

COVID-19 AND IT'S IMPACT ON BUSINESS CONTINUITY IN GHANA: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Sanjeet Kumar Pattnaik

*Doctor of philosophy in leadership and management
continuing student of Management University of Africa*

E-mail: sanjeetkumarpattnaik@yahoo.com

Mobile No: +233-579233325 or + 91- 7978673766

Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic is having a clear impact on business continuity for all organizations. As the world attempts to navigate through this difficult time, most companies are struggling to maintain a steady flow of required goods and services as well as maintain a stable financial position. This has necessitated a study into the business continuity in organizations in this current era. The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of Covid-19 on business continuity in Ghana while bringing into perspective the role the Government plays in easing the crisis. A descriptive survey design was used to solicit information from the employees of ten (10) companies in Ghana. Thirty (30) employees from these selected companies were sampled for interviews. The instrument used in this study was an interview guide. The research approach adopted for this study was the qualitative approach. Multi-stage sampling procedures involving both Purposive and simple random sampling were used to obtain data from a sample size of 30 employees. The study findings indicated that organizations face several challenges such as altering in the channel of distribution bringing in additional cost on technology and skills, drastic reduction in cash flows leading to inability to meet the companies' financial obligations to their suppliers and employees. The findings also suggested that the government has come up with various policies to ease the impact of the CoVOC-19 crisis. However, the respondents still expect the government to coordinate with the organizations to curb the problem. Practically, this study recommends that the government should explore opportunities focused on making conditions of trade flexible in responding to arising uncertainties.

Keywords: Coronavirus Challenges, Business operations, Business Continuity, Role of Government, Ghana.

Introduction

Business Continuity Management (BCM) is a “holistic management process that identifies potential threats to a business and its impacts on its operations (Foster & Dye, 2005). This is very important as it helps management to know what might cause the threats, and provide solutions to the threat identified. This also provides a framework for building organizational resilience with the capacity for an effective response that protects the interest of its stakeholders, reputation, brand, and value-creating” (Meschi, Métais, & Miller, 2015). However, there are certain threats that management teams may find difficult to envisage despite how cautious the organizations might be. The typical situation is the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) which has had far-reaching effects on virtually all sectors of the global economy. The COVID-19 crisis has proven to be a challenge for all players in the business environment. The problem was that management found it difficult to protect employees, managing business engagement, and minimizing disruption of customer service in this COVID 19 era (Martin, Moverman & Menendez, 2020).

Further, as a result of the CoVID-19 crisis, organizations' leadership teams have gone through difficult times in order to develop immediate action plans to fill up the anticipated revenue gaps, stabilize financial liquidity, reduce net working capital, and identify alternative sources of financing. This has resulted in many businesses collapsing while others still struggle to survive the CoVID-19 shocks. The government as a major player has the responsibility of helping businesses to continue in their operations during the pandemic. The main challenges of government comprise of constraints related to undertaking a genuine assessment of pandemic risk, handling panic and nervousness in the community, and setting standards for businesses (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). For businesses, the Coronavirus pandemic has impacted their employees, customers, legal relations, and financial management.

Almost every country in the globe has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) has thus declared the pandemic as a pandemic as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (WHO, 2020). Governments across the world have taken measures to curb the spread including warnings, quarantine, as well as outdoor and travel restrictions. Another critical implication of the pandemic has been its effect on strategic business, whose magnitude on the survival of the business is still being counted (Sigala, 2020). The impact of Covid-19 on the global economy is likely to be extraordinary since the 1930s Great Depression (WHO, 2020). This represents the most important environmental changes in the business world.

Ghana is no exception to this rapid Coronavirus pandemic that has squandered a large number of people to death, collapsing, and negatively affecting businesses and the economy as a whole. This situation has become a challenge to the business and government of Ghana (Amankwah-Amoah, Khan, & Wood, 2020). Notwithstanding, little attention has been focused on the impact of these challenges on business operations in Ghana. This paper, therefore, focuses on how COVID-19 has impacted businesses and the role that government plays in their quest to ensure that the appropriate BCM is implemented in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by one general objective and two specific objectives.

General Objective

The general objective of the research was to examine the impact of Covid-19 on business continuity in Ghana while bringing into perspective the role the Government plays in easing the crisis.

Specific Objectives

In line with the general objective, the study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the challenges of coronavirus that are obstructing the continuity of business in Ghana.
2. To find out the role the Government plays in easing these challenges.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to address the above research specific objectives.

1. What are the challenges of coronavirus that are obstructing the continuity of business in Ghana?
2. What is the role the Government plays in easing these challenges?

