



Proposed Initiatives to Protect Small Businesses in Wales; the United Kingdom Due to Covid-19

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses worldwide have faced unprecedented challenges. This study presents a detailed analysis of these challenges and explores the effectiveness of government interventions in supporting small business recovery. Utilizing a mix of quantitative research methods, including statistical analysis and a comprehensive literature review, the research focuses on the specific impacts of the pandemic on small business operations and finances. Key findings indicate that small businesses have suffered significant disruptions, primarily in supply chain management and customer engagement. The study evaluates various government initiatives, such as financial aid packages and regulatory relaxations, highlighting their role in mitigating the pandemic's adverse effects. Furthermore, it proposes a set of recommendations for both government and small businesses, emphasizing the need for tailored financial support, enhanced digital transformation strategies, and flexible operational adjustments. The research concludes that a collaborative approach between government and small businesses is essential for ensuring sustainable growth and recovery in the post-pandemic era. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing actionable insights and practical strategies for policymakers and business owners, aiming to bolster the resilience and long-term prosperity of small businesses, which are integral to the global economy.

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1. BACKGROUND OF THE CHOSEN TOPIC

Small businesses are the most important asset of any economy many people jobs depend on small businesses, in fact, there are many countries in which small business owners are providers of majority of the jobs, hence it was important to know how Covid-19 has affected small businesses and what actions the government can take to reduce economic stress of these businesses. The primary purpose of this study is to know how small businesses are affected, the challenges they face in the current working environment, and to know if they are still working in these economical and Healthwise challenging times.

Small business is the backbone of economies around the world. The success of small businesses is important for the smooth running of a healthy economy. Research role was to conduct quantitative research and literature review. The research is about small businesses, and how covid-19 has affected it, and what can the government do to help them with this. This study suggests the steps government should take along with the steps businesses should take to do effective business. The research question is what are the possible initiatives that can be taken to protect the growth of small businesses.

2. INTRODUCTION

Small businesses are primarily owned by one person or partnership that has few employees (less than two hundred and fifty) and less revenue than a corporation (*What is a Small Business?*, 2020). Small businesses definition varies by countries and industries. Small business is the backbone of economies around the world. The success of small businesses is important for the smooth running of a healthy economy. The only person who is conducting research is Umar Iqbal Butt. Research role was to conduct quantitative research and literature review. The research question is what are the possible initiatives that can be taken to protect the growth of small businesses. Currently, different types are available to small business in Wales from the government such as financial support and grants, support for the owners, business rates relief and economic resilience

fund (*Coronavirus support for your business*, 2020).

2.1 Research Question

The research question is what are the possible initiatives that can be taken to protect the growth of the small businesses in Covid-19 era by Wales government and small businesses owners, and what problems are faced by small businesses currently?

2.2 Research Aim

The research aim is to focus on, to investigate what problems small businesses are facing and steps small businesses can take for their growth and protection during this Covid-19 era.

2.3 Research Objectives

To establish what steps or initiatives governments and small businesses can take to protect small businesses in Covid-19 era.

A second research objective is to analyse the problems and suggest steps a small business can take for their growth and protection.

2.4 Justification of the Study

Small businesses are present in many forms around the world. Government needs to protect these businesses because a lot of employees work in these businesses. Small businesses spending is another factor in making an economy strong. Small businesses in Wales extant many opportunities for locals, and loss of business was damaging to the whole economy of the area. There is Wales Business Fund is one of the largest funds that helps SMEs looking to grow and develop with less than two hundred fifty employees in Wales (Wales Business Fund | Development Bank of Wales, 2020), more of these funds and grants are needed to provide initiative for small businesses. This study needs to explore all the options of growth and development available to business owners in Wales.

2.5 Limitations of the Study

This research was focused specifically on Wales, United Kingdom (UK), and therefore it is a

preliminary analysis. The primary restriction was due to Covid-19 because face to face interviews was not possible. The United Kingdom is made up of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland is an island nation in north-western Europe and this research focus only in Wales.

2.6 Summary of Research Project

Small businesses are present in many forms around the world. Benefits of this research included are mentioned below:

- Government needs to protect these businesses because a lot of employees work in these businesses.
- Small businesses spending is another factor in making an economy strong.
- What problems small businesses face due to Covid-19.
- To find out how small businesses are prepared for Covid-19 situations.
- To research about supply chain disruptions of small businesses.

The research objective is to know what steps or initiative the government of UK and small businesses can take to protect small businesses. A second research objective is what steps a small business can take for their growth and protection. The research was focus on time, supply chain and prepared of small businesses in the era of Covid-19.

Potential benefits of the proposed research:

There are several benefits related to this research for instance what companies can learn from their experience of doing small businesses. This research sets the direction for the growth of small business around the world.

Location(s) at which Project is to be Carried out:

The location at which the research was carried out is specifically Wales, UK. Currently, I am in the United Arab Emirates, I was conducting an online meeting to various small businesses or sending them an online survey to fill if needed in any process of this research.

Financial Crises: Financial crises have many forms, financial crisis is a change in asset prices and credit volume. Financial crises are multidimensional and are difficult to characterise using one indicator. Financial crises sometimes appear irrational factors, which include times of stress and financial turmoil [1]. The budgetary crisis affects all of us, small business needs to

have a competitive advantage for their business sustainability. Small business needs to have strategic planning for operational and financial performance benefits [2].

