
		SSB	13	1	16			
5	Provision Retails	MSB	24	2	7	.855	2	.652
		SSB	9	1	5			
6	Business centres	MSB	19	4	8	11.066	2	.004
		SSB	4	2	15			
7	Petroleum Product Retails	MSB	5	5	23	3.215	2	.200
		SSB	1	3	26			
8	Meat/Fish Retails	MSB	28	6	14	7.479	2	.024
		SSB	2	1	8			
9	Bars/Eateries	MSB	31	3	6	9.576	2	.008
		SSB	11	0	11			
10	POS/Micro Financing	MSB	14	2	8	9.472	2	.009
		SSB	0	1	8			
11	Pool betting shops	MSB	3	1	7	2.895	2	.235
		SSB	7	0	5			

The result from Table 1 shows the summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and their monthly and annual plans for business. It shows that the relationship between enterprise and their monthly and annual plans for business were significant amongst Fruit sellers ($X^2=8.879$, $p=.012$), Business centres ($X^2=11.066$, $p=.04$), Bars/Eateries ($X^2=9.576$, $p=.008$) and POS/Micro Financing ($X^2=9.472$, $p=.009$) respectively.

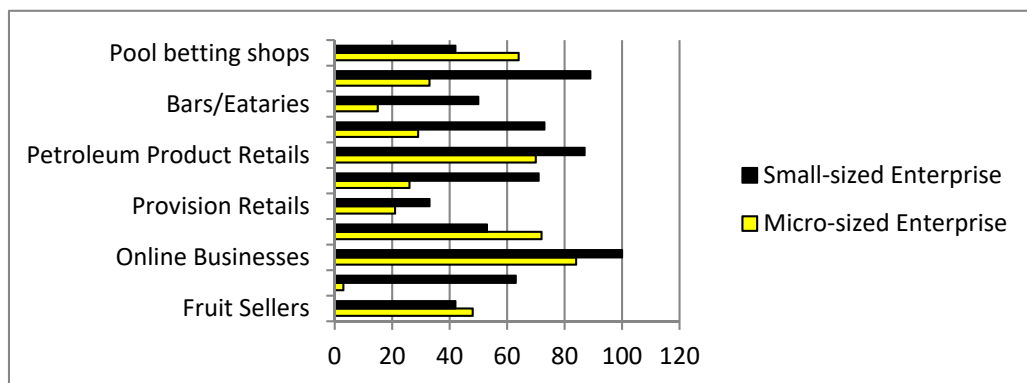


Figure 1. The extent to which micro/small sized businesses make operational plans

We asked to know from the various business owners if they make business plans. Figure 1 shows that a greater percentage of business owners/managers of small-sized businesses said they do when compared to the owners of micro-sized businesses. The major exceptions were in pool betting and pharmacies/drug shops but in those cases the differences were not statistically significant (See Table 1).

4.2 The Business Carries Our Performance Reviews

Table 2. Summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and the assessment of their monthly and annual performance reviews

SN		Business	Performance reviews			Total	X2	df	p-value
			NEUTRAL	NO	YES				
1	Fruit sellers	MSB	24	14	14	52	1.094	2	.579
		SSB	4	3	5	12			
2	Artisan/Skill workers	MSB	29	0	1	30	39.123	2	.000
		SSB	5	4	21	30			
3	Online Businesses	MSB	5	0	26	31	2.366	1	.124
		SSB	0	0	13	13			
4	Pharmacy/Chemists	MSB	9	0	21	30	2.403	2	.301
		SSB	13	1	17	30			
5	Provision Retailers	MSB	24	5	4	33	6.363	2	.042
		SSB	9	0	6	15			
6	Business centres	MSB	19	5	7	31	14.587	2	.001
		SSB	4	1	16	21			
7	Petroleum Product Retailers	MSB	5	16	12	33	22.209	2	.000
		SSB	1	1	28	30			
8	Meat/Fish Retailers	MSB	28	10	10	48	11.399	2	.003
		SSB	2	1	8	11			
9	Bars/Eateries	MSB	31	4	5	40	11.519	2	.003
		SSB	11	0	11	22			
10	POS/Micro Financing	MSB	14	2	8	24	11.647	2	.003
		SSB	0	0	9	9			
11	Pool betting shops	MSB	3	2	6	11	3.654	2	.161
		SSB	7	0	5	12			

