

Business Mentoring and Small-Scale Business Survival in Delta State

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Abstract

Small businesses commonly encounter difficulties in gaining access to credit facilities and continuous capacity building, which affected their survival. Therefore, this study aims to describe managers' perspectives of business mentoring on small-scale business survival. Specifically, the study identifies the extent to which mentoring aid credit facility accessibility and promote capacity building for small scale business survival. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The study population was 1397 registered small scale enterprise in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State. A proportionate sampling technique was used to select 140 respondents for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire as an instrument. Three experts validated the instrument, and Cronbach's alpha statistics tested the reliability and yielded 0.97. Descriptive statistics of mean was used to answer the research questions with a mean average of 2.50 above as high extent and 2.49 below as low extent. The analysis results showed that mentoring promoted credit facility accessibility and supported the capacity building of entrepreneurs to a high extent to a high extent. Accordingly, it was recommended that there be a forum in states that would help identify mentors in all business sectors to guide credit facility accessibility. Furthermore, there is a need for a sound policy in which business mentoring should be anchored. The sound policy will guide capacity building and other sundry aspects of mentoring to mentees for improving business performance.

Keywords:

Business Mentoring, Small Scale Business, Credit Facility, Capacity Building

INTRODUCTION

A small business is one that its owners actively manage, highly personalized, largely local in its area of operations, relatively small size within the industry, and largely dependent on internal sources of capital to finance growth. A small business is any business in which the owner/manager can recall the first names of his or her employees. Small businesses seem to be characterized by the inability of owners to gain access to credit facilities and continuous capacity building. This situation may impact the business growth and survival.

Some of the scheme embarked upon by government includes the introduction of fiscal incentive, i.e., granting small business tax holiday for the first six years of its operation. To give financial support, the Central Bank of Nigeria set credit guidelines requiring commercial banks to allocate a certain percentage of their funds to small businesses. Several developmental financial institutions and schemes were also established to aid small

businesses, including the Nigerian Bank of Commerce and Industry (NCBI), the Nigerian Industrial Development Bank (NIDB), and the World Bank SME I and SME II initiatives. There were also export incentives from the Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM) to stimulate export loan facilities to small businesses as well as export duty exemptions administered by the Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC). Small-business assistance programs have also been established by local and state governments (Osemeke, 2012).

With the various programs and support, it is logical to assume that the small businesses/small-scale sector in Nigeria would have gradually taken its place as the instrument to change the Nigerian economy as anticipated by researchers. But the reality is that many businesses in Delta State cannot even break even after the first year, while many go into extinction in the third year of existence (Delta State Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Investment, 2019). Therefore, one is forced to ask whether the business owners aware of the credit facility provision and capacity building from the state, federal governments and other non-governmental agencies? How to increase business owners' awareness of available credit facilities and capacity-building opportunities?

Mentoring is one of the ways to lessen such impact. Effective and efficient mentorship programs tend to raise entrepreneurial outcomes among upcoming entrepreneurs operating Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). In addition, mentorship programs result in benefits from the wisdom and skills of the masters, which, when skillfully passed, raise the level of entrepreneurial outcomes. Modern-day mentorship acts as an instrument of developing group and/or individuals' potentials to carry out duties and responsibilities, learn new techniques, and enhance the well-being of mentees (Cummings & Worley, 2019). It means that mentorship anchored on the wisdom and skill of the mentor improves apprentice competence in boosting outcomes.

In line with the career and personal or psychosocial developments, both entrepreneurship development and SMEs have been globally acknowledged as instruments for achieving economic growth and development as well as employment creation (Rebecca and Benjamin, 2019). Furthermore, small business performance positively impacts GDP, exports per capita, patents per capita, and employment rates (Cumming, Johan, & Zhang, 2020), and mentoring improves the chances of business success (Iyamu, 2018). Accordingly, this study aims to describe managers' perspectives of business mentoring on small-scale business survival. Furthermore, the study specifically determined (1) the extent to which mentoring aid credit facility accessibility for small-scale business survival, and (2) the extent to which mentoring promote capacity building for small scale business survival.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small-scale business

There are many definitions of small-scale business in Nigeria, also known as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The central bank of Nigeria (CBN), in its monetary policy circular No 22 of 2019, defined SMEs as having a turnover not exceeding 500,000 Naira. Also, commercial banks defined SMEs as enterprises with annual turnover not exceeding 500,000. In contrast, the merchant banks defined SMEs as those enterprises with annual turnover not exceeding two million naira. However, the definition of SMEs varies from country to country. The nation needs SMEs because they contribute meaningfully to economic development. They are at the forefront of output expansion, employment

generation, income redistribution, promotion of indigenous entrepreneurship and production of primary goods to strengthen industrial linkages. The sector is responsible for about 70 percent of the total industrial employment in the country and between 10-15 percent of the total manufacturing output.