Stress management, stress is a dynamic condition which an individual is confronted by opportunity, a demand which individual desires for which the outcome is perceived to be significant and uncertain. Challenge stressors are related to workload and pressure to complete tasks on time. Hindrance stressors are stressors which keep you from reaching your goals such as confusion or red tape. Sometimes stress is good to perform a job on time but other times it causes chaos. Harmful workplace stress causes employees to perform poorly [3].

Taiwan is located two hundred kilometres from first COVID-19 outbreak, Taiwan was able to keep relatively low infection and death numbers. Taiwan implemented task force on time with collaborative behaviours and volunteers [4]. Many countries are able to deal with Covid-19 crisis easily but there are countries which are struggling with this crisis and are falling into other crisis.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Initial Theoretical Research

3.1.1 Literature review or concepts/themes

Small businesses are defined in the UK according to UK's Companies Act 2006 a small business is defined as one that does not have a turnover of more than six point five million pounds, a balance sheet total of more than three-point twenty-six million pounds and does not have more than 50 employees (SME Definition | What is a Small Business or SME?, 2020). Majority of active enterprises in Wales are SMEs, they account for ninety-nine point four per cent of total enterprises in 2019. While micro-enterprises or small businesses with zero to nine employees account for ninety-five per cent of total enterprises in Wales (Gov.Wales, 2020). These small businesses provide one point two million jobs to Wales people and account for an annual turnover of one hundred and twenty-two point five billion British pounds.

Coronavirus disease 2019 is known as Covid-19, is defined as an illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-2), which was

first found in an outbreak of respiratory illness in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China [5]. The Covid-19 virus spreads primarily through a droplet of saliva or discharges from the nose when the infected person sneezes, hence it is important that one must also practice respiratory etiquette [6]. Covid-19 has struck fear into the population around the world and horrified the medical community of the world [7]. Now the ultimate goal is to lower the fatality rate with the help of scientists and medical service providers.

Small business should look at the big picture, people generally have the tendency to tackle problems without any difficulty. This knowledge makes good sense in some situations. But currently, it is a fun time to look at the big picture and evaluate what is working and what needs to change in small business. It is time to point out the strengths and weaknesses of small businesses and how they come to play in these grim times.

For small business owner's payroll is top cost, so these small business owners should make sure that the money is well spent, and the expenses make sense. This involves the review of staff and makes sure the right people are working with you and doing their jobs effectively. Low salary for employees cannot be productive because it can lead to uninterested productivity.

It is vital for small business owners to safeguard access to cash for the business, predominantly in periods of crisis. If you are short on cash and money then you need to have a loan, for this visiting a bank office and knowing what is required to obtain a loan is a good option. For instance, small business owners who had such associations had an easier time accessing loans during the COVID-19 pandemic, just due to the fact of knowing the person earlier helps in trust. Small business owners should not sacrifice quality in crucial tough times, small business owners should stay offensive and work with employees for changes made in the current environment. Small business owners should not make product changes [8].

There are many stakeholders in small business, the owners, employees, banks, customers, government, societies in the area where the small businesses operate in, and suppliers to small business. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has two hundred banks for microfinance moneylenders. Their target audience is lady's

business, development-driven establishments, and neighbourhood establishments. Yakhmos Group a family-owned samosa and ice-cream producer in Tajikistan was helped by this bank loan with a longer tenor available in the area [9]. Yakhmos operated with a Japanese consultant for success and within a year were in increased turnover of twenty-five per cent. Liqvor is a pharmaceutical producer from Armenia which was helped by EBRD equity investment of half million dollars in 2004, the better-quality accounting and financial systems which made them successfully grow to two point nine million dollars in 2010. Hence banks are a crucial tool for the development of small businesses and the owner must take going to banks initiatives.

In today's world of COVID-19, many challenges are faced by the owner of small business, small business focuses on short-term and may take actions that could damage future business, on the other hand, a small business that focuses on long term may fail to address short-term organisational needs indispensable for the survival of the organisation, so small business should focus on being rational and objective [10].

It is believed that COVID-19 can hit local economies, for instance, small and medium businesses, in America around sixty million people which is equal to forty-seven per cent workers, work with a company with less than five hundred employees [11]. Small businesses are discovering themselves suffering economic privation and often these businesses struggle to make cash to get through rough times.

Small business face shortfalls in supply chain and inventory, it important for small business to have an adequate supply of their inventory for a longer period of time for sustainability. They should diversify their distributor sources if one supplier cannot meet an order request. Doing business during COVID-19 period is difficult since businesses need to have a cleaning product such as masks, sanitisers, and gloves for every customer. The small business owner has to clean the surfaces of the recurrently touched area by lodgers and customers. Insurance is another issue which should be important for small business, in case of fire or damage to property, insurance can be handy for the survival of the business.

Small business must understand changing market demands, for instance, due to restriction placed by government customer cannot reach

the business, or people are afraid to expose themselves to big risks, hence help yourself to navigate any rapid changes in demands. Marketing is crucial in these times because people need to know your working hour, and promotion or discount, these are easy ways to upsurge customers [12].

