

ENTREPRENEURIAL HUMAN RELATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: A STUDY OF SMES IN EDO STATE

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Abstract

The study aimed to evaluate the effect of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. Data were primarily sourced through administered questionnaires. A sample of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents was conveniently selected for the study. Out of a total of 150 copies of questionnaires administered, only 149 were found usable for the study. The STATA 16 statistical software was used for analysis of the variables as well as correlation of the variables and regression analysis carried out to test the stated hypotheses. The findings from the multivariate survey linear regression analyses revealed that entrepreneurial risk taking (Coef. = -0.037, $t = -0.49$ and $P > 0.05$) and entrepreneurial proactiveness (Coef. = -0.134, $t = -1.16$ and $P > 0.05$) have no significant effect on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. Based on the findings, the study upholds the stated null hypotheses. Thus, we recommended that entrepreneurs, researchers and policy-makers should develop policies that upsurge entrepreneurs' self-transcendence and altruism tenets that are oriented towards organizational sustainability. This would enable entrepreneurs to identify more sustainable opportunities leading to overall organizational performance. Entrepreneurs should take into account the importance of personal values for the identification of sustainable opportunities and engagement in sustainable best practices to boost organizational performance that enhances its sustainability.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial, Human relations, Proactiveness, Risk taking, Sustainability

Introduction

Human relations of an entrepreneur play a strategic role in achieving the decision-making requirements of stakeholders for organizational sustainability. This is so because a good entrepreneurial human relation will

accelerate economic activities and job creation in an organization. An entrepreneur must frequently work together on projects, communicate ideas and provide motivation to get things done (Hughes & Morgan, 2007). Without a stable and inviting workplace culture, difficult challenges can arise both in the logistics of managing employees and in the bottom line. Businesses with engaging workplaces and a well-trained workforce are more likely to retain and attract qualified employees, foster loyalty with customers and more quickly adapt to meet the needs of a changing market place (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Workplace relationships provide a source of employee motivation, which is important for maintaining productivity.

Employees' creativity is often dependent on their ability to communicate with other employees and share ideas. Without quality workplace relationships, employees are less likely to be able to develop and share the solutions that a business needs to survive. An entrepreneur who maintains good human relations with customers, employees, suppliers, creditors and the community are much more likely to succeed in his business than the individual who does not practice good human relations. Entrepreneurial human relations (also referred to as tactfulness) in business are the process of training employees, addressing their needs, fostering a workplace culture and resolving conflicts between different employees or between staff and management. In addition, severing ties with old employees can sometimes be challenging, especially if the circumstances are not particularly amicable (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Unfortunately, due to economic concerns, entrepreneurs as owners of small and medium sized companies focus on core business issues and overlook one of their most potentially serious and costly issues of human relations and human resources. However, if entrepreneurs of small business focus on human relation management, this will lead to a sustainable development of the organization. Notwithstanding, Entrepreneurial human relation has received substantial conceptual and empirical attention, representing some of the few areas in research into entrepreneurship and organizational sustainability in which a cumulative body of knowledge is developing. It is noteworthy that past research has concentrated only on the examination of the direct effect of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational productivity or on the effect of other variables on one or two dimensions of entrepreneurial human relation. Some of these studies include Lumpkin and Dess (2001), Ahlin, Drnovsek and Hisrich (2014), and Asmat-Nizam and Farid (2016), all of which provide an incomplete picture, especially in the case of mid-sized enterprises in developing countries such as Nigeria.

Nyanjom (2007) has studied how enterprises in Botswana can develop and enhance entrepreneurial innovation and encourage entrepreneurial activity within enterprises. The study, however, fails to address the effect of entrepreneurial human relationship on organizational productivity among small-sized enterprises. Many more studies in Nigeria and other African countries (Mayaka, 2006; Miring'u & Muoria, 2011; Mang'unyi, 2011; Ongore, K'Obonyo & Ogutu, 2011; Mokaya, 2012; Lwamba, Bwisa & Sakwa, 2014) have been conducted to find the factors that influence productivity of enterprises; however, none of these studies has focused on small-sized enterprises. Hence, the studies dimensions are different, and they have failed to identify corporate entrepreneurship dimensions that lead to organizational productivity of the enterprises; precisely, small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, this study is necessary to explore the effect of entrepreneurial human relationship on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. As a result, the study seeks to:

- i. evaluate the relationship between entrepreneurial risk taking and organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Benin City.
- ii. ascertain the relationship between entrepreneurial proactiveness and organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Benin City.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Organizational Sustainability