The result from Table 2 shows the summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and the assessment of their performance regularly. It shows that the relationship between enterprise and the assessment of their performance regularly amongst Artisan/Skill workers ($X^2=39.123$, $p=.000$), Provision Retailers ($X^2=6.363$, $p=.042$), Business centres ($X^2=14.587$, $p=.001$), Petroleum Product Retailers ($X^2=22.209$, $p=.000$), Meat/Fish Retailers ($X^2=11.399$, $p=.003$), Bars/Eateries ($X^2=11.519$, $p=.003$) and POS/Micro Financing ($X^2=11.647$, $p=.003$) respectively.

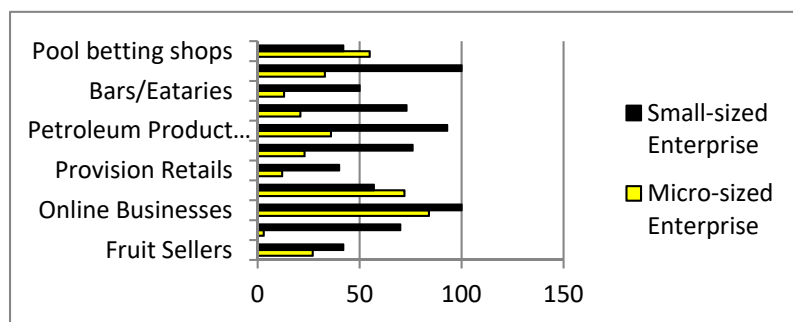


Figure 2. The extent to which micro/small sized businesses carry out routine performance reviews

Figure 2 shows the trend of responses with regards to having routine performance review against the plans made. Many micro-sized businesses do not monitor their business performance. Though the relatively smaller units of pharmacy/drug shops and pool betting units said they review performance more than their larger counterparts, the differences in those cases were not significant (see Table 2).

4.3 Business Policy in Place

Table 3. Summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and the business policies in place

SN		Business Policy			Total	X2	df	p-value	
		Business	NEUTRAL	NO					YES
1	Fruit sellers	MSB	24	5	23	52	4.541	2	.103
		SSB	4	4	4	12			
2	Artisan/Skill workers	MSB	29	0	1	30	39.176	2	.000
		SSB	5	9	16	30			
3	Online Businesses	MSB	5	5	21	31	2.459	2	.293
		SSB	0	2	11	13			
4	Pharmacy/Chemists	MSB	9	1	20	30	1.971	2	.373
		SSB	13	0	17	30			
5	Provision Retails	MSB	24	4	5	33	2.174	2	.337
		SSB	9	1	5	15			
6	Business centres	MSB	19	3	9	31	13.833	2	.001
		SSB	4	0	17	21			
7	Petroleum Product Retails	MSB	5	20	8	33	30.895	2	.000
		SSB	1	1	28	30			
8	Meat/Fish Retails	MSB	28	12	8	48	10.778	2	.005
		SSB	2	2	7	11			
9	Bars/Eateries	MSB	31	6	3	40	8.268	2	.016
		MSB	11	3	8	22			
10	POS/Micro Financing	SSB	14	0	10	24	9.118	1	.003
		MSB	0	0	9	9			
11	Pool betting shops	SSB	14	0	8	11	2.253	1	.133
		MSB	0	0	5	12			

The result from Table 3 shows the summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and the business policies in place. It shows that the relationship between enterprise and the business policies in place amongst Artisan/Skill workers ($X^2=39.176$, $p=.000$), Business centres ($X^2=13.833$, $p=.001$), Petroleum Product Retails ($X^2=30.895$, $p=.000$), Meat/Fish Retails ($X^2=0.778$, $p=.005$), Bars/Eateries ($X^2=8.268$, $p=.016$) and POS/Micro Financing ($X^2=9.118$, $p=.003$) respectively.

