

Resilience In The Face Of Disruption: A Sales Process Blueprint For SMEs Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

Unquestionably, the recent global crisis (COVID-19) altered several facets of business, including operations, growth, sales, etc. This article examines resilience and growth appropriate for facing a pandemic. An enterprise needs capability and a plan to survive. As noted in earlier research, resilience is seen as a process rather than just the outcome of a pandemic. Additionally, growth strategies and their phases vary between normal times and emergencies. This article paper reviews various publications that used different techniques to expound on how corporate resilience and growth plans alter in response to a crisis. Using growth and resilience as pillars, this study creates a conceptual paradigm for creating business sustainability following a disaster. This inductive study illustrates growth and resilience techniques that can help entrepreneurs steer clear of deceptive tactics. Furthermore, the results showed that digital imperatives could speed up both procedures to achieve sustainability. The theoretical ramifications of this research are discussed in this work using organizational resilience theory. In addition to growth stages during times of crisis, such as no growth, growth support, growth force, and sustainable growth, this study identifies three primary stages in the resilience process: resilience awareness, adaptation, and action. Practically speaking, the suggested approach can also help entrepreneurs comprehend their circumstances and know what to do in a crisis. In addition to offering comprehensive phases for resilience response and company growth plans, this study adds to the continuing discussion on crisis response.

Keywords: *SMEs, Business Resilience, Digital Imperative, Business Growth, Business Sustainability.*

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I. Introduction

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) generate a sizable portion of wealth and jobs. However, because of their restricted capacities and relative lack of resource endowment, SMEs are disproportionately affected by disruptive occurrences and are hence more susceptible to disruptive shocks. To stop the spread of the COVID-19 global health disaster, certain precautions were implemented in December 2019, such as lockdowns and travel restrictions. The SME sector has been most impacted globally by the subsequent decline in business activity brought on by the pandemic.

Every business sector is susceptible to a crisis, whether it is a natural disaster, political upheaval, economic downturn, or war. The most recent problem that the world society has faced is the Covid-19 pandemic. A worldwide economic crisis resulted from the pandemic's aftereffects, which included limited mobility, a health crisis, job losses, school closures, and destroyed industries. More than 41.6% of SMEs closed globally as a result of this crisis (Bartik *et al.*, 2020), which led to a sharp rise in unemployment rates, forced homelessness, and decreased productivity. Over the course of the two years, several business sectors—like many in the tourism and leisure sector—even had to cease operations. While both big and small firms were affected by this crisis, small enterprises with fewer networks, resources, and capital were more negatively impacted, and their viability as a company was in jeopardy (Bachtiar and Ramli, 2023). These results made it imperative to improve business sustainability.

Current crisis literature links business sustainability to enterprise effectiveness (Obrenovic *et al.*, 2020), human resources (Womoh *et al.*, 2020), the supply chain (Karmaker *et al.*, 2021), competitiveness, capabilities, and competencies (Hamilton, 2020), and the supply chain. Corporate resilience is the ability, attitude, and skill to pursue corporate sustainability following a disaster. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that dynamic growth produced by implemented tactics including open innovation, innovative campaigns, and leadership effectively achieves corporate sustainability (Aldianto *et al.*, 2021).

Growth and resilience are two key tactics for corporate sustainability that are included in the current study. Prior studies have primarily focused on resilience and growth as tactics and instruments for corporate sustainability alone (Aldianto *et al.*, 2021; Yun *et al.*, 2020). This article, on the other hand, acknowledges that growth and resilience are complicated concepts. We contend that procedures and phases make up corporate growth and resilience. As a result, both aspects evolve and alter throughout a crisis. To achieve corporate

sustainability following a crisis, this research aims to shed light on the phases of resilience development and growth strategies that have not yet been adequately illustrated in the body of current literature.

Moreover, the intricacy of a corporation must be taken into account when crises are constant. Various accelerators are becoming more and more necessary to improve business capabilities and strategies. The business model, diversity (Duchek *et al.*, 2020), digitalization (Henn *et al.*, 2022), and networks (Wachning *et al.*, 2023) are the accelerating aspects that have been identified in previous literature.