Colbert, Kurucz and Wheeler (2007) identify the colloquial definition of sustainability as being to “keep the business going”, whilst another frequently used term in this context refers to the “future proofing” of organizations. Boudreau and Ramstad (2005), refer to sustainability as “achieving success today without compromising the needs of the future”. The Charter of Sustainability Committee created by the Board of Directors at Ford focuses on sustainable growth, and defined it as “the ability to meet the needs of present customers while taking into account the needs of future generations” (Ford & Ford, 2012). Sustainable growth encompasses a business model that creates value consistent with the long-term preservation and enhancement of financial, environmental and social capital. The essence of sustainability in an organizational context is “the principle of enhancing the societal, environmental and economic systems within which a business operates”. This introduces the concept of a three-way focus for organizations striving for

sustainability. This is reflected also by Colbert *et al.* (2007), who state that sustainability “implies a simultaneous focus on economic, social, and environmental performance”.

The sustainability of any business organization is inevitably linked to the natural ecosystems from which all productive resources are extracted and within which all material wastes must be disposed. All economic value is ultimately dependent on the energy that enters, cycles, and recycles through the Earth’s natural ecosystems. Business organizations either take from the environment or dump into the environment, which in turn affect the environment as a whole and thus ultimately affects the long-run viability of the organization (Omigie & Kubeyinje, 2022).

Entrepreneurial Relation

Corporate entrepreneurship may be viewed as an extension of programs that embrace employee participation; conscious efforts to instill entrepreneurial practices within corporations are intended to enhance the ability of the firm to produce or acquire new products or services and manage the innovation process (Hitt, Ireland, Camp & Sexton, 2002). Corporate entrepreneurship provides support for the development and exploitation of one or more innovations that are deemed to be strategically and financially consistent with the organization’s mission (Herbert & Brazeal, 1998). However, the concept of Entrepreneurial relation (ER) has become a central focus in the entrepreneurship literature and a subject of more than three decades of research (Covin & Wales, 2012). Researchers consider ER to be a higher order construct with underlying dimensions (George & Marino, 2011). Miller (1983) conceptualizes the three focal dimensions of ER as innovativeness, risk-taking and proactiveness; stressing that “an entrepreneurial firm is one that engages in product market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with ‘proactive’ innovations, beating competitors to the punch.” These three dimensions have since been used consistently (Kemelgor, 2002; Dimitratos Voudouris, Plakoyiannaki, & Nakos, 2011). In addition to the three much used entrepreneurial relation dimensions first proclaimed by Miller (1983), Lumpkin and Dess (1996) argued that dimensions such as competitive aggressiveness and autonomy should also be considered as essential components of ER.

Entrepreneurial Risk Taking

Entrepreneurial risk-taking refers to actions such as venturing into the unknown, heavy borrowing and/or committing large portions of corporate assets in uncertain environments (Baird & Thomas, 1985). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) argue that entrepreneurially oriented firms are often characterized by risk-taking behavior, such as incurring heavy debts or making significant resource commitments, in the interests of obtaining high returns by seizing opportunities in the marketplace. The concept of risk-taking has been long associated with entrepreneurship. Early definition of entrepreneurship centered on the willingness of entrepreneurs to engage in calculated business risks. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) and Oscar, Jaju, Puzakova and Rocereto (2013) identified venturing into the unknown as a generally accepted definition for risk taking, though may be difficult to quantify. This is because, in addition to monetary risk, it typically entails psychological and social risks (Gasse, 1982; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Oscar *et al.*, 2013). Landes, Mokyr and Baumol (2012) identified three types of risks, namely social or market risk, monetary risk and psychological risk. Social or market risk refer to the risk which occurs when a market crash or decline crushes the performance of investment even when the quality of the investment remains the same. Monetary risk is usually the resultant effect of inflation as a phenomenon. Inflation reduces the value of money i.e. the purchasing power of money, making firms to expend more money in production, distribution of their products or services, and consequently impact the level of profits negatively. While psychological risk, is a risk associated with debtors' inability to fulfill or honor their repayment obligations, thereby impair the liquidity position of the firm and consequently its performance (Landes *et al.*, 2012). Risk-taking also connotes a tendency to take bold steps such as venturing into unknown and new market as stated by Lumpkin and Dess (2001) and Wiklund and Shepherd (2005). It can also be associated with willingness to commit large amount of resources to a project which the probable cost and chances of failure are high (Keh, Nguyen & Ng 2007; Baker & Sinkula, 2009).