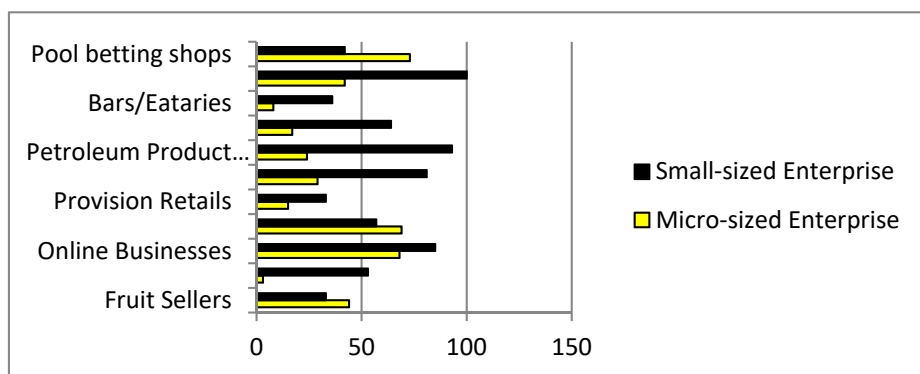


Figure 3. The extent to which micro/small sized businesses have put in place operational policies

Many of the relatively larger businesses performed better in this regard. 100% of the owners of Micro-financing business had business policies that guide their business operations. In all the cases, the micro-sized businesses had lower proportions compared to the bigger sized counterparts with business policies in place except for fruit

sellers, pharmacy/drug shops and pool betting businesses where the smaller units said they are more complaint with having business policies in place. However, in all such cases, the differences were not significant (See table 4)

4.4 Does Having Business Policy Help During Management of Crisis Like the COVID-19?

Table 4. Summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and Business Policy that help during management of crisis like the COVID-19

SN	Business	Management of crisis			Total	X2	df	p-value	
		NEUTRAL	NO	YES					
1	Fruit sellers	MSB	24	17	11	52	.985	2	.611
		SSB	4	4	4	12			
2	Artisan/Skill workers	MSB	29	0	1	30	39.163	2	.000
		SSB	5	8	17	30			
3	Online Businesses	MSB	5	3	23	31	2.488	2	.288
		SSB	0	2	11	13			
4	Pharmacy/Chemists	MSB	9	1	20	30	1.775	2	.412
		SSB	13	2	15	30			
5	Provision Retails	MSB	24	4	5	33	2.174	2	.337
		SSB	9	1	5	15			
6	Business centres	MSB	19	6	6	31	10.333	2	.006
		SSB	4	5	12	21			
7	Petroleum Product Retails	MSB	5	21	7	33	33.381	2	.000
		SSB	1	1	28	30			
8	Meat/Fish Retails	MSB	28	7	13	48	5.370	2	.068
		SSB	3	1	7	11			
9	Bars/Eateries	MSB	31	6	3	40	16.238	2	.000
		SSB	11	0	11	22			
10	POS/Micro Financing	MSB	14	4	6	24	11.681	2	.003
		SSB	0	1	8	9			
11	Pool betting shops	MSB	3	3	5	11	2.673	2	.263
		MSB	7	1	4	12			

The result from Table 4 shows the summary of frequency and Chi-square statistic on the relationship between enterprise and Business Policy that help during management of crisis like the COVID-19. It shows that the relationship between enterprise and Business Policy that help during management of crisis like the COVID-19 amongst Artisan/Skill workers ($X^2=39.163$, $p=.000$), Business centres ($X^2=10.333$, $p=.001$), Petroleum Product Retails ($X^2=33.381$, $p=.000$), Bars/Eateries ($X^2=16.238$, $p=.000$) and POS/Micro Financing ($X^2=11.681$, $p=.003$) respectively