Since February to April 2020 in the United States of American (USA), active business owners were down by three-point three million or twenty-two per cent. Active business owners were largest on record and felt in all industries. African American had forty-one per cent drop-in business activity and were hit hardest. Latina business activity fell by thirty-two per cent and Asian fell by twenty-six per cent. Immigrant business owner's loss was thirty-six per cent, and female business owner loss was twenty-five per cent. These findings are of early-stage losses of small business activity but they have important implication related to income losses, economic inequality and policy [13].

Congressional Budget Office (CBO) forecast strong economic growth in the second half of 2020 but CBO expects the unemployment rate was eleven-point five per cent in the fourth quarter of 2020 and eight-point six in the fourth quarter of 2021 [14]. Small business need supports form government. This support should focus on productive capacity and preserving ecosystems of knowledge and relationship that drives productivity.

3.1.2 Small business marketing

Loyalty programs are a valuable tool for marketing and collecting data about customers. Small businesses lack in-house Information and Communication Technology (ICT) expertise to the advantage of such data, and financial resources are also limited. Small businesses are informal in their ways of marketing planning and are based on intuition and flexibility depending on their experiences. Marketing in today's world requires a statistical format illustrating market trends and growth. Small businesses are challenged by multiple retailers and competitive pressure from large competitors [15].

3.1.3 Small business human resources

Considerable work has been done in Human Resource Management (HRM) as it is applied in all big organisations. Small businesses are about to adopt or apply models which are mainly for big

organisations. Small businesses lack suitable systems for well-organised human resources management. More importantly, small businesses are the product of their owners; hence their personal involvement and personality dominate the business. According to research Small business key for success is retaining good staff and motivation [16], and like all businesses have importance to attitudes, beliefs and values. Effective management of small business growth needs commitment from the owner to have policies, structure and practices which enable employees to take greater responsibilities and have to participate in dynamic innovative teams. The formalisation of HR policies is necessary for the scope of business scale and growth. Learning to delegate authority and responsibility through application of HR practices are essential for business triumph.

New developments in HR innovations can help small businesses such as in New Zealand. HR innovators are helping small businesses to endure Covid-19 anarchy. MyHR has a thousand local businesses in their books, and they are being tested in tough times with their customers. Due to Covid-19, many organisations were a force to downsize, restructure or change their existing staffs. MyHR is Auckland-based organisation which provides services like outsourced and on-demand HR so small businesses don't need dedicated HR staff [17]. Their offer service and software model which covers full scale of HR issues employer face, and in Covid-19 era their customers multiplied. CEO of MyHR say before Covid-19 they had six to eight restructures but now average in eighty-eight a week. In total MyHR had dealt with seventeen thousand employees on behalf of thousand businesses. A digital platform such as MyHR is important for the future development of companies.

3.1.4 Small business finance

There is the use of finance in small businesses which is default rate in collateralised credit operation in their investments. The research shows the negative relationship between the rate of default and the risk-free interest rate, also the negative relationship with the level of collateral [18], this was tested by 47,108 loan contracts for Brazilian small businesses from 2004 to 2010. Small businesses take unreliable credit operations which leads to an increase of the probability of default.

3.1.5 Small business operations

A study was conducted in Jamaica to show how operations strategy can be used to improve firm profitability. Small businesses have product quality which is perceived to be of paramount importance but in these old firms are more consistent than new firms. Labour is also of paramount importance for executing competitive priorities. In Jamaica, one-third of the workforce is provided by small businesses [19]. Operations strategy refers to plan and decision involved in positioning, developing, and aligning managerial policies which are needed resources for consistency with overall business strategy.

3.1.6 Role of SMEs in economic growth

British business banks have a variety of different funding solutions designed to address both current cyclical issues in SME finance markets and long-standing of small businesses. The British banks have facilitated seven hundred eighty-two million pounds (£) of new lending and investment in 2013/2014 [20], which was to diversify the market. There is an impact on the wider economy and assess value for money loaned by banks needs to be studied.

The human capital of SME (Small and Medium Enterprise) is believed to be a principal factor in determining the outcomes of firms, especially small business. In small businesses, it is important to focus on human capital outcomes and study how the effects of human capital on entrepreneurial outcomes is mediated [21].

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Participants and Sampling Technique

Primary data was collected from small businesses owners in Wales. The sampling technique that was utilised in the study to collect the data was random, randomly fifty business owners were chosen, and they fill ten to fourteen questionnaires.

4.1.1 Small organisations in area

The area selected for this study is Wales, UK, and covers the requirement of surveying or questionnaire small businesses or shop owners in the area.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Research methodology

The research methodology is using a questionnaire, it involves surveying fifty small business owners, there were ten to twenty questions related to the current business environment, and how small business owners think they are affected by it. The research involved observing them and noting or recording their conversation or giving them an online survey to fill. In further paragraphs is the academic way of taking these steps one by one.

4.2.2 Qualitative research

The research methodology is qualitative, it is primary research because it involves surveying small companies of the UK, and how they see the current business environment. The research approach was the connection between the complaint and strategy. As the research can be plunged into two sections, research structure and information assortment [22]. One was explore subjectively with an individual phenomenological viewpoint. There were deciphering the truth of how the small business can recover from the current difficult business environment. The qualitative method was used to gather literature review information and quantitative method was used to analyse the data collected from online surveys.

quantitative research is quantitative survey data which has number linked with it and it can be a simple per cent of people responding yes and no to a specific question [23]. Quantitative methods emphasize numerical analysis of data collected by questionnaires and surveys, the sample population may be very small and purposefully selected [24].