Justification/Significance of The Study

The outcome of this paper was intended to help the leaders to move towards trending and sensing strategies to meet global social and environmental challenges. The study contends that the Covid-19 pandemic offers an opportunity for businesses to move towards trending and sensing strategy to global social and environmental challenges. Findings from the study would enable management to build a stronger relationship among their employees, customers, and the general public.

Literature Review

This chapter sought to set the parameters of the study and also to review empirical literature concerning the research objectives. Sources of literature that were considered included books, journal articles, official documents and reports, working papers, and the internet.

Leadership and Coordination

One of the basic claims in this paper is that the spectacle of leadership is closely connected to coordination in order to solve business continuity challenges in the course of the CoVID-19 crisis and that leadership is a precisely sophisticated level of the coordinative instrument which make room for coordination on minor levels to materialize (Martin, Moverman & Menendez, 2020). For instance, leadership may successfully create a state of shared knowledge that aids the coordination of strategies. Ford & Ford (2012) defined leadership as a procedure in which one individual imparts another in the direction of the realization of a group or organizational objectives. Arguably, leadership can be detached from management. The reason for this claim according to Maak, Pless and Borecká, (2014) is that management encompasses planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling, therefore a manager is keen to perform all these functions. In contrast leadership principally pacts with influence and coordination. Factually, a manager may be an effective leader or not. Leaders' aptitude to impact others may be grounded on a diverse factor other than their formal power or rank. According to the coordination theory, organizational actors are confronted with coordination glitches (Peterson & Kim, 2012). These are mainly as a result of habits in the organization that coerce the efficiency of task performance to below. These theories of leadership and coordination are expedient for a study which to examine the role government play in alleviating a nationwide problem.

Business Continuity Management Systems (BCMS)

Many researchers suggest that Business continuity management is the best-approved way to formulate for possible predicaments and minimize the impact of disturbance (Ferguson, 2019; Foster & Dye, 2005; Lindström, 2012). This uses effective backup planning to ensure that all and sundry in an organization follows the plan when there is happening. BCMS adopts logical emergency concepts and retrieval plans that enable the organization to return to industrious operations as fast as possible after disruption or let-down of the business processes, services, IT services, or systems. In pursuit of this, the ISO 22301:2012, Societal security – Business continuity management systems – was developed to help organizations, irrespective of their size, location, or activity, to allow for better preparation and gain more confidence in handling disturbance of any type (Ferguson, 2019). The BCMS is necessary for the study concerning establishing a continuity plan for the business in this crisis.

Methodology

This chapter deals with the methodology adopted to provide answers to research questions to achieve the study objectives. The chapter covers research design, research approach, sources of data, research instrument, sampling methods, and sample size, and data collection procedures.

Research Design

This is an outline and processes which guide the researcher to provide the overall framework for data collection (Herrera, 2019). The researcher relied on a descriptive survey design for this current study to solicit information from employees from 10 companies in Ghana.

Research Approach

According to Rosenthal, (2016) the choice or appropriateness of a research approach depends on the ideas which emphasize the study, the nature of the study problem, and the information gathering procedure. As identified by Rapport Clement, Doel & Hutchins ""(2015), there are three basic types of research approaches, namely, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approach. This study used a qualitative approach. This postulates that the qualitative research method has a subjectivist outset which reflects the interpretive viewpoint (Wu & Little, 2011). It is generally believed that data for the qualitative approach are collected through interviews and open-ended questions that provide direct responses. The qualitative approach provides valuable insights and understanding of problematic areas (Rosenthal, 2016). Qualitative researchers seek to understand individuals' feelings and views of the world around them. That is why qualitative research involves understanding complexity, detail, and context producing rich, contextual, and detailed data. Mcvilly, Stancliffe, Parmenter & Burton-Smith (2008) highlighted that one of the common critiques of qualitative methods is that it is too subjective.

Population

The population as used in this study is defined as the total number of employees in Ghanaian companies. The target population was 10 companies in Ghana.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 30 respondents which comprised of the managers, administrators, and operational staff from all the 10 organizations. According to Saunders, (2012), the adequate sample size for qualitative research methods and interviews must be between 25-30 respondents.

The probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling method was used in the collection of data for this study involving multi-stage sampling techniques comprising purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select ten (10) companies located in the Greater Accra region for the study. Simple random sampling was used to select three staff from each of the ten organizations to respond to the interview guide.

Research Instrument

An interview guide was used for the study with 30 participants. The study designed and administered the interview questions based on the research questions of this study. The data collection instrument was in the form of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each participant. The primary focus of conducting the semi-structured interviews for this study was to obtain reliable information that would form the basis for the interpretation and conclusion of the research questions.

