
Developing A Model For Organizational Preparedness And Business Disasters: A Case Of Small And Medium Enterprises In South Western Uganda

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Abstract

The study developed a model for organizational preparedness and business disaster of SMEs in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda. A cross sectional survey research design was employed and interviewer-administered questionnaire as research tool was used to elicit information from the managers of SMEs across the six (6) districts of Kigezi sub-region. Two-stage cluster sampling technique was used and the sample size was computed using Yamane's sampling formulae based on a 5% level of precision. The value of CVI obtained was 0.840 while the value of reliability obtained was 0.770, which indicates that the questionnaire items were relevant and suitable for the study. Five hundred and ninety-one (591) questionnaires were administered to the SMEs owners/managers while four hundred and seventy-six (476) questionnaires were returned giving the overall return rate as 81%. The results showed that organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response accounts for a total of 27.9% improvement on the management of business disaster in Kigezi sub-region. The results further indicate that organization features ($\beta = 0.163$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$) and characteristics of decision makers ($\beta = 0.021$, $p\text{-value} = 0.648$) have positive but significant effect while government response ($\beta = -0.780$, $p\text{-value} = 0.682$) has negative but no significant effect on the management of business disaster. The study concludes that organization features and characteristics of decision makers are important factors that affect the organizational preparedness and the management of business during COVID-19 pandemics in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda. The study recommends that there is a need for government/NGOs interventions in the area of subsidy for SMEs owners/managers during the pandemic to boost their businesses.

Keywords: Model Development, organization features, business disaster, small and medium-sized enterprises, decision makers, SMEs Owners/managers.

Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has severely affected national and global economies (Brighton et al., 2023). Particularly, SMEs are facing a variety of problems such as a decrease in demand, supply chain disruptions, cancellation of export orders, raw material shortage, and transportation disruptions, among others. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that enterprises around the globe are experiencing the significant impact of COVID-19 outbreak on their businesses (Winny et al., 2023). Major victims of

COVID-19 outbreak were the SMEs because they usually do not possess sufficient resources, especially financial and managerial, and are not prepared for such disruptions likely to go longer than expected. Various enterprises are facing different issues with a certain degree of losses (Turyatamba et al., 2022).

It is a major practical problem to find out a pathway for firms to quickly recover from the performance decline in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and other sudden major business disaster. The

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COVID-19 pandemic has forced a global blockade and economic shutdown, with a significant negative impact on production, operations and sales of firms, resulting in firm performance decline (Tasha et al., 2023). Whether SMEs can manage a business disaster situation is arguably rooted in its response to the crisis (Tasha et al., 2023). Decisions made during a business disaster are described as complex because they tend to contain paradoxes, such as having to be made carefully but quickly (Vargo & Seville, 2011), and dilemmas, such as balancing short-term effects against long-term results (Frank et al., 2023). Reduced costs for survival in the short-term can hinder opportunities for long-term value creation. Making quick and sound decisions under pressure is therefore a key competence for effective business disaster management. To complement our understanding of the impact of a crisis (Collins et al., 2023) and what measures are taken during a crisis (Victoria et al., 2023), it is therefore valuable to describe the nature of crisis management and to consider how business managers handle crises in practice. In this sense, business disaster management is seen as something people do, and not as something that organizations have (F. Christopher et al., 2022), which is why attention is directed towards people and how they act and interact (Kim & Lim, 2020).

Threats of business interruptions are always present (Kazaara et al., 2023), and the incidence of crises is said to be increasing (Anthony et al., 2023). Since spring 2020, the world has faced a crisis that is rarely encountered: A previously unknown virus (COVID-19) was discovered, spread globally, and has had an impact that has been difficult to understand, let alone

to predict. According to (N. Faridah et al., 2023), the situation has been more complicated to deal with than traditional crises. While many previous crises occurred at a specific place and time (such as natural disasters) or had global effects that developed over a long period of time (such as financial crises), the COVID-19 crisis combines a global spread, which significantly complicates the work of dealing with the business disaster.

According to (Winny et al., 2023), one category of companies that is rarely noticed when it comes to crisis management is small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This is despite SMEs constituting 99% of all companies and generating 50%–60% of total economic production within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), and their importance for regional economies and the welfare of nations (Ronet et al., 2023). A possible explanation for the limited attention to SMEs in the crisis management literature might be the ambiguity about the efficacy of crisis management for SMEs. On the one hand, small businesses might be particularly vulnerable to crises due to a number of size-related characteristics (Battisti & Deakins, 2017; Doern, 2016; Herbane, 2013; Vargo & Seville, 2011). On the other hand, SMEs arguably possess a strategic advantage over larger organizations in their flexibility and adaptability, which means that they can respond quickly to changing environments (Kazaara & Kazaara, 2023). Thus, there are arguments that SMEs may be particularly vulnerable to situations similar to those that have followed in the wake of COVID-19, but there are also arguments that SMEs may be more