The data collection was primarily done using the internet, there may be a need to contact some small business which also can be done online through an online survey or interview question with options to choose from. There were no involvement in social media for interaction.

4.2.3 Preliminary hypothesis

Small businesses are unprepared for Covid-19 related problems.

Small businesses supply chain is disrupted due to Covid-19.

Government of Wales is taking positive initiatives for small businesses.

4.2.4 Future growth

There are many opportunities' for small businesses in 2020 for instance, software engineering and development, meal kit sales and delivery, self-storage units and senior care services [25]. There are five main stages of development of small businesses, existence, success-disengagement, survival, success-growth, take-off and resource maturity, finally of which, business resources are the main material of which success is formed of, which involve from market share to technological base [26]. The study objective is to know what is hindering small businesses at the movement and steps small businesses owner or government can take to improve the current situation.

4.3 Data Analysis

4.3.1 Conducting primary research

Conducting primary research for this research is significant, subsequently, the study was point to vital small business survival methods during Covid-19 times or grim times. The research focused on conducting the interview of different small companies' owners in the area, it pointed out what decisions were taken by them and what results in their success financially. Hence it was about participants observation of fifty small companies. The main sample size of this interview is fifty business owners specifically in Wales, UK. Sampling technique is to understand what they say regarding the small businesses and what they are going through and was selected randomly. Purpose of conducting this study is to find how to save or protect the small businesses from shutting down.

Research requires the conventional endorsement of an outside body, please give subtleties:

There were no need for the conventional endorsement of an outside body for the research.

Details of any collaborating or sponsoring organisation:

There were no sponsorship involved in this research.

If any of the research is to be undertaken outside UK legal jurisdiction:

Participants: Whom you be asking to take part in the research?

There were a total of 50 small business owners in Wales, United Kingdom (UK).

4.4 Method of Data Collection

4.4.1 Methods of data collection (conducting interviews or survey questionnaire)

The questionnaire was used to collect data, and this was primary data collected. A questionnaire is a foremost instrument for collecting data in survey research. The questionnaire is a set of standardized questions which are called items and which follow a fixed scheme to collect individual data about one or more specific themes (Lavrakas, 2008).

4.4.2 Data analysis method

The quantitative research was limited to data collection and qualitative research for the literature review and information collection through journals, books, and reports. The quantitative method of research interview is not possible physically due to Covid-19. For the quantitative data analysis, Microsoft Excel was used, all data was collected, then it was analysed collectively and represented in the form of a graph, hence visually appealing. 2-D clustered column was used to make charts for most of the data collected.

4.5 Demographics of Research

Age: Research is aiming to tap in the owner of small businesses who are experienced and familiar with business systems. The range was above eighteen years old people. The total number of surveys was 50, the majority of surveys completed are by females. This is the actual demography of survey takers mentioned below.

Table 1. Financial support and funding to keep business operating

Where can you receive financial support and funding to keep your business operating?		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Government Support	46.00%	23
Bank Loan	34.00%	17
Start-up Fund Support	14.00%	7
Ask for help from Friend or Relative	24.00%	12
Other (please specify)	24.00%	12
	Answered	50
	Skipped	0