Concept of mentoring

Traditionally, the term ‘mentor’ might conjure up for us a picture of a ‘white-haired wise man or guide’. In fact, the origins of the word mentor come from Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Before leaving to fight the Trojan war, Odysseus left his son and his entire estate in the care of his friend Mentor, who then guided the young Telemachus as he grew up. Mentor, however, was only in his early twenties. Mentorship is a relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. The mentor may be older or younger than the person being mentored, but he or she must have a certain area of expertise (Farren, 2019). It is a learning and development partnership between someone with vast experience and someone who wants to learn. Interaction with an expert may also be necessary to gain proficiency with/in cultural tools (Rogoff, 2020).

Mentoring is a process that always involves communication and is relationship-based, but its precise definition is elusive (Dawson, 2018), with more than 50 definitions currently in use (Crisp and Cruz, 2019). One definition of the many that have been proposed is “Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)” (Bozeman and Feeney, 2018).

Within a more modern context, most of us might be familiar with the concept of a business mentor within our workplace. The business mentor is someone who has more experience or wisdom and is willing to share their knowledge and insights in bringing on a younger colleague, guiding their career within the company. However, it is only relatively recently that the term mentor has broken out of the workplace and into the marketplace. As a result, the term ‘business mentor’ is often freely bandied around to encompass a broad range of activities and services from business angels to non-executive directors.

Mentoring is primarily developed to increase the knowledge base of the protégé. However, for the mentor, the relationship can also have positive outcomes (Haggard, Dougherty, Turban and Wilbanks, 2018), such as increased satisfaction from enabling others to learn, learning the art of reflective dialogue and developing one’s interpersonal skills. Bozeman and Feeney (2018) indicated that mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period between a person perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience known as the mentor and a person who is perceived to have less, the protégé. In other words, entrepreneurs learn from experience, which is rarely planned or imposed on them by mentors.

Business mentoring does not involve employing a consultant or employee to help run the business. Instead, it is a relationship between the business owner and someone with business experience that can guide the business owner through making difficult decisions. Mentors point out ways of improving the business, ask the owner the tough questions and

motivate him/her to want to achieve higher levels of performance, all within the bounds of a trusted relationship. Because it is lonely at the top, business mentoring can offer the business owner a partner in the process, sharing views with someone who knows the ropes. In addition, working with a business mentor will help the owner gain fresh insights into problems and decision-making through impartial, objective discussion and feedback.

Therefore, it is pertinent to absolutely clear what ‘business mentoring’ should be – and it begins with absolute and genuine belief in the businesses we work with and their onward success. With anybody other than a professional business mentor, time and attention will always be divided amongst their activities and the business mentor’s level of motivation. Evidence abound however that most successful entrepreneurs will attribute much of their achievement to the support and guidance they received from a business mentor.

Mentoring and small-scale business survival

According to Global Experts in Coaching (2019), a good mentor is an encourager who is passionate about the success of others. A mentor will not tell a mentee what to do. Instead, he or she will actively listen to the mentee’s ideas and work with him/her to make those ideas a reality. In many instances, realizing those ideas will increase revenue and ultimately make the company more valuable to acquirers. Over the years, it has been observed that no two mentoring processes are the same. Small business owners usually develop personal relationships with their mentors, and those relationships gradually evolve. Yet, from the outset, the relationship a small-scale business owners establish with his/her mentor needs to align with the business goals and the outcomes he/she hopes to achieve from the mentoring process.

Mentoring and credit facility accessibility

A credit facility can be defined as a type of loan made in a business that allows the borrowing business to take out money over an extended period instead of reapplying for a loan each time the business needs money (CBN, 2019). Credit facility accessibility by small business owners is probably made available through mentoring relationships.