Lastly, in times of crisis, corporate development and resilience are critical. The ability of a company to innovate and expand amid a catastrophe is the primary function of resilience. The author reviewed how SMEs could recover from the pandemic's effects. Purnomo *et al.* (2021) support this claim by arguing that taking advantage of chances that arise during a crisis is beneficial for business expansion.

Meyer's (1982) organizational resilience theory serves as the foundation for this investigation. According to organizational resilience theory, SMEs can attain business sustainability by growing their businesses in a way that logically maximizes their goals. By incorporating growth stages and resilience as tactics and methods to attain corporate sustainability, organizational resilience theory expands on crisis literature. Based on this approach, the current study examines SMEs as a significant milestone in Nigeria's economic progress.

To better understand the phenomenon and entrepreneurs' opinions on and experiences with maintaining their enterprises after a crisis, an inductive theory-building technique is being used.

First, the idea of organizational resilience is developed as a stage process in this study. Some contend that to support the resilience process, the idea of resilience must be deconstructed. As a result, this study adds to the theory of organizational resilience, which mostly concentrates on the traits of entrepreneurs and their intentions. Second, growth is a consequence of the crisis that can be seen as both the beginning and the end of a firm. By demonstrating a growth approach at every step of the firm during a crisis, this finding broadens the scope of growth strategy. The study's conclusions can be crucial in helping companies get ready to change tactics in times of need.

The objectives are to comprehend how the resilience of SMEs changes during times of crisis, the growth of SMEs during these times, the factors that could strengthen and quicken the growth and resilience of a business, and how growth and resilience contribute to the sustainability of SMEs.

II. Literature Review

A key idea in business and entrepreneurship studies is the performance of SMEs. It is often the subject of business management research. However, opinions on firm-level performance are divided, especially when it comes to the selection of metrics and their multifaceted character. Employing aggregate corporate performance metrics may skew important information and jeopardize the quality of research findings, scholars must select performance factors relevant to their context and scope.

A popular subject in management and business studies is corporate sustainability. The idea has so far been connected to the personality, capital, networks, and tactics of entrepreneurs (Hamilton, 2020). Despite obstacles from both internal and external sources, corporate sustainability is also seen as a crucial objective in the industry. Leadership, team issues, creativity, finances, and dedication are examples of internal hurdles; political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal elements are examples of external barriers.

The world is currently coping with the long-term effects of the COVID-19 global epidemic in addition to the aforementioned difficulties. Businesses have found it challenging to attain sustainability as a result of this crisis, particularly small, vulnerable companies with little funding and resources. As a result, companies must take advantage of their assets and skills and build resilience.

Organizational Resilience for Business Sustainability

The concept of resilience was first investigated in the domains of geography, engineering, psychology, and climate change (Chadwick and Raver, 2020; Kammouh *et al.*, 2020). Since the 1980s, when Staw *et al.* (1981) and Meyer (1982) began to connect organizational resilience to organizational reaction to external challenges, organizational resilience in business has also been the subject of much discussion. It has been demonstrated that self-efficacy, motivation, and individual traits are the sources of organizational resilience. The association between psychological capital (psycap) and resilience is identified in this body of study.

With its benefits, organizational resilience can also set off a process of recovery and change, where it takes center stage as the main reaction to crisis and disruption, forming an adaptive shift toward a new circumstance and trend. Business survival as the main reaction to change can be reinforced by organizational resilience. This idea explains why some companies can endure while others are unable (Korber and McNaughton, 2018).