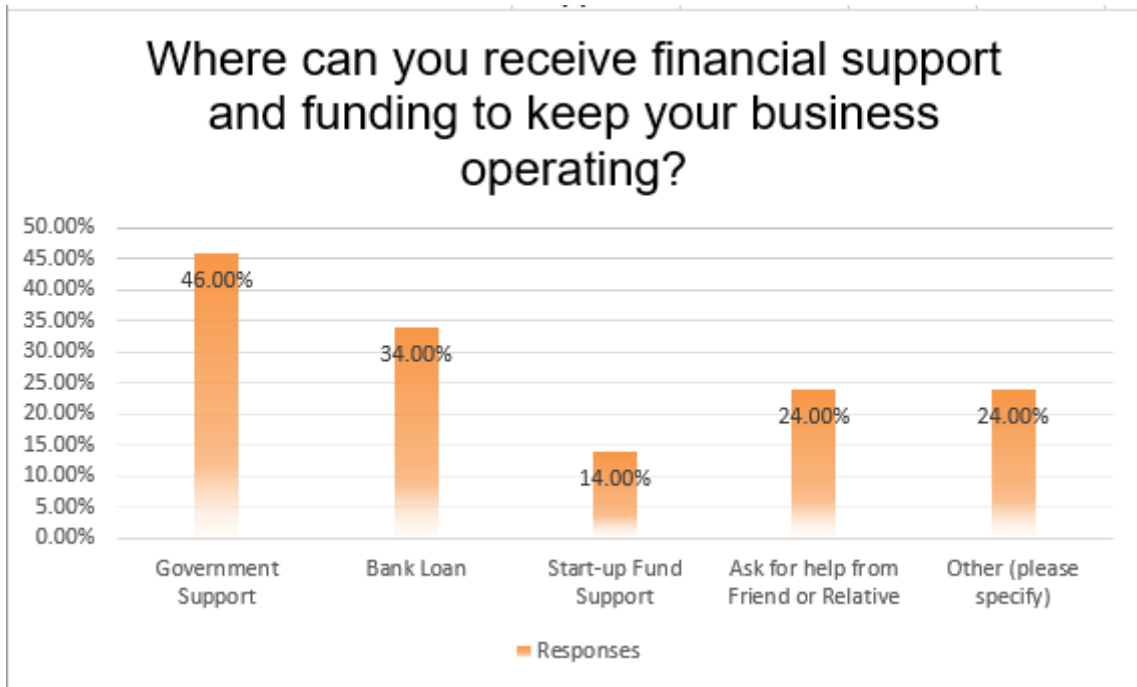


Fig. 1. Financial support and funding

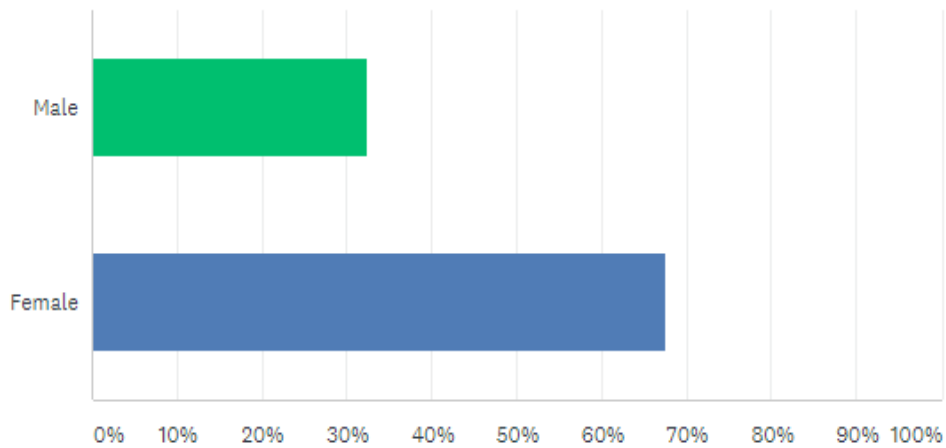


Fig. 2. Demography of survey

Research Questions:

Q.1. How easy or difficult is it for you to work effectively these days?

1. Very easy
2. Somewhat easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Somewhat difficult
5. Very difficult

Q.2. What are the biggest challenges you are currently facing while working remotely or either at your workspace?

1. My physical workspace
2. Too many distractions at home
3. I don't have access to the tools or information I need to do my job at home.
4. Internet connectivity
5. Childcare
6. Social isolation
7. Communication with co-workers is harder
8. I'm sick or helping others who are sick.
9. Keeping a regular schedule
10. General anxiety about the impact of coronavirus on my life
11. Not getting enough food
12. Other (please specify)

Q.3. Do you need to adjust your supply chains?

- Yes
- No

Q.4. In what ways did Covid-19 affect your small business?

Q.5. Are you now prepared for unexpected business circumstances?

- Yes
- No

Q.6. Are you worried about the wellbeing of your employees?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all

Q.7. How can you ensure sustainable financing and stable cash reserves?

- Investing in Stocks
- Investing in Real-estate
- Start-up
- Own Different Businesses for Multiple Source of Income
- Saving Money in Saving Account
- All of the Above
- Other (please specify)

Q.8. Where can you receive financial support and funding to keep your business operating?

- Government Support
- Bank Loan
- Start-up Fund Support
- Ask for help from Friend or Relative
- Other (please specify)

Q.9. What steps can the government take for improvement of your business?

- No License/Renewal Fee
- No Tax until the Pandemic is over
- Education and Training Programs
- Free Healthcare and Education for Owner and Employees
- All of Above
- Other (please specify)

Q.10. Please provide the full legal name of your business:

5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Effective Work

These are challenging times for all of us, some people are devastated by the effect of Covid-19. Nevertheless, it was found that small business owners are taking things normal and saying the Covid-19 has been neither easy nor difficult and substantial percentage has said it is somewhat easy. Effective work support balance is important for work and life roles [27], effective work can be linked to flexible work hours which are not possible due to Covid-19, and business owners are not struggling due to the fact they can work from home or online any time they want.

5.2 Biggest Challenges

Different businesses owners are having different effects of work, work and life balance challenges that they face at their workplace are getting intense due to Covid-19, most businesses are complaining about keeping a regular schedule

and having general anxiety about the impact of coronavirus on their life, while others responded by none, moving their business to online completely has been challenging, clients unable to attend due to frailty, being retired, not working remotely, not allowed to work at the office, and being afraid of the pandemic. Due to closure of business when people return to work they need to have manage relationships in the workplace and need to make adjustments to achieve success after their return to work in Covid-19 or Post Covid-19 [28].

5.3 Supply Chain

It was believed that the supply chain of small business was disrupted but most of the small businesses feel no need to adjust their supply chain due to Covid-19 as shown in the above-mentioned graph. Distribution strategy promotes an approach that pursues to achieve mutual benefits for the economy and environment [29], but most in the survey feel need to adjust business supply chain.

Q1 How easy or difficult is it for you to work effectively these days?

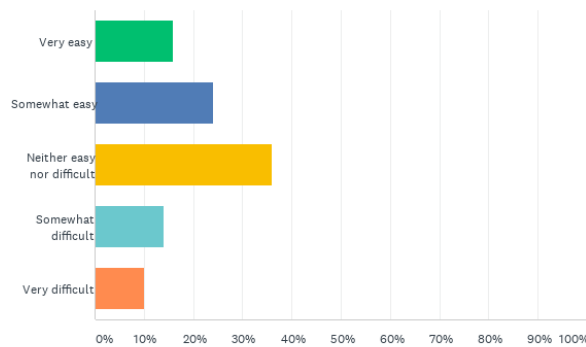


Fig. 3. Bar graph showing easy or difficulty in effective work

Q2 What are the biggest challenges you are currently facing while working remotely or either at your workspace?