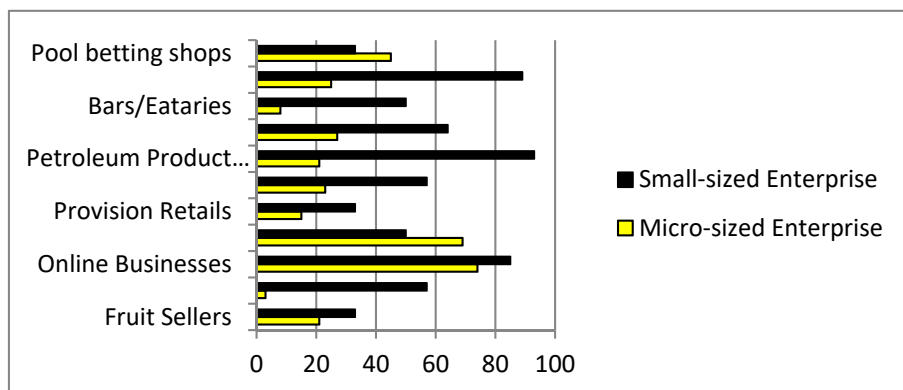


Figure 4. The views of business owners on the importance of business policies

Figure 4 shows the proportion of business owners that think having a business policy is beneficial to a business. Most of the owners/managers of the relatively larger businesses see the importance of having business policy.

That is not the case with the relatively smaller businesses. However, the owners/managers of relatively smaller businesses of pharmacy and pool betting seem to recognise the importance of policies to businesses (though not statistically significant) than their relatively larger counterparts (see Table 4).

4.5 Strategies employed by Micro/Small-sized businesses to survive the COVID-19 pandemic

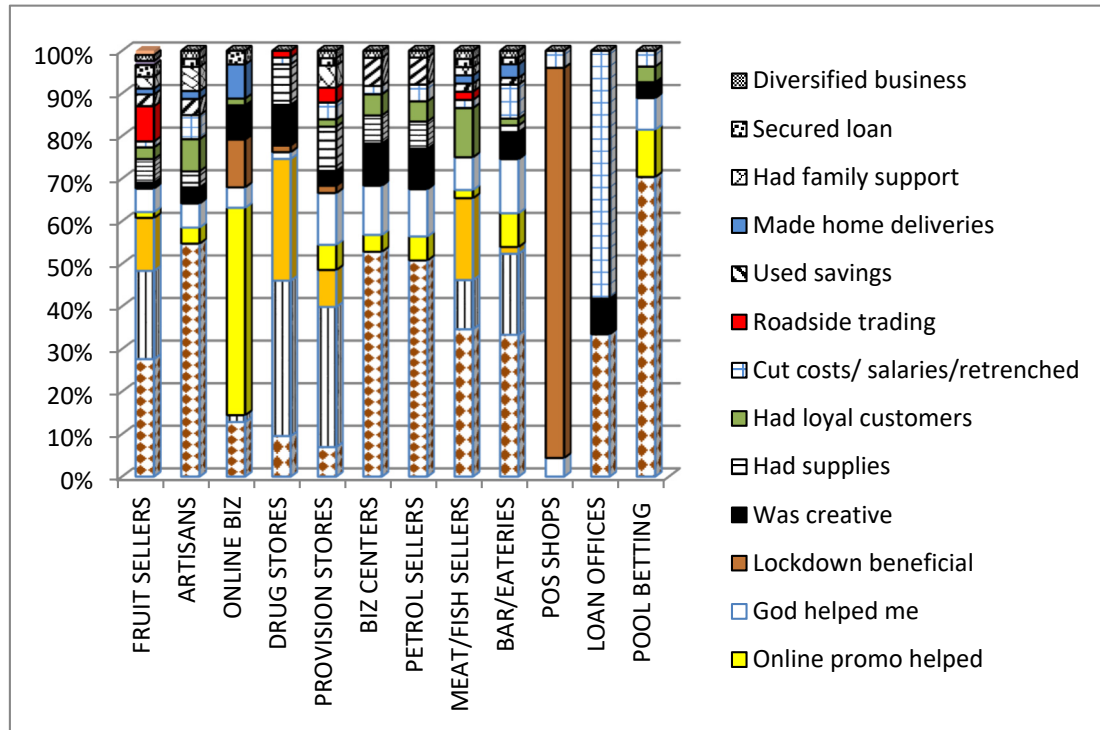


Figure 5. The various strategies employed by the business owners to survive the COVID-19 Pandemic

Figure 5 shows the various strategies employed by these businesses sampled to survive the pandemic. The type of strategies employed for survival differed from one business type to the other. We were able to distil 16 broad areas of strategies businesses applied during the pandemic as follows: operational shut down, selling essential and highly in demand goods, position one’s business to exploit panic buying, resort to advertising and selling online, praying to God for special grace and good-luck, being very creative and intuitive, stocking adequate goods, exploring and maintaining loyal customers, reducing workers’ salaries and other costs items and temporarily retrench workers where necessary. Some of the businesses even resorted to selling inside or in front of their homes or by roadsides when the markets were closed.