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resilient and better equipped to manage the situation than their larger counterparts. However, OECD (2020) estimates that more than half of all SMEs have been exposed to serious revenue losses due to the pandemic (Kazaara & Christopher, 2023). Jackets et al. (2017) described business disaster as a behavioral phenomenon, meaning that crises are socially constructed by the actors involved rather than a function of factors in the objective environment (Deverell, 2021). Business disaster management is said to involve shaping the perceptions/experiences of interactions with stakeholders to prevent, resolve and learn from crises (Frank et al., 2023). Attention is focused on interactions between actors within SMEs, interactions between SMEs and external stakeholders, and how these interactions influence perceptions and experiences of businesses. Torres et al. (2019) also highlighted the importance of business activities in the context of disaster management and illustrated how small business social networks explain disaster resilience and recovery. Similarly, (Racheal, Kazaara, et al., 2023) stated that relationships with others provide access to key resources such as information, physical and emotional resources; Sauser et al. (2018) emphasized that formal and informal social ties are as important as physical resources to the business recovery process. Dahles and Susilowati (2015) showed how interactions and connections with actors outside the current industry can also be critical to SMEs' resilience – that is, the ability to withstand turbulence and recover from interference. Regardless of where actors come from, on what basis they are involved, and the time they spend on the

issue, they shape the interpretation of the business situation and alternative actions through the concepts and vocabulary they add (Racheal, Enock et al., 2023).

However, which actors are involved depends on which arenas small business managers use. The term “arena” refers to the place where work takes place rather than a formal organization (Melandar et al., 2011). (Racheal, Enock, et al., 2023) described an arena as any place where there is an opportunity for reflection or interaction about business-related matters. Depending on the arenas used, the business leader encounters different types of actors and information. Thus, the understanding of the situation and the activities performed cannot be separated from the social context in which they take place (Winny et al., 2023). A specific area commonly present in the business disaster management literature is the crisis team, which can exist in many variations. In their review of the crisis management and resilience literature, Williams et al. (2017) testify to the dubious nature of crisis groups or corporate crisis management teams. On the one hand, they argued that “highly capable teams and other relational systems embedded in organizations can generate positive outcomes and facilitate the return (or improvement) of the status quo” (T. Christopher, 2022).

On the other hand, they argued that reactive crisis management groups may not understand the crisis and thereby limit organizational recovery. As such, team composition, experiences among significant individuals, and shared images are critical to the formation of effective crisis groups (Deverell, 2021;

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Spillan & Hough, 2003). The ambiguous nature of the role of crisis groups also extends to SMEs, where we have limited knowledge of the areas and actors involved in crisis management (District et al., 2023). Relationships and networks are likely to be very important to SMEs, and as such, the existence and composition of crisis groups in SMEs may differ considerably from groups and their larger counterparts (see Hong et al., 2012).

For a perspective where business disaster management is seen as context-bound, a distinctive importance is attributed to mediating tools of interaction (Lydia et al., 2023). Mediation tools refer

to the languages and artefacts – such as papers, reports, models and plans – through which participating actors construct a system according to their way of thinking and acting in context. When interacting, people rely on psychological and physical tools that influence how an individual perceives reality (Brown-Devlin et al., 2020). Thus, the working methods used in crisis management organize the interaction and reflection of the actors involved (Ramadhan et al., 2023) and influence how these actors perceive and shape the understanding of the situation.

Statement of the Problem

An estimated 5 million and 29 million people have been pushed below the extreme poverty line of US\$1.90 per day as a result of the impact of COVID-19 compared to Africa's 2020 baseline growth scenario. Vulnerable households affected by COVID-19 face an increased likelihood of moving into transitional poverty by 17.1 percent, 4.2 percent more likely to remain in poverty for ten years or more, and with a 5.9 percent decrease in the likelihood of moving out of poverty. percent. Increased poverty rates have also exacerbated existing income inequalities (K. Faridah et al., 2023). For low-income households, which already spend an average of 36 percent of their income on health care expenses, access to health care has become increasingly unaffordable as a result of COVID-19, leading to an increase in the number of households falling behind. below the poverty line.