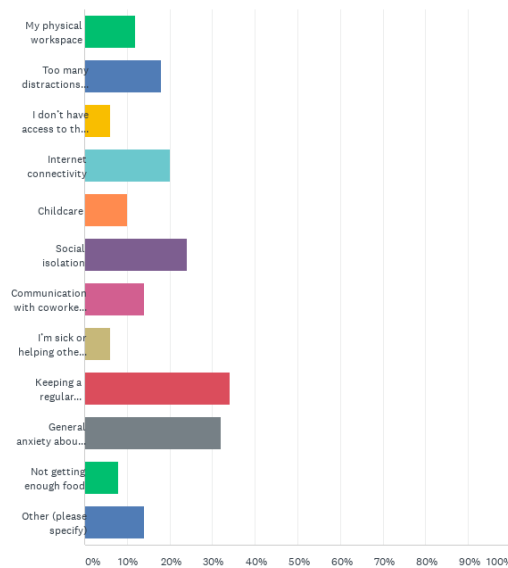


Fig. 4. Biggest challenges currently face in workspace

Q3 Do you need to adjust your supply chains?

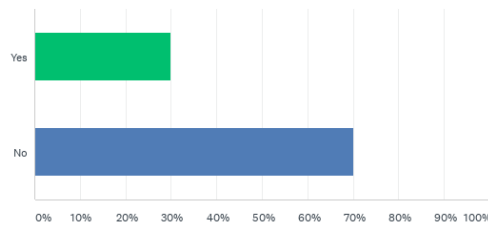


Fig. 5. Supply chain management

5.4 Ways in which Covid-19 affect Small Businesses

Covid-19 affected most businesses and hence most businesses are going online, some businesses complain about fewer clients in shops and the inability to travel. New Zealand offered \$2.8 billion in business tax relief and the UK cut its standard interest rate by half a percentage point, to zero point twenty-five per cent, revived a program to support lending to SMEs [30], but each small business is affected differently and governments need to provide tailor-made solutions to these businesses. Below is the response of fifty different small business owners and their problems. Customers rate their experience of small business at seventy-six per cent which is higher than mid-size businesses [31], hence effect on small businesses may decrease customer satisfaction in the UK.

Responses No. and Responses

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1 | Unable to work productively. | 14 | No longer able to operate from physical premises so moved completely online. |
| 2 | Reduced work hours. | 15 | It's hard to find enough of what we need so we need to find new suppliers. |
| 3 | Lack of supplies and deliveries. | 16 | All my clients had to cancel. |
| 4 | Fewer clients. | 17 | Not many customers. |
| 5 | None. | 18 | Fewer customers. |
| 6 | I haven't been able to get stock for my business. | 19 | We had to stop working during lockdowns as we are non-essential workers and we work with the public, we're photographers. |
| 7 | Long shutdown from March, still in the middle of 2 weeks' lockdown - takings plummeted. | 20 | No effect. |
| 8 | we closed for just over 3 months. | 21 | Lockdown, customers staying away from the high street. |
| 9 | Ability to travel to international projects is currently not possible. | 22 | Working entirely from home now. |
| 10 | None - working from home normally. | 23 | Shut completely due to being a close proximity business. |
| 11 | Anxiety about the pandemic. | 24 | None. |
| 12 | It made an impact on the number of people looking to rent. | 25 | None |
| 13 | Getting into places due to lockdown and safety reasons. | 26 | Fewer customers, less choice of stock. |
| | | 27 | No income during lockdowns. |
| | | 28 | Prevented international travel to visit clients and projects. |
| | | 29 | Events were cancelled. |
| | | 30 | Loss of customers. |
| | | 31 | Closed down so went online. |
| | | 32 | I had to close for a while and was not eligible for help from the government. |
| | | 33 | Closure of the business. |
| | | 34 | Firing employees since I am unable to pay their wages. |
| | | 35 | Reduced customer base. Had to find new ways of providing remote services. |
| | | 36 | Family members, not getting to see the elderly relatives. |
| | | 37 | Less income and more expenses to payout. |
| | | 38 | Couldn't work due to general anxiety and working from home. |
| | | 39 | Reduced income due to fewer customers. |
| | | 40 | Lockdown. |
| | | 41 | Closure and no sales. |
| | | 42 | Fewer orders so fewer wages, employees were not happy so had to ask them to leave. |

- 43 Loss of customers online and in the physical store.
- 44 Went bankrupt because we weren't allowed to open and couldn't afford to keep things running.
- 45 Had to temporarily close.
- 46 No change to my work schedule, if anything I became busier because more people are at home.
- 47 It closed it down for 3 months and now I have reduced hours.
- 48 Supply chain problems.
- 49 Customers especially the elderly are extremely worried about having craftspeople in their homes right now.
- 50 Less walk-in customers.

not prepared for unexpected business circumstances. Organisational intervention process and content mechanisms help bring out the desired outcome in an unexpected business circumstance [32], but above-mentioned graph show small businesses are prepared for unexpected which can be a misleading attitude or feeling.