5. Discussions

5.1 Business Planning in Place

The level of literacy required to manage certain businesses like micro-finance, pharmacy, online businesses etc. affected their level of application of business planning skills. Those with less literacy requirement like selling fruits, semi-skilled artisans, roadside provision retail shops, roadside bear parlours, small scale selling of meat/fish etc. had more people who admitted not to be applying planning techniques in their businesses.

Comparing the micro and small sized businesses, those managing larger sized businesses tend to apply business planning more because they have more at stake with bigger capital investments.

5.2 Performance Review in Place

It is only those who have made business plans that can review their performances against such plans. The fact that many smaller firms do not monitor the performance of their businesses is a concern. This should be an area of targeted capacity building. Not having the capacity or the interest to monitor the performance of your business is like walking blind and accidents or sudden failure is inevitable. Without such reviews a business owner will not know if his business is having problem until it has finally failed to the level that it cannot be revived again.

5.3 Business Policies in Place

Another management tool we tested was if these businesses have developed their business policies. The following businesses: pool betting, micro-financing, filling stations and pharmacies are highly regulated or required certain levels of security measures to ensure safety of the business and personnel have put in place adequate policies to regulate the business. The smaller businesses seem not to care about the policies

5.4 Is Business Policy Important for the Business?

The fact that more of the small-sized business owners and managers think business policy is beneficial to the survivability and profitability of business shows why more of them have policies in place to guide their businesses. These policies will help them to better manage the businesses especially during crisis and interfacing effectively with regulators. A good policy can be 'prohibition of committing crimes no matter the circumstance'.

5.5 Strategies Employed by Businesses to Survive the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis

Businesses showed the zeal to survive. Some diversified into new business opportunities that arose as result of the lockdown and restrictions. One of which was Point of Sale (POS) business people who were having difficulties getting their money from banks due to the government imposed restrictions to prevent rapid spread of the virus. It was very easy for people to make financial transactions without the need to travel far and spending so much time waiting in the cue. Many of the businesses employed a strategy to shut down operations temporarily at the peak of the pandemic so as not to incur unnecessary costs.

It was clear that online business transactions became more common as people desired to reduce direct face to face interactions. Many businesses advertised and made sales online aggressively and then make home deliveries.

6. Conclusion

A good number of the businesses closed shops at the peak of the crisis when markets and certain areas were closed down by government. However, because many of them are operating at the level of subsistence, they can easily become cash trapped. To survive, these micro and small-sized businesses can do anything to stay alive. It is for these reasons that many micro-sized businesses equally send their children when possible to hawk their wares by the roadsides. Businesses adopted creative measures like online advertisement, online marketing and home delivery where possible to remain afloat. Some diversified their businesses into other areas where the market is flourishing like selling sanitizers, face masks. Expanding the concept we can say, it is for similar reasons, schools started online classes and engagements, churches started online worship and many opted for online services.

We also observed that a good number of these micro-sized business owners are not educated in business management. They do not adopt structured business plans, do not review the performances of their businesses against the plans, do not have guiding policies of their businesses and they even declared to the enumerators that they do not understand the importance of having a business policy as a guiding principle of the business. These are weak links towards sustainable growth of such businesses. Businesses that do not plan and do not know if their businesses are performing well and if they are beginning to make profit towards getting to break-even point from what was invested are groping in the dark and that is not safe places for businesses to be.

Since the small and medium-sized businesses account for the largest source of employment, government should support and provide avenues for these businesses to enhance their business skill capacities so that many of them do not fail prematurely. As more big companies, industries and construction come on board so will be the increase requirement for smaller suppliers, service providers etc. The availability of these industries and large active construction sites will increase economic activities in the nation and therefore increase the survivability of the small and medium-sized businesses.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings/discussions/conclusions, we recommend for further research to identify the specific business skill gaps among the micro and small-sized businesses and then develop appropriate interventions to bridge such capacity gaps.