Most mentors are happy to make their networks available to the people they mentor. Depending on the situation, the mentor may facilitate connections with partners, vendors or even prospective customers - another reason why it is helpful to recruit a mentor with experience in the industry of interest. Mentors have valuable connections in the business world. Networking is vital for climbing the corporate ladder, so having a close relationship with a successful mentor can be essential. Business mentors can put the mentee in touch with contacts who can help make his/her business more successful through loans, grants and investment portfolios (Farren, 2019). The more networking a business owner does, the more people he/she meet. And the more people met, the greater the odds are that he/she will have someone in his/her rolodex that can help solve financial business problems.

According to Owen et al. (2019), youth business mentoring can both improve access to external finance and lead to improved business performance. In another study conducted in Nigeria, Ofili (2019) confirmed that many entrepreneurs looked for a fully-funded government mentoring program that allowed novice entrepreneurs to obtain business funding in the end. On a different note, Zvaigzne and Kotāne (2019) explained that mentees gained the opportunities to develop business networking, attract new investments and fund through their mentors.

Mentoring and capacity building

Capacity building in small-scale businesses cannot be overemphasized. It allows the business owner to learn, unlearn and relearn new strategies, promotional packages and systems for business growth and survival. Seeing the importance of small-scale business on economic development, the federal government of Nigeria has rolled out some schemes for its promotion.

In contrast to consultants who may only be concerned with what is best for a business venture, mentors are invested in helping mentees develop business skills for the long term. Mentors are unlike advisers and consultants, who care only about the business venture. Instead, business mentors help the mentee develop his business skills (Collins, 2017). For example, if employees constantly complain that they do not understand the company's directions, a business mentor can work with the company to improve communication with the staff. This way, the company will have a better understanding of how to communicate with the staff both now and in the future.

Past studies also verified the effect of mentoring on capacity building. For example, a mentee could develop entrepreneurial self-efficacy related to opportunity recognition after a mentoring process (St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). Additionally, mentoring enabled mentees to understand stakeholders' tacit knowledge, management style, and organizational culture (Kandade, Samara, Parada & Dawson, 2020). Mentees also benefitted from mentorship as they built decision-making skills to assess and make sense of evidence (Jordaan et al., 2018). To a further extent, mentorship created mutual benefits for mentor and mentee when exchanging ideas, behaviors and values (Joel, 2018). Finally, continuous capacity building resulting from a series of meetings with the mentor can also increase the survival of small-scale business owners (Rogoff, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey research is devoted to gathering information about prevailing conditions or situations for the purpose of description and interpretation (Aggarwal, 2018). The study population consisted of 1397 registered small-scale enterprise owners in Delta Central Senatorial District with Delta State Internal Revenue Service (DIRS). The geographical scope of this study covered Delta Central Senatorial District. This senatorial district includes Sapele, Okpe, Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Udu, Ughelli North, and Ughelli South Local Government Areas. A proportionate random sampling technique was used to sample 140 registered small-scale enterprise owners, indicating 10% of the population. This method was justified as adequate as a representative sample of a large population can be studied and inferred on (Reynolds, Siminitiras and Diamantopoulos, 2018).

The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire. The instrument was self-developed by the researchers. The instrument consisted of two sections; A and B. Section A contained the respondents' socio-demographic data. Section B contained twelve (12) item statements representing credit facility accessibility and capacity building through mentoring. The responses were rated on a four (4) point rating scale ranging from Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Low Extent (LE) = 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1.

The instrument for data collection was subjected to face validity by three experts familiar with instrument validation. Cronbach alpha statistics was used to ascertain the reliability of the study. The instrument was administered to twenty (20) respondents in the population but not part of the sample for reliability purposes. An alpha value of 0.97 was obtained, which shows that the instrument was reliable.

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents by the researcher with the help of three assistants. The questionnaires were administered and retrieved immediately in order to control the loss of the questionnaire. The exercise lasted for three weeks. The data generated from the administration of the research questionnaire was analyzed using mean(x) to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the mean ratings of the respondents ranged from 2.59 to 3.12. The lowest mean was obtained by item stated: “absence of recognizable mentors’ forum impedes credit facility acquisition for business survival.” Meanwhile, “mentoring creates awareness on the credit facilities opportunities in business” yielded the highest mean of 3.12. This result implied that small-scale business owners did not have adequate information on credit acquisition, but they mostly benefitted from the mentoring program by gaining access to such knowledge. Despite that, the respondents did not entirely agree that credit acquisition was impeded by the lack of recognizable mentors’ forum. Overall, all values exceeded the cut-off point of 0.25; thus, they were interpreted to a high extent. The result indicates that mentoring has a high extent of influence on credit facility accessibility for small-scale business survival in Delta State.