Nonetheless, the majority of research views organizational resilience as a consequence of failure, uncertainty, adversity, and crisis (Korber and McNaughton, 2018). The potential for organizational resilience as

a complicated process leading to firm survival and sustainability is overlooked in earlier research. In 2020, Duchek wrote a compelling study about resilience as a process. According to this study, companies must build resilience to handle unforeseen circumstances and emergencies. According to this study, companies must build resilience in order to handle unforeseen circumstances and emergencies. Organizational resilience is a process that requires the phases of activation, response, and organizational learning. It is conceptualized as meta-capability (Duchek, 2020). There is much concentration on accepting and coping with the crisis to develop and implement solutions, which is in opposition to the current research's idea of building resilience during a crisis. As part of the process of building resilience during the crisis and as steps to assist business sustainability beyond the crisis, this article divides that stage into three components: resilience awareness, adaptation, and action.

Growth Strategy Development

Growth is a crucial indicator of a company's ability to survive and strongly correlates with its sustainability. Several factors, including a company's lifespan, financial results, and how it evolves, can be used to determine growth (Bachtiar, 2020b). The majority of the literature concentrates on two distinct business growth themes. First, they go over growth strategy, which includes sectoral engagement, market linkage, profit generation, market development, control, creativity, teamwork, and business experience. Similarly, a company must pay attention to its declining phase and take strategic measures to avoid it if it hopes to expand. Secondly, growth metrics such as scale, quality performance, defect rate, firm size, sales growth, and profit are the main emphasis of the literature. To describe the growth stages that businesses must experience, measure, and plan for, researchers created the Growth Stage Model (GSM). According to earlier research, GSM describes the phases that companies must go through to achieve sustainability and maturity. According to some authors, GSM is a four-stage process that emphasizes each stage's important phase. Others divide GSM into five or six stages, with each stage being named after the company's stage from inception to survival, young growth, and mature growth. Storey and Greene's (2010) study, which identifies the decreasing phase as the final stage of GSM, is one of the most important studies in the field. According to the authors, every company and/or product will have a period of decline that will compel them to diversify or change their business emphasis (Storey & Greene, 2010). By claiming that companies can attain sustainable growth by utilizing the areas outlined in our suggested model, the current study contests that viewpoint.

Additionally, prior research has only examined growth strategy and GSM during regular periods (Bachtiar, 2020b). According to the current study, corporate tactics will be entirely different during times of crisis, and GSM and growth strategies will be unique and creative. To determine the implications for corporate sustainability, this study will look at how companies expand and how the GSM changes during a crisis.

Business Sustainability and Growth Post-Crisis

When the World Commission on Environment and Development declared in 1987 that it was critical to meet current demands without sacrificing the capacity of future generations to meet their own, the idea of sustainability gained prominence. Now the development of the Triple Bottom Line (3P) concept—the well-known Triple-P model for Profit, Planet, and People—this idea has now gained widespread acceptance in the business world. The Triple-P model states that economic, social, and environmental considerations are the fundamental components of corporate growth and sustainability.

In the past, conversations regarding corporate sustainability centered on how to reduce environmental effects while maintaining long-term profitability by striking a balance between social and environmental issues. Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) conducted case studies with two large organizations and provided a detailed explanation of this focus. Their objective was to reframe a company's mission from generating revenue to focusing on the social and environmental facets of corporate sustainability. Their semi-structured interviews showed that both companies' sustainable business models relied on economics as well as the environmental and social facets of sustainability and that their performance depended on effective leadership and stakeholders.

At the moment, these conversations center on implementing business plans to satisfy the demands of an organization and its stakeholders while protecting natural resources, enhancing operations, innovation, and strategic expansion, providing long-term benefits to society, and fostering collaborative innovation that entails collaboration, communication, and interpersonal relationships (Hindi and Frenkel, 2022). For instance, Borowski (2021) presents an eco-systematic framework for sustainability to promote innovation in the sustainability process, and Evans *et al.* (2017) suggest developing a business model innovation. However, this study contends that in addition to the aforementioned tactics, achieving business sustainability and growth during a crisis calls for organizational-level strategy as well as the capabilities of the organization and its entrepreneurs, as well as an accelerator element to guarantee the process' success. To achieve corporate sustainability, the idea of resilience is therefore suggested.