Finally, we recommend the below model as a tool for micro and small size businesses in assessing and managing crisis.

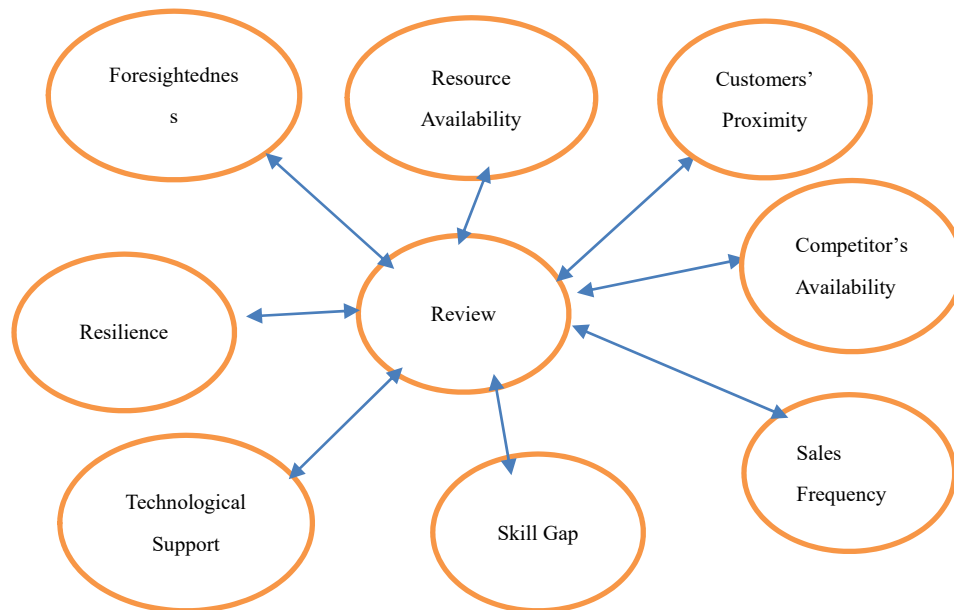


Figure 6. Lawrence nine-point crisis assessment model (L9 model)

Source. Researchers (Desk, 2021).

The L9 Model was designed to help Micro and Small Scale Enterprises with relative literacy skills and some formal education to assess their business during and after crisis. It comprises of 9 indicators which play a significant role in proffering strategies to managing crisis situations which are:

1. Foresightedness: The ability for the small and medium sized businesses to see or predict the future business scenarios. Without this, an organization flies blind and can be submissive to whatever situation they find themselves rather than influence or creating the needed environment to thrive.
2. Resource availability: this indicator exposes the SME to reality on ground concerning the resources available to run operations during a crisis situation (Such as supply, personnel and finance).
3. Customers' proximity: an organization is useless without its customers, and during a crisis situation SME's must examine the behaviour of their customers and how easy it is to reach them. They must assess their marketing strength and customer relationships.
4. Competitors' availability: During a crisis situation SMEs should evaluate their competitors or similar businesses in their industry and learn from how they survive or why they stopped operations. This will give them business intelligence on how to thrive or minimise risk during a crisis.
5. Sales frequency: businesses are functional due to profits and this is as a result of sales. In a crisis situation SME must review their sales frequency to avoid running at a loss, this will also give insight on how important their product or service is.
6. Skill gap: In other to stay relevant SMEs should be creative, they should be able to evaluate their skills from time to time and build new relevant skills in order to serve better.
7. Technological support: the ability for an organization to leverage on technology results to productivity on all fronts of the business. SMEs, must be able to continuously discover new ways of operating to save cost and increase profit.
8. Resilience: Without a resilience spirit any organization can crash during a crisis situation, SMEs must be able to stay resilient with high emotional intelligence in other to thrive
9. Review: Finally, a constant reflection on every stage and of every point will give the organization a holistic view and the ability to create goals and milestones as assessment and growth indicators.

8. Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Dame Dr Mercy Oke-Chinda and Dr Christy George for finding time to go through this work and we value the useful corrections made. We also thank Dr Wonu Nduka who analysed the data statistically.

References

- Adams, R. B., Licht, A. N., & Sagiv, L. (2011). Shareholders and stakeholders: How do directors decide? *Strategic Management Journal*, 32(12), 1331-1355. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.940>
- Ahiauazu, A. I., & Asawo, S. P. (2016). *Advanced Social Research Methods*. Port Harcourt, Rivers: CIMRAT.
- Alves, J. C., Lok, T. Ch., Luo, Y. B., & Hao, W. (2020). Crisis Management for Small Business during the COVID-19 Outbreak: Survival, Resilience and Renewal Strategies of Firms in Macau. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs34541/v1>
- Amuda, Y., J., & University, P., S. (2020). Impact of Coronavirus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs): Towards post-COVID19 economic recovery in Nigeria. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 19(6).
- Amesi, J., & Augustus, A. (2015). Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution Strategies in Business Organizations in Rivers State.
- Bailey, V. (2016). Proactive or Reactive Leadership, which is Most Effective in the Workplace? Retrieved from <https://blog.vistage.co.uk/proactive-or-reactive-leadership-which-is-most-effective-in-the-workplace>
- Bartik, W., A., Bertrand, M., Cullen, Z., Glaeser, G., L., Luca, M. & Stanton, C. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Small Business Outcomes and Expectations. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2006991117>
- Business Wire. (2020) Small Businesses Feel Biggest Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic. *Business Wire*. Retrieved from <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20201008005232/en/Small-Businesses-Feel-Biggest-Impact-of-Coronavirus-Pandemic>
- Carter, T. (2020). Entrepreneur Leadership Network Contributor. Entrepreneur Media. Retrieved from <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/363407>
- Chukwuka, O., & Ekeruche, M. A. (2020). Understanding the Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Nigerian economy. Brookings Institution. Lawrence, D. O., Aaron, A. . ., Pope, O. ., & Subai, A. . . (2020). Corporate Foresight and Organizational Sustainability of Oil Servicing Companies in the Niger Delta Region, South-South, Nigeria. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 5(2), 12 - 27. <https://doi.org/10.47672/jsm.599>
- Dansoh, A. (2005). Strategic planning practice of construction firms in Ghana. *Construction Management & Economics*, 23, 163-168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144619042000241435>
- Desai, A. (2000). Does strategic planning create value? The stock market's belief. *Management Decision*, 38, 685-693. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740010379731>
- Dincer, O., Tatoglu, E., & Glaister, J. (2006). The strategic planning process: Evidence from Turkish firms. *Management Research News*, 29, 206-219. <https://doi.org/10.1108/1409170610665068>
- Enitilo, O., Ajayi, I. E., Famuagun, F. Y., & Adelugba, I. A. (2018). Effects of strategic intention on organizational performance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development Research*, 8(3), 19670-19674.
- Genise, P. (2002). Usability Evaluation: Methods and Techniques. *Technical Paper*. University of Texas, USA.
- Heath, R. L. (2010). Introduction crisis communication: Defining the beast and e-marginalizing key publics. In Timothy Coombs W, Holladay S. J. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (pp. 1-11). Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I. and Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative Research Methods* (p. 14). London: Sage publications Ltd.
- Herbane, B. (2013). Exploring crisis management in UK small-and-medium-sized enterprises. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 21(2), 82-95.
- Hong, P., Huang, C., & Li, B. (2012). Crisis management for SMEs: insights from a multiple-case study. *International Journal of Business Excellence*, 5(5), 535-553.
- Irvine, W., & Anderson, A. R. (2006). The impacts of foot and mouth disease on a peripheral tourism area: Therole and effect of crisis management. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 19(2-3), 47-60.
- Jung, H., Park, M., Hong, K., & Hyun, E. (2016). The impact of an epidemic outbreak on consumer expenditures: An empirical assessment for MERS Korea. *Sustainability*, 8(454), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8050454>