For many SMEs that would lack working capital, there could also be an increased need to access credit to initially restart the business (Winny et al., 2023). The main consideration for predicting the recovery time is the time it takes for demand to recover, as the supply shock is relatively mild and the recovery would take much less time to rely on readily available local materials in many cases. The possibility of insufficient supply, especially of consumer goods, immediately after the lockdown should not be completely ruled out. This can become a problem in cases of wholesalers hoarding goods and raising prices beyond what is affordable for SMEs, who are also likely to face a lack of working capital to resume their operations (Faith et al., 2023). However, pent-up demand will take longer to recover, meaning many of these businesses will not be able to operate at full capacity for some time. Informal businesses that depend on imported goods and materials or are involved in export operations (such as cross-border trade) are likely to take longer to recover in line with the time required to fully restore cross-border movement and international trade flows (Wegulo et al., 2023). Therefore, this study modeled the relationship between factors

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identified with organizational preparedness and business disaster of small and medium enterprises in Kigezi sub-region, Southwestern Uganda.

Study Objective

To model the relationship between those factors identified with organizational preparedness and business disaster of small and medium enterprises during the Covid-19 pandemics in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda.

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between those factors identified with organizational preparedness and business disaster of small and medium enterprises during the Covid-19 pandemics in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda.

Methodology

The study used cross sectional survey to gather information from various SMEs records and panel procedures as well as supplementary interview as methods of data collection. The population of this study were micro, small and medium enterprises in the six (6) districts of Kigezi region of South Western Uganda. These districts have high concentration of SMEs. The owners and the managers of these SMEs were the units of enquiry or respondents as a result of their direct involvement in planning, implementation and management of the firms' growth and development.

The sample size required for quantitative survey was computed using Yamane (1967) formula of calculating single population proportions with the assumption of 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level. In view of the number of SMEs in the six (6) districts of the region, a minimum and appropriate sample size shall be drawn from the target population as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}, \text{ Where; } N \text{ is the population of study; } n \text{ is the sample size and } e \text{ is precision level.}$$

A proportional stratification procedure was applied to select the firms' respondents. Firms' owners and managers were the units of inquires due to their importance as custodian of information of all the activities taking place in their respective SMEs (Rhodes, 2009). In proportional stratification, the research population is divided into districts and SMEs selected using simple random sampling.

The data were analyzed using quantitative analysis approach. The descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used and presented in tables (Nelson et al., 2022). Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics was used to establish the level of the relationship. Regression analysis was be carried out to model the relationship between those factors identified to affect organization preparedness and business disaster of small and medium enterprises during COVID-19 pandemic in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda.

The proposed model for estimation is described as follows:

$$BD = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FS_1 + \beta_2 PE_2 + \beta_3 SIC_3 + \beta_4 RP_4 + \beta_5 G_5 + \beta_6 GR_6 + \varepsilon_i$$

BD = F (FS, PE, SIC, RP G, GR) model

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Where;

BD: Business Disaster

FS: Firm Size

PE: Previous Experience

SIC: Source of Initial Capital

RP: Risk Perception

G: Gender

GP: Government Response

Results

Table 1: Logistic Regression Model

Variable	Model
Dependent Variable	Management of Business Disaster
Independent Variables	
Firm Size (Medium) (Small)	1.214* (0.001)
Firm Year of Existence (Above 4 years) (Less than 4 years)	1.237 (0.162)
Firm Financial Condition (Established and growing) (Profitable and growing) (Pre-profit) (Start-up stage)	1.219* (0.000) 1.187* (0.001) 1.175* (0.001)
Source of Initial Capital (Grants) (Family support) (Personal money)	1.002 (0.130) 1.001 (0.070)
Risk Perception (Yes) (No)	1.198* (0.000)
Gender (Female) (Male)	1.213 (0.067)
Government Subsidy (Yes) (No)	1.383* (0.001)
Help from NGOs (Yes) (No)	1.164* (0.001)
Bank/SACCO Loan (Yes)	1.439* (0.000)

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(No)	
Number of Respondents	476
Pseudo R ²	0.821
Prob > chi ²	0.001

The results in Table 1 indicate that management of business disaster levels increased significantly by firm size (AOR=1.214; p_value=0.001); increased insignificantly by firm year of existence (AOR=1.237; p_value=0.0162); increased significantly by firm financial condition (AOR=1.219; p_value=0.000); increased insignificantly by source of initial capital (AOR=1.002; p_value=0.130); increased significantly by risk perception (AOR=1.198; p_value=0.000); increased insignificantly by the gender of owners/managers (AOR=1.213; p_value=0.067); increased significantly by government subsidy (AOR=1.383; p_value=0.001); increased significantly by the help received from NGOs (AOR=1.164; p_value=0.001); and increased significantly by the loan received from the bank/SACCO (AOR=1.439; p_value=0.000). The likelihood ratio (LR) chi-square with a p-value of 0.001 indicates that the model fits significantly (Nelson et al., 2023).