III. Results And Discussion

Towards Resilience Creation Process for Business Sustainability

Although we know that without resilience, businesses will struggle to shape their business growth and sustainability. This study is of the view that resilience after the crisis attained a new level. This is because businesses face numerous constraints when their performance reaches its lowest point (Laorden *et al.*, 2022), which forces many businesses to close down due to their inability to survive and grow (Madeira *et al.*, 2021). Following the recent pandemic, Bachtiar *et al.*, 2023 found that entrepreneurial resilience among small business owners is changing. Prior research has concentrated on resilience in response to a crisis, resilience goals, and resilience results (Ciasullo *et al.*, 2022; Iborra *et al.*, 2020; Iftikhar *et al.*, 2021). In times of crisis, business resilience emerges in phases that adhere to a specific order all through. The identification of a resilience-creation process that is guided by the themes that surfaced from the gathering of data, helps to understand resilience after a disaster.

Growth Development for Business Sustainability After the Pandemic

Another issue for firms is trying to grow during a crisis. A prior study on SMEs in Indonesia highlights the significance of owners' or entrepreneurs' ambition to capitalize on their main product or diversify in pursuit of growth (Bachtiar, 2020b). To do this, entrepreneurs need to be resilient, proactive, optimistic, self-efficacious, and willing to take risks.

In times of crisis, corporate expansion is crucial to preventing company closure. It implies that corporate expansion should always be sought, even during times of crisis. Pursuing progress at times of crisis differs greatly from doing so in regular times, though. This shows that the Growth Stage Model (GSM) is useful for comprehending the shifts that take place during corporate growth (Bachtiar *et al.*, 2023). By adding important data gathering and analysis steps, the current study updates earlier GSM studies (Bachtiar, 2020b) to take into account the recent crisis time.

According to reviews, a company must go through a few distinct phases to continue growing throughout a crisis. The four-stage model outlines the prerequisites for long-term growth as well as crisis-resolution tactics.

Enterprises will experience a period of stagnation during a crisis, during which the majority of businesses will fail and shut down. At this point, survival is the main priority, and great motivation turns into the main goal. The existence and survival phases are combined in this initial phase. It is contended that since organizations deal with both phases simultaneously during times of crisis, there is no such thing as distinct stages. During the initial phase of a crisis, the growth line is negative and slow. Support from the government, business community, and community, however, might raise the line. Since flexibility and technology maximization may bridge the support and accelerate corporate growth, the second stage of GSM during times of crisis is known as growth support.

This stage replaces rapid growth and young growth suggested by earlier research (Storey & Greene, 2010). Businesses go through growth support stages during times of crisis rather than those stages, where they are unable to function independently and require various forms of support to enhance their growth. Following that, because of the new prospects and competition among surviving enterprises, company growth expands more significantly during times of crisis. During normal times, this phase is known as the growth stage, during which companies are keen to seize fresh chances to expand their operations. Businesses have distinct goals but the same focus during times of crisis. During a crisis, GSM's next step is to push growth to stay in company, as opposed to expansion.

Accelerator for Attaining Business Sustainability

In addition to speeding up the process, this accelerator ensures that GSM can function at its best during a crisis by supporting both components. The digital business model is a moderating variable between resilience and growth for corporate sustainability, according to Prastian *et al.* (2022). According to other studies, by modifying IT infrastructure, abandoning traditional corporate practices, and advancing with wise digital innovation, digital readiness can enhance readiness for post-crisis situations (Rapaccini *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, resilient businesses use internal resources, like IT investment and management decision-making, to create development and productivity plans, according to a study on 102 European SMEs (Audretsch and Belitski, 2021). Entrepreneurial resilience during COVID-19 was reinvented by creative digital pivoting, digital infrastructure, social impact through digital technology, and growth through digitalization, according to the most recent research on the influence of COVID-19 on 42 successful entrepreneurs (Santos *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, to achieve corporate sustainability, these findings and earlier research agree that the digital imperative must support and enhance resilience and growth. Due to the difficulty of entrepreneurs to make their pursuit of business sustainability a priority during and after a crisis, this finding helps to reduce their uncertainty about which element they should focus on first to achieve business growth (Prastian *et al.*, 2022).