Entrepreneurial Proactiveness

Miller (1983) describes proactiveness as an opportunity-seeking, forward-looking perspective characteristic of the introduction of new services and products ahead of the competition and acting in anticipation of future demand. Miller and Friesen (1982) define proactiveness as acting and anticipating with a forward-looking perspective to introduce new products or services', and risk-taking as "the degree of risky behaviour in the

entrepreneurial strategic process. Lieberman and Montgomery (1988) emphasized the importance of first-mover advantage as the best strategy for capitalizing on a market opportunity. By exploiting asymmetries in the marketplace, the first mover can capture unusually high profits and get a head start on establishing brand recognition.

Thus, taking initiative by anticipating and pursuing new opportunities and by participating in emerging markets also has become associated with entrepreneurship. The term proactiveness is "acting in anticipation of future problems, needs, or changes." As such, proactiveness may be crucial to an entrepreneurial orientation because it suggests a forward-looking perspective that is accompanied by innovative or new-venturing activity. In an early formulation, Miller and Friesen (1982) argued that the proactiveness of a firm's decisions is determined by answering the question, "Does it shape the environment by introducing new products, technologies, administrative techniques, or does it merely react?" Later, proactiveness was used to depict a firm that was the quickest to innovate and first to introduce new products or services. This is suggested by Miller's description of an entrepreneurial firm as one that is "first to come up with 'proactive' innovations" (Miller, 1983). Although the idea of acting in anticipation of future demand is an important component of entrepreneurship, the idea of being first to market is somewhat narrowly construed. A firm can be novel, forward thinking, and fast without always being first.

Methodology

The target population for this study consists of all small and medium enterprises work force in Benin City, Edo State; but the exact population of SMEs workers in Benin City could not be ascertain due its extremely large nature, paucity of data and other constrains that bothers on ethical thoughtfulness and concealment of government reserved information. However, the researchers' decided to draw a sample of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents conveniently for the study. This is considered adequate since convenient sampling is population elements selected for inclusion in the sample based on ease of accessibility (Kothari & Gaurav, 2014). The respondents comprised of hair dress making operators, cyber cafe operators, computer centers operators, coupled with tailoring, printing and publishing shops, photography, barbing, shoe making, welding and fabrication, Agro-allied industries, food vendors and restaurants operators. The study questionnaire was structured on a five point scale ranging from 1-5 (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree)

respectively; there are two sections: the first section contain questions that are used to elicit information on the socio-demographic features of the respondents while second part seeks to disclose respondents views on effect of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. Out of a total of 150 questionnaires administered, only 149 were found usable for the study. The STATA 16 statistical software was used for analysis of the variables as well as correlation of the variable. Moreover, regression analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses after certifying that all the assumptions of regression analysis technique were not violated. Such assumptions include normality of residua, heteroscedasticity, multicollinearity and model specification.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Using both mathematical and statistical techniques this section present the analysis of the questionnaires administered and retrieved from the sampled respondents, from which our recommendation and conclusion are drawn from.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	No	Percentage (%)
Males	89	59.73
Females	60	40.27
Total	149	100.00

Source: Author Compilation from field work, 2022

From table 1 above, it is observed that 89 of the respondents were males, which represented 59.73% of the total respondents. Similarly, 60 of them were females representing 40.27% of the total respondents. This shows that most of the operators of the understudied SMEs are males.

Table 2: Age Distribution of the Respondents.

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20 – 25	15	10.07
26 – 35	23	15.44
36 – 45	64	42.95
46 and above	47	31.54
Total	149	100.00

Source: Author Compilation from field work, 2022

From table 2 above, it is observed that 15 of the respondents were in the age bracket of 20-25, representing 10.07% of the respondents. 23 of the respondents were in the age bracket of 26-35, representing 15.44% of the respondents. 64 of the respondents were in the age bracket of 36-45, representing 42.95% of the respondents. 47 of them were in the age brackets of 46 and above, representing 31.54% of the total respondents. This shows that most of the respondents/ operators of the understudied SMEs are in the age bracket of 36-45 years old.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation was conducted to establish the possible association between the variables of interest as shown in the table below;

Table 3: Pearson Correlation

	ogsus	entrsk	entpro
ogsus	1.0000		
entrsk	0.2637	1.0000	
entpro	0.0064	-0.1215	1.0000

Source: Author Compilation from STATA 16

Specifically, the analysis from the Pearson correlation showed that entrepreneurial risk taking (entrsk) (0.2637) and entrepreneurial proactiveness (entpro) (0.0064) are positively correlated with the dependent variable i.e. organizational sustainability (ogsus). Moreover, from the associations, there is no room to suspect the presence of multicollinearity in the estimated models.