Procedures for Data Collection

Thirty participants identified from 10 companies in Accra provided information for this study. The participants received an e-mail regarding the study and their participation. Data was collected by the researcher through face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions with the respondents. Each interview took place at the office of the respondents and did not take more than 10 minutes. The researcher recorded the data on the cell phone and audio recorder and took notes of important phrases that participants used to describe the coronavirus challenges and the role the government plays in addressing the challenges. The researcher then transcribed all data collected within 48 hours of each interview and contacted the participants within 72 hours of the interview for checking to confirm the accuracy of the responses netted.

Presentation of Data Results

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Covid-19 on business continuity management in Ghana while bringing into perspective the role of government in easing the crisis. Participants' experiences and feedback added insight to the research objective posed in this study. By listening to and analysing the employees of these organizations, valuable information was obtained about the primary purpose of the study. In this chapter, the two research questions are addressed with supporting evidence in two themes.

Demographics of Participants

The results of this qualitative study are based on interviews of thirty (30) employees of Ten Companies that operate in Ghana. All employees voluntarily participated in the study. Eighteen (18) of the Thirty (30) respondents in this study representing 60% were all low-level managers who focused on controlling and directing activities in their organizations. Eight (8) of the participants occupied positions at the middle-management levels focused on executing organizational plans while the remaining four (4) were top managers overseeing the entire organization. 80% of the participants interviewed have been in their respective firms for at least two years however only the top managers have been working for more than five years in their respective organizations. All participants were based in the country and are citizens of Ghana. The results show that the researcher carefully selected experience and required participants for the study. This is because the purpose of the study requires that the interviewee who will be able to spell out the right information.

Theme 1: Challenges of coronavirus that are obstructing the continuity of businesses in Ghana.

In this section, the researcher asked the participants the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the operations and supply chain management as well as the finance and liquidity of their organizations. The results are analysed in the following subsections.

Operations and supply chain management

To ascertain the challenges in the supply chain in business operations brought about by Covid-19, the researcher asked about the developments in the channels of distribution. According to the findings of the study, 75% of the respondents indicated that the channels of distribution to end users have significantly changed from the traditional wholesaler, retailer, and even brick-and-mortar retailer to the company to end-users using online orders and delivery systems. However, 25% of the respondents disagreed with this view while noting that the channel of distribution remained the same however services are delivered using online platforms. Following up on this, respondents were asked about the volume of orders by customers to the company. It was made bare by 85% of the respondents that requests for necessities (goods and services which are deemed necessary) have increased while 15% said otherwise that requests for general goods and services have decreased. Furthermore, 95% of respondents revealed that productivity at ware depots decreased owing to short-term closures, strict healthcare measures, and reduced capacity employees at the depot.

Finance and liquidity

To discover the challenges in the sector of finance and liquidity of organizations brought about by Covid-19, the researcher asked about the developments in cash flow differences. It was revealed by 70% of the respondents that, there has been a drastic difference (fall) in the cash flow of their company despite the increase in demand for necessary goods and services. However, 30% of the respondents said that there has not been any significant change in the cash flow of their organization. In line with this, respondents were asked about the capability to pay suppliers as well as payroll. It was made bare by 75% of the respondents that the organization finds it very difficult to pay supplies and employees during this crisis, yet 25% supposed otherwise. Furthermore, 80% of respondents revealed that their organization is finding it difficult to meet its financial covenant with other financing institutions leading contract breaches.

Theme 2: The role the Government plays in easing these challenges

In this section, the researcher asked the participants the role the Government plays in easing these challenges with regards to tax, trade, and regulatory. The results are analysed in the following subsections.

Tax, Trade and Regulatory

In the quest to realize the role the Government plays in easing these challenges brought about by Covid-19, the researcher asked about the measures the local government and tax authorities have laid tax alleviate the crisis. Majority(80%) of the respondents opined that, though the government has laid down a stimulus package for small and medium-scale businesses they are yet to benefit from it. However, 20% of the respondents supposed the contrary. In line with this, respondents were asked about the development of tax filling. It was made bare by 95% of the respondents that the government has proposed and actually implemented a policy to extend the tax filing of organizations from four months to six months after the end of the accounting year nonetheless failed to allow for assessment of tax resources to determine how much the organizations will be able to pay in this era of Covid-19. Furthermore, 90% of respondents revealed that there has not been any flexible policy on conditions trade as well as duties on imports.

Discussion of The Study

The section analyses the results and discusses the various associated research questions. The results recalled each research question, a summary of the findings from each research question is discussed and comparative analysis concerning other researchers are also done.

Research Question One: Challenges of coronavirus that are obstructing the continuity of businesses in Ghana.