- Karam, M. G. (2018). The Impact of Strategic Planning on Crisis Management Styles in the 5-Star Hotels. *Journal of Hotel & Business Management*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2169-0286.1000171>
- Kayes, D., C., Allen, N. C., & Self., N. (2012). Integrating Learning, Leadership, and crisis in management education: Lessons from army officers in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562912456168>
- Khaled, Z., & Tevhide, S. G. (2014). Crisis Management: A Historical and Conceptual Approach for a Better Understanding of Today's Crises, *Crisis Management - Theory and Practice*, Katarina Holla, Michal Titko and Jozef Ristvej, IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.76198>
- Kim, Y. J., Jeong, Y. J., Kim, S. H., Kim, Y. J., Lee, S. Y., Kim, T. Y., Choi, M. S., & Ahn, J. H. (2020). Preparedness for COVID-19 infection prevention in Korea: a single-centre experience. *J Hosp Infect.*, 105(2), 370-2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhin.2020.04.018>
- Lakuma, P. C., & Sunday, N. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on micro, small, and medium businesses in Uganda. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/05/19/impact-of-covid-19-on-micro-small-and-medium-businesses-in-uganda/>
- Lerbinger, O. (2012). *The Crisis Manager: Facing Disasters, Conflicts and Failures* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- McConnell, A. (2011). Success? Failure? Something in-between? A Framework for Evaluating Crisis Management. *Policy and Society*, 30, 63-76
- Mintzberg, H. (1978). Patterns in Strategy Formation. *Management Science*, 24, 934-948. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.24.9.934>
- Monroe, A. S. (2002). Do successful companies possess strategic intent? A master's dissertation. Massey University, Palmerstone, New Zealand.
- Oladeinde, O. (2020). Nigeria: Coronavirus - Nigeria Cuts Oil Benchmark to \$30, Slashes Capital Budget By 20% Premium Times Abuja.
- Oparanma, A. O., & Wechie, I. (2014). Crisis management processes to ensure effective and continuous performance. Accessed 20/03/2019 from research gate.
- Ozili, P., & Arun, T. (2020) Spillover of COVID 19, impact on the global Economy.
- Robbins, S., Judge, T., & Campbell, T. (2010). *Organizational Behaviour*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Sandada, M., Poee, D., & Dhurup, M. (2014). Strategic Planning and Its Relationship With Business Performance Among Small And Medium Enterprises In South Africa. *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 13, 659. <https://doi.org/10.19030/iber.v13i3.8602>
- Simola, S. (2013). Teaching Corporate Crisis Management through business ethics education. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 38(5). <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-05-2013-0055>
- Taneja, S., Pryor, M., Sewell, S., & Recuero, A. (2014). Strategic Crisis Management: A Basis for Renewal and Crisis Prevention. *Journal of Management Policy & Practice*, 15(1), 78-85. Business Source Complete, Ipswich, MA
- Tashanova, D., Sekerbay, A., & Chen, D., Luo, Y., Zhao, S. & Zhang, Q. (2020). Investment Opportunities and Strategies in an Era of Coronavirus Pandemic. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3567445>
- Topper, B & Lagadec, P. (2013). Fractal crises – a new path for crisis theory and management. *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12008>
- U.N. (2020). *SDGs.: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. Retrieved from <https://Sustainabledevelopment.Un.Org/Topics/Sustainabledevelopmentgoals>
- Warren, G., Howat, D., & Hume, I. (2011). Strategic thinking and decision making: literature review. *Journal of Strategy and Management*, 4(3), 238-250.
- Wobodo, C., & Oparanma, A. (2019). Crisis management and corporate resilience of multinational oil and gas companies in Rivers State: A theoretical perspective. *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research*, 7-14.

- Wobodo, C., Asawo, S., & S., Asawo. (2018). Knowledge Sharing and Employee Resilience in Tertiary Institutions in Port Harcourt.
- Wong, P. (2014). Viktor Frankl's Meaning-Seeking Model and Positive Psychology. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0308-5_10
- World Health Organization [WHO]. (2020). Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 –11th March. World Health Organization.
- Worldometer. (2021). *Coronavirus Update (Live): 123,877,740 Cases and 2,727,921 Deaths from COVID-19 Virus Pandemic* - Worldometer. Retrieved from https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?%22#countries

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).