Regression Analysis

The results obtained from the panel least square regression of the model is as shown in the table below;

Table 4 Multivariate Survey Regression Estimation Result

	Linearized				
ogsus	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]

entrsk	-.0372681	.0767296	-0.49	0.628	-.1889037	.1143675
entpro	-.134003	.1156639	-1.16	0.249	-.3625818	.0945759
_cons	2.173549	.4439699	4.90	0.000	1.29616	3.050937

No. of obs. = 149 p-value of F-statics = 0.0000 $R^2 = 0.3414$

Source: Author Compilation from STATA 16

The study provides interpretation for survey least square regression as shown in table 4 above. The model goodness of fit as captured by the F-statistics and the corresponding probability of the F-statistics for the model shows a 5% statistically significant level suggesting that the entire model is fit and can be employed for interpretation and possible recommendation. More than this, an R^2 value of 0.3414 indicates that about 34% of the variation in the dependent variable is being explained by all the independent variables in the model. This also means that about 66% of the variation in the dependent variable is left unexplained but have been captured by the error term.

Test of Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Entrepreneurial risk taking does not significantly affect organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Edo state.

The regression results of organizational sustainability of SMEs model presented in table 4 reveal the result of the variable of entrepreneurial risk taking as follows: (Coef. = -0.037, $t = -0.49$ and P -value = 0.628). Following the results above, it is revealed that the effect of entrepreneurial risk taking on organizational sustainability of SMEs is negative and statistically insignificant at 5% or 1% level. This finding is consistent with the stated null hypothesis which leads to its acceptance. Thus, there is no significant effect of entrepreneurial risk taking on organizational sustainability in Edo State.

Hypothesis 2: Entrepreneurial proactiveness does not significantly affect organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprise in Edo state.

The regression results of organizational sustainability of SMEs model presented in table 4 reveal the result of the variable of entrepreneurial proactiveness as follows: (Coef. = -0.134, $t = -1.16$ and P -value = 0.249). Following the results above, it is revealed that the effect of entrepreneurial proactiveness on organizational sustainability of SMEs is negative and

statistically insignificant at 5% or 1% level. This finding is consistent with the stated null hypothesis which leads to its acceptance. Thus, there is no significant effect of entrepreneurial proactiveness on organizational sustainability in Edo State.

Discussion of Findings

In this study, the first hypothesis shows an insignificant effect of entrepreneurial risk taking on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo state. This outcome is inconsistent with prior studies of Kropp, Lindsay and Shoham (2008), Oscar *et al.* (2013) and Slima and Prakash (2021) who concluded that a positive significant effect exists between entrepreneurial risk taking and organizational sustainability/ performance.

Similarly, the second hypothesis shows a statistically insignificant effect of entrepreneurial proactiveness on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo state. This research result is also inconsistent with Slima and Prakash (2021) results as they found that entrepreneurial proactiveness affects business performance/ sustainability.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial human relation on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. The study sought to examine the impact of entrepreneurial risk taking and entrepreneurial proactiveness on organizational sustainability of small and medium scale enterprises in Benin City, Edo State. The independent variables are entrepreneurial risk taking and entrepreneurial proactiveness while the dependent variable is organizational sustainability. The findings from the multivariate survey linear regression technique revealed that entrepreneurial risk taking (Coef. = -0.037, $t = -0.49$ and $P > 0.05$) and entrepreneurial proactiveness (Coef. = -0.134, $t = -1.16$ and $P > 0.05$) have no significant effect on organizational sustainability of SMEs in Edo State. This study from the findings upholds the stated null hypotheses.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study presents the following recommendations:

- i. Entrepreneurs, researchers and policy-makers can work on ways of increasing entrepreneurs' self-transcendence and altruism tenets that are oriented towards organizational sustainability.
- ii. Entrepreneurs should take into account the importance of personal values for the identification of sustainable opportunities and engagement in sustainable best practices to boost organizational performance.
- iii. Entrepreneurs should explore various training and development programmes that will help develop creative and innovative concepts in their organization. This would enable entrepreneurs to identify more sustainable opportunities leading to overall organizational performance.

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