The finding exposed numerous challenges faced by organizations in Ghana concerning supply chain management due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These include the change in channel distribution to online orders rather than the traditional wholesaler, retailer among others. This challenge lies in line with the claim made by Sharma, Adhikary, and Borah, (2020) that firms are facing numerous challenges in demand-supply disparity, technology, and developing a resilient supply chain for the new trend. This owes to the fact that there is a high demand for same-day and next-delivery services by customers. Moreover, demand for necessity goods and services has increase piling massive pressure on the warehouses to increase their facility to accommodate additional stocks. This obviously comes with additional huge costs nonetheless the trend may go extinct and demand reduction to their normal levels. To Laato, Islam, Farooq, and Dhir, (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic has brought numerous unplanned expenditures to organizations whose stocks are in high demand which is confirmed in this study. Last on the operations and supply chain management challenges, the researchers discovered that productivity at the warehouse depot has dropped hugely due to short-term closures, strict healthcare measures, and reduced capacity of employees. This expanding and stocking additionally will bring a loss rather than profit since the productivity is on the low as suggested by Viitala, (2014).

The outcome of the results further uncovered several challenges faced by organizations in Ghana concerning finance and liquidity due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These include the drastic difference in the cash flow of organizations in Ghana. This finding is affirmed by several studies (Hao, Xiao, & Chon, 2020; Seetharaman, 2020; Wellman, Moskal, Barnes, & Parvizi, 2020). Owing to this development, organizations face severe problems in meeting the needs of employees as well as suppliers. According to Amankwah-Amoah et al., (2020, p.), the pandemic has highlighted many weaknesses in many organizations in Ghana which is evident in this study since in the short run, businesses are not able to meet their financial obligations to sustain their business. Besides, the study has revealed many organizations in Ghana are finding it difficult to meet their financial covenants with other financial institutions. This also affirms the claim by Shafi, Liu, and Ren, (2020), that suggests the downfall of SMEs due to failure to meet their financial obligations in this era which leads to breaches of contract and results in legal actions.

Research Question Two: The role the Government plays in easing these challenges

The literature review made bare one of the most important roles to be played by the government of Ghana in managing the coronavirus crisis is leading and coordinating. Then followed by Preventing Panic, providing packages, creating awareness, and lastly developing standards for business continuity Plan. Hence the role of the government in easing the challenges it has brought on businesses is crucial.

The findings revealed that the government has laid down a stimulus package for Small and Medium Scale Enterprises with the neglect of large-scale businesses. Though SMEs are vulnerable in situations like this has established a Business Continuity Management (BCM) plan for them, the large-scale businesses are equally important. Therefore, the government exhibits good leadership skills but not coordination. The research finding also uncovered that the government has proposed and actually implemented a policy to extend the tax filing of organizations from four months to six months after the end of the accounting year nonetheless failed to allow businesses to assess their tax resources to determine how much the organizations will be able to pay in this era of Covid-19. This also depicts a lack of coordination on the side of the government which was similarly suggested by Martin et al., (2020). Moreover, the government made no policy in making the conditions of trade as well as duties on imports flexible to absorb some of the shocks propelled by Covid-19. Hence as the cash flow of businesses falls as import duties and conditions trade remain strict leading to the precarious financial situation, laying off workers among others. However, the government did well in preventing panic and creating awareness of the pandemic.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings from the study offer a solid ground to conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic has, by several means, altered the channels of distribution to online orders and in effect, this has presented problems such as demand-supply disparity, finding the right technology and skill within a short time to match online orders of customers and developing a resilient supply chain for the new trend which same-day and next day delivery to customers. This also comes with expanding their warehouse capacity if the business deals a necessity good. However, depot productivity has decreased due to

covid-19 protocols posing a serious problem on the profitability of these businesses. Additionally, the general cash flow of businesses has dropped significantly and in effect makes it difficult to meet their obligations with suppliers and employees. Therefore, several businesses have laid off most of their workers since this has affected the suppliers as well; suppliers cannot also pay their employees and meet their financial covenant. The government has played a major role in alleviating the problem of covid-19, however, lack a key component in deleting the effect of this pandemic which is coordination with organizations to bring the best business continuity management strategy. This is because its policies hugely favoured Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to the neglect of large-scale businesses whose business activities involve dealing in most of the country's imports and exports.

To recommend, challenges, without doubt, exist for governments in this difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, close cooperation with all actors of the business environment is essential in this period. Even though many businesses can deal with some of the flown-on effects of the pandemic, they would still need the government to provide a rigid Business Continuity Management (BCM) strategy to allow a smooth transition to a post-COVID period. The government, therefore, should liaise up with organizations to tackle the general need of businesses in the quest to be sustainable. Besides, it must explore opportunities focused on making conditions of trade flexible in responding to arising uncertainties. Businesses are also to consider fast-tracking digital transformations as the shift to remote working or telecommuting exposes gaps in IT infrastructure, workforce planning, and digital upskilling.

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