Table 2 shows the survey results of mentoring and capacity building for small-scale business survival. The mean ratings of the respondents ranged from 2.59 to 3.03. The table shows that all the variables were rated to a high extent. However, the lowest mean was obtained by item stated: “capacity building by mentors opens new business owners to exciting opportunities for business survival.” In contrast, respondents rated the item “mentors cushion the effects associated with new businesses startup for business survival” the highest. The result shows that mentoring has a high extent influence in capacity building for small-scale business survival in Delta State. Overall, the result implied that business owners viewed business mentoring as a reactive mitigation strategy to maintain business survival rather than a proactive measure to grow their businesses.

Table 1: Mentoring and credit facility accessibility for small-scale business survival

Item Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Credit facility made available to business owners through mentoring.	2.94	0.99	High Extent
Mentor advice smooth’s the process of credit facility	2.82	0.97	High Extent

acquisition for business survival.

Mentoring creates awareness on the credit facilities opportunities in business.	3.12	0.96	High Extent
Mentoring collates documentation needs of credit facility for breeding business credit acquisition.	2.90	1.07	High Extent
Absence of recognizable mentors' forum impedes credit facility acquisition for business survival.	2.59	1.84	High Extent
Mentors serves as surety in credit facility acquisition for business survival	2.86	1.18	High Extent
Overall	2.87	1.18	High Extent

Table 2: Mentoring and capacity building for small-scale business survival

Item Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Mentors promote capacity building for intending and emerging businesses.	2.94	0.99	High Extent
Capacity building by mentors opens new business owners to exciting opportunities for business survival.	2.59	1.84	High Extent
Mentors provide the experience of day to day running of a business through capacity-building forums.	2.86	1.18	High Extent
Mentors cushion the effects associated with new businesses startup for business survival.	3.03	1.13	High Extent
Mentoring platform provides legal services for small-scale business survival.	2.90	1.14	High Extent
Mentoring platform promotes auditing services for small-scale business survival.	2.69	1.18	High Extent
Overall	2.84	1.02	High Extent

DISCUSSION

Business owners in Delta State rated mentoring influence in credit facility accessibility for small scale business survival to a high extent. According to Osamwonyi (2010), factors inhibiting funds accessibility to SMEs are the stringent conditions set by financial institutions, the lack of adequate collateral and credit information, and the cost of accessing funds, but this can probably change with mentoring focus. This assertion is in consonance

with the findings of this study. Mentors' advice can help change the narrative for small-scale business owners as many find it difficult to access credit facilities. With mentor guidance, the proper documentation and step-by-step process to meet the stringent conditions of financial institutions become available.

Furthermore, business owners in Delta State rated mentoring influence in capacity building for small-scale business survival to a high extent. Rogers (2020) noted that mentoring has the potential to minimize the inefficiency in overall business management and poor record-keeping of most troubled SMEs. This assertion aligns with the findings of this study. Mentors can help solve technical problems/incompetence, lack of essential and required expertise in production, procurement, maintenance and marketing.

One of the challenges facing new business is the absence of some vital skills which might affect decision making in the day to day running of the business. A good mentor identifies the skill gap and then works with the mentee through capacity building to overcome the skill deficiency. This initiative promotes small-scale business survival.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that mentoring engenders the survival of small-scale businesses in Delta State through credit facility accessibility and capacity building to a high extent. This result implies that if mentoring is properly harnessed, changing the narrative of small-scale business failure in Delta State is possible. Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made from this study.

1. Business mentoring should be introduced formally in the informal sector in the Delta State and gradually to other states in Nigeria. It is intended to give direction and training to most business owners at the starting, growing and stabilizing stages to improve enterprise performance. Moreover, business mentoring can reduce stagnation and business interruption during the first 5-years of the startup.
2. For mentorship to be effective in SMEs, there needs to be an awareness of the need and availability of business mentors. There should be a forum in states that would help identify mentors in all business sectors to guide credit facility accessibility.
3. There is a need for a sound policy in which business mentoring should be anchored. The sound policy will guide capacity building and other sundry aspects of mentoring to mentees to improve business performance and survival.

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