Towards Business Resilience and Growth Strategy Transformation Post-Crisis

According to research, people go through crucial phases to sustain and foster resilience and business expansion. This study demonstrates that by establishing systems for resilience awareness, adaptation, and action, entrepreneurs can enhance their capacity for resilience. After that, this study finds that, in contradiction to data from all earlier Growth Stage Models (GSM), firms must go through multiple stages to pursue growth amid crises. These stages include no growth, growth support, growth force, and sustainable growth.

The growth stage model and organizational resilience concepts are used to analyze how growth and resilience expand during a crisis, how these factors influence a business's post-crisis sustainability model, and how digitalization plays a role in this process. According to the reviews, their motivation, optimism, commitment, resilience, and consistency were the most important traits that enabled them to weather this disaster. According to Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017), this study supports the psychology capital theory, which emphasizes the positive psychological states of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope for success.

Although crises are inevitable, they have the power to propel businesses to new heights of resilience, expansion, and sustainability.

Entrepreneurs who embrace a crisis in their company must first and foremost address the problem by implementing growth stages and resilience. Businesses must first build their resilience to achieve business sustainability, as building resilience has strong support as a bottom-line strategy of business sustainability (Bachtiar and Ramli, 2023). The article supports earlier research that asserts resilience building is a prerequisite for developing corporate sustainability (Golicic *et al.*, 2017). Resilience and sustainability are compatible, according to another study, with sustainability being the goal at every stage of resilience, from emerging and developing to mature resilience (Espiner *et al.*, 2017). The relationship between resilience and business sustainability has not been consistently positioned in the research up to this point. According to some research, sustainability is a component of resilience, whereas other research asserts that resilience is a component of sustainability (Bachtiar and Ramli, 2023). Drawing from this review, the report makes the case that resilience is a fundamental strategy and component of company sustainability, beginning with raising entrepreneurs' understanding of resilience and continuing through processes of adaptation and action. Furthermore, it must be realized that when a crisis first starts and everything is still in disarray, there won't be any progress. To achieve sustainable growth, growth stages must be modified by pursuing growth drives and employing growth supports. An accelerator, which this study identifies as a digital strategy or necessity, completes both components. Businesses must develop a resilience plan to help them recover from outbreaks like the recent Covid-19 if they hope to achieve company sustainability. One of the main strategies developed to cope with different kinds of adversity is resilience (Linnenluecke, 2017b). According to Korber and McNaughton (2018), resilience is a dynamic process that calls for adaptability, drive, optimism, tenacity, self-efficacy, and hope. As a result, a procedure known as the resilience-creation process needs to be examined to develop the whole resilience capabilities.

Entrepreneurs will unavoidably face some obstacles when implementing the resilience and growth stages described above, beginning with raising employee resilience awareness so that they can adapt and work together to build business resilience, and high motivation during a period of no growth when the majority of businesses fail and close, identifying appropriate support to help them get back up, continuing to grow to achieve sustainable growth, and improving their digital readiness. Therefore, to guarantee the survival of any organization, both these methods require a strong ecosystem with all actors cooperating and a significant amount of psychological capital from the owner or entrepreneur.

IV. Conclusion

To address how SMEs may improve sustainability both during and after a crisis, this article looks at research findings and new trends.

When entrepreneurs recognize and understand crises, they plan to continue operating their companies, implement new business plans, and make a commitment to their long-term viability. These responses are necessary to create corporate expansion. Business owners who suffered from the lockdown policy and were unable to expand their companies tended to turn to new technology, such as social media and smartphone apps, to establish support networks. SMEs must seek expansion throughout this crisis, and digital exploitation enabled them to remain viable during the post-crisis phase. This proves that to improve sustainability, digital procedures are essential. Lastly, this study is important for guiding business owners in the crisis phase toward their sustainability plan. Entrepreneurs are urged to follow the guidelines and recommendations to prevent selecting the incorrect growth plan and to foresee the psychological limitations that may have an impact on them and their companies.

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