Therefore, the factors identified to be significant with organizational preparedness and the management of business during COVID-19 pandemics in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda were firm size, firm financial condition, risk perception, government subsidy, help received from NGOs and the loan received from the bank/SACCO while other factors: firm year of existence, source of initial capital, and gender of owners/managers were found to be insignificant.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Model

Variables Regressed	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error	F-value	Sig.	Interpretation	Decision on H ₀
Management of Business Disaster Vs Organization Features, Characteristics of Decision Makers, Government Response	0.279	0.1343	6.175	0.000	Significant effect	Rejected
Coefficients	Beta	Standard Error	t-value	Sig.		

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(Constant)	1.425	0.446	4.322	0.001	Significant Effect	Rejected
Organization Features	0.163	0.142	3.449	0.000	Significant Effect	Rejected
Characteristics of Decision Makers	0.021	0.058	4.260	0.004	Significant Effect	Rejected
Government Response	-0.780	0.056	-6.090	0.682	No Significant Effect	Not Rejected

Results in Table 2 indicate the multiple regression analysis carried out to model the management of business disaster on organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response. The results showed that organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response accounts for a total of 27.9% improvement on the management of business disaster in Kigezi sub-region. The results further indicate that organization features ($\beta = 0.163$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$) and characteristics of decision makers ($\beta = 0.021$, $p\text{-value} = 0.648$) have positive but significant effect while government response ($\beta = -0.780$, $p\text{-value} = 0.682$) has negative but no significant effect on the management of business disaster (Winny et al., 2023).

The multiple regression model for the estimation is given as:

$$\widehat{BD} = 1.425 + 0.163F + 0.021C - 0.780G$$

The results indicate that a unit increase in F (Organization Features), brings about 16.3% increase in BD (Management of Business Disaster); a unit increase in C (Characteristics of Decision Makers), brings about 0.21% increase in BD (Management of Business Disaster); and a unit increase in G (Government Response), brings about 78.0% decrease in BD (Management of Business Disaster).

Table 3: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	0.320	3	0.107	6.175	0.000
Residual	3.783	219	0.017		
Total	4.103	222			
a. Dependent Variable: BD (Management of Business Disaster)					
b. Predictors: (Constant), F (Organization Features), C (Characteristics of Decision Makers), and G (Government Response)					

Results in Table 3 validate the model for the management of business disaster on organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response. The p-value of 0.000 indicates that the model is significant and suitable to predict the level of business disaster management based on the organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response (Musaibah et al., 2023).

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Discussion of Findings

Louis Pasteur famously declared that ‘chance favours the prepared mind’, and this dictum might also apply to unfortunate unforeseen events—that is, a ‘prepared mind’ is potentially more effective than a fully developed business disaster management routine when responding to a crisis situation. For SMEs this is particularly true, since resources of time and money are often scarce and are deployed where they are most needed at a particular moment in time (Racheal, Enock, et al., 2023). Our study also indicates that characteristics of SMEs owners/managers contributes to the level of preparedness for any pandemic. This finding is in line with contemporary research on business disaster management (Winny et al., 2023), whose results show clearly that characteristics of SMEs have shown to be a success factor in crisis management. Organizational features and owners/managers characteristics are both critical for SMEs to develop and improve processes, products and strategies to generate new ideas and creative solutions (Cabrales *et al.*, 2009; Kim & Lim, 2020; Rasheed *et al.*, 2017). There are also indications that new knowledge structures develop primarily in the periphery where employees interact, while managers with a distance from everyday life tend to resort to exploitative strategies within existing knowledge structures (Tasha et al., 2023).

The finding also indicates that SMEs often react in the exact opposite way, by switching to deductive techniques in times of uncertainty and turbulence (Regnér, 2003). This is similar to our finding that SMEs during COVID-19 making greater use of their characters to manage their business during pandemic such as COVID-19. This indicates that although procedural and interactive crisis management approaches differ from each other, they are also complementary working methods used by SMEs owners/managers to understand and manage business crises.

Conclusions

The factors identified to be significant with organizational preparedness and the management of business during COVID-19 pandemics in Kigezi sub-region in South Western Uganda were firm size, firm financial condition, risk perception, government subsidy, help received from NGOs and the loan received from the bank/SACCO while other factors: firm year of existence, source of initial capital, and gender of owners/managers were found to be insignificant. Organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response accounts for a total of 27.9% improvement on the management of business disaster in the sub region. Both organization features and characteristics of decision makers have significant positive effect while government response has negative but no significant effect on the management of business disaster. The developed model is significant, suitable and fits well to predict the level of business disaster management based on the organization features, characteristics of decision makers and government response.

Recommendation

The study further recommends that SMEs owners/managers should ensure adequate planning and preparation towards a robust management of business disaster.

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Finally, the study recommends that there is a need for government interventions in the area of subsidy and NGOs support for SMEs during pandemic to boost their businesses.

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