5.5 Unexpected Business Circumstances

It is obvious from the research that more businesses (sixty-two per cent) are now prepared for unexpected business circumstances but still a small number of thirty-eight per cent people are

5.6 The wellbeing of employees

It is suggested by research that a large number of employers are not at all worried about the wellbeing of their employees but if you add a lot and a great deal than most people are worried about the wellbeing of their employees. There is a benefit of workplace wellbeing, and wellbeing aligned to perceptions related to health and unhealthy worker aligned with occupational health and safety paradigms [33]. A lot of small business owners are worried about their employees and in this turbulent time, we all should take care of each other.

Q5 Are you now prepared for unexpected business circumstances?

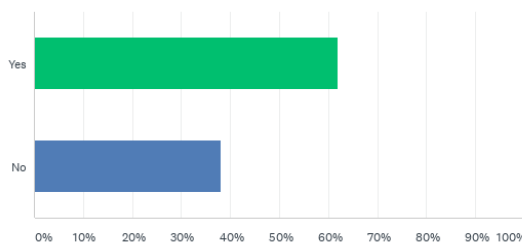


Fig. 6. Unexpected business circumstances

Q6 Are you worried about the wellbeing of your employees?

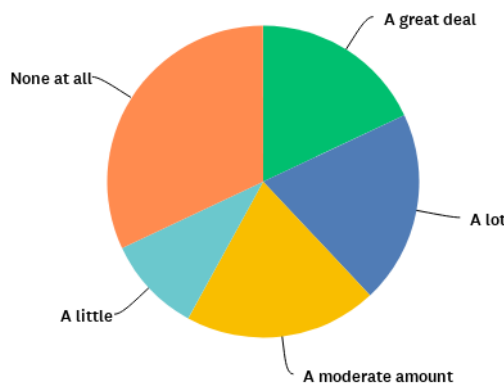


Fig. 7. The wellbeing of Employees

Q7 How can you ensure sustainable financing and stable cash reserves?

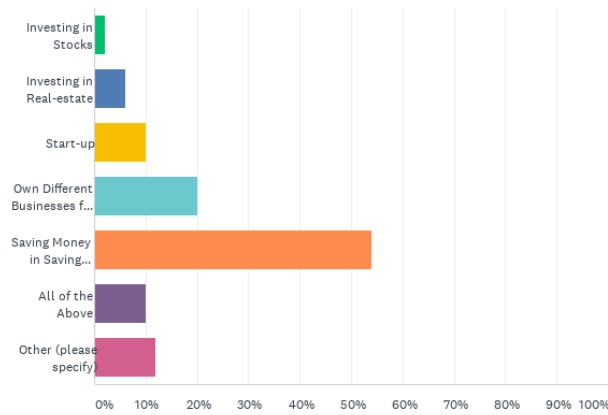


Fig. 8. Stable Cash Reserves

Q8 Where can you receive financial support and funding to keep your business operating?

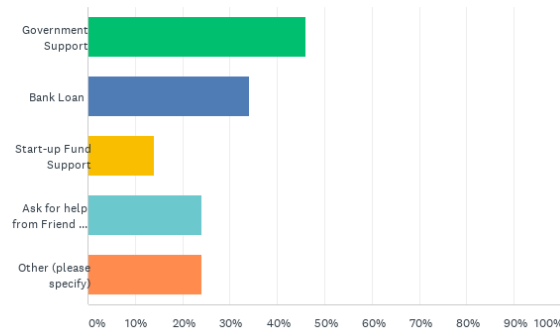


Fig. 9. Receive financial support

Q9 What steps can the government take for improvement of your business?

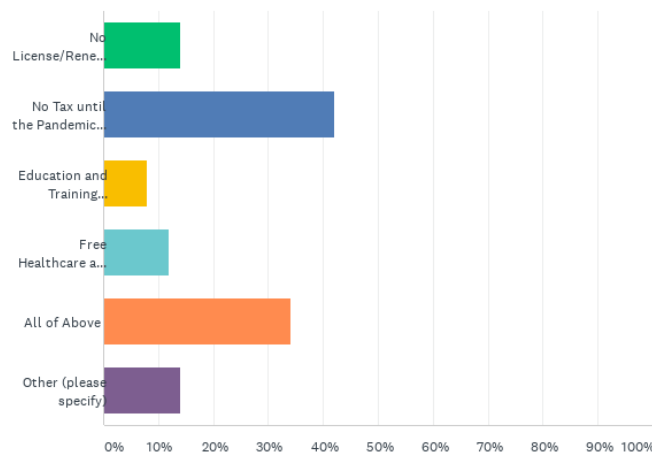


Fig. 10. Steps government can take to improve the business

5.7 Stable Cash Reserves

Most business owners have different views but most agreed way to ensure finance stable of cash reserve was through Saving Money in Saving Account. Those who responded in other said:

1. By having some customers therefore money and being on a level playing field with vast tax-dodgers whom the government will not hold to account.
2. N/A - already have one real estate property.
3. Determined to make my now completely online business work. Not giving up.
4. I have to survive on my pension for a stable life.
5. Don't know.
6. No idea.

Saving is an important financial behaviour that offers an individual with psychological boosts and security of person's overall sense of wellbeing [34] More small business owners are opting for saving money in saving bank account this strategy can be a lifeline in difficult and turbulent times. Some small business owners are also opting to diversify their investment by opening a different business which is a good strategy for long term growth and success.

5.8 Receive Financial Support

It is concluded that most small businesses are looking for Government Support and then Bank Loans. Those who responded in others are.

1. Can use Loan but not as paying the loan back is a very tedious and long process.
2. Own financial resources.
3. Don't know.
4. Nowhere, I am not taking loans/additional help etc.
5. Not required.
6. None, been excluded.
7. Not applicable to my business.
8. Personal reserves.
9. I can't receive financial support.
10. Pointless as I have tried but haven't seen any success.
11. Work harder and longer, I don't need support from anyone.
12. Savings.

The government provide a vital lifeline for any business, they can support both small and large organisations through a healthy business

environment. This time small businesses are looking at the UK government for support and fund to keep operating if the government does not help then the business will face closer which will have a trickle-down effect on the economy resulting in economy becoming weak.

5.9 Steps Government can Take

There are many steps that a government can take but most important one needed by small business owners is no tax until the pandemic is over. Those who responded in others are:

1. Evening out the field by taxing big companies like Amazon etc. PROPERLY.
2. N/A.
3. Continue with the self-employment scheme.
4. Make seiss grants better.
5. Business grant for self-employed.
6. Reasonable grants for self-employed people.
7. None.

A one-hundred and fifteen billion pounds estimated receipts from corporation tax, Value Added Tax (VAT) and other taxes in 2018-19 were received by the government of the UK from small business [31], it was encouraging for small business if taxes are suspended for some time. Taxes are a heavy burden on small business in Covid-19 era, most small business owners are asking the UK government to stop taxes now, so they can survive to give taxes after this difficult period is over [35,36].

6. DISCUSSION

The study examined small business owners' operational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on labour schedules, supply chain management, customer dynamics, and financial strategies. This study shows that most small business owners have good operational techniques, but they struggle to maintain healthy work habits, unlike pre-pandemic enterprises. Welsh small business owners reported few supply chain alterations, indicating regional pandemic responses. Despite working irregular hours and switching to internet platforms, small company owners adapted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the report. Government and banks are the main sources of funding, with tax relief and tailored grants preferred. The report highlights small companies' diverse consequences and reactions, highlighting the need for personalised assistance measures to survive and expand during and after the

pandemic. COVID-19 has had a variety of effects on various firms, but two main tendencies emerged: lower customer footfall and a faster transition online. Crisis preparedness is lacking, as 62% of businesses questioned were somewhat prepared for such unforeseen circumstances and 38% were not. To handle economic uncertainty, many owners of small enterprises are pursuing sustainable financial measures like cash buffers and savings accounts to protect employee wellness. Government help, bank loans, and personal networks (friends and family) are preferred for external support.

7. CONCLUSION

The study has explored the operational adaptations of small business owners in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on work schedules, supply chain management, customer dynamics, and financial strategies. This study reveals that, while most small business owners have maintained effective operational practices, they face challenges in sustaining regular and healthy work routines, a stark contrast to their pre-pandemic operations. Interestingly, small business owners in Wales reported minimal need for supply chain adjustments, indicating regional variations in pandemic responses.

The study highlights the adaptability of small business owners during the COVID-19 crisis, despite facing challenges in regular work schedules and transitioning to online platforms. Financial support is primarily sought from the government and banks, with a strong preference for tax relief and targeted grants. The study underscores the diversity of impacts and responses among small businesses, pointing towards the need for tailored support strategies to ensure their survival and growth during and after the pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 on these businesses has been diverse, yet common trends emerged: a significant decline in customer footfall and an accelerated shift towards online platforms. Approximately 62% of businesses surveyed were somewhat prepared for such unforeseen circumstances, while the remaining 38% were not, underscoring a gap in crisis preparedness.

A critical concern among these businesses is employee wellbeing, with many owners exploring sustainable financial strategies, such as stable cash reserves and savings accounts, to navigate

the economic uncertainties. In terms of external support, there is a noticeable inclination towards government assistance, bank loans, and personal networks (friends and relatives) for financial aid.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research further suggests specific governmental measures that could bolster small business resilience, including tax relief for the duration of the pandemic and targeted grants for self-employed individuals. These findings offer valuable insights for small business owners seeking to fund and operate their enterprises in the challenging COVID-19 era, as well as for policymakers aiming to support this vital sector of the economy.

9. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this research is that the number of businesses which are used for research are very few. There was a total of fifty small businesses owners from Wales, UK. Due to Covid-19, it was not possible to physically go to a small business owner but to have interaction online or through survey questionnaires only.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Supplementary Materials Available in this link https://journalajebo.com/media/supplementary-responses_all_240325.pdf

CONSENT

There was a research consent to all applicable legitimate necessities at where the research is to happen.

DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Today is the time that we only know the scratch of the surface of the economic disturbance that Covid-19 may unbridle upon us. It is vital for the government to make decisions to protect their residents every single day with sufficient support from the federal government of the UK. Giving societies or small businesses the economic security, they need, having to combat Covid-19 is the basic contribution which economic policymaker can make now. It is vital for the government to know about the economy, to know the current situation of small business and how other stakeholders can help, hence the basic and

most important reason for this research. Future research can be about what steps different governments can take to help small businesses.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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