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The Resilience of Micro and Small Enterprises in Kenya from a Strategic Perspective: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This article noted the significant contribution of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to the economies of both developed and developing countries and the challenges they face that adversely impact their ability to build capacity to be resilient. Most of the micro and small enterprises (MSEs) die by their fifth anniversary. This study was motivated by the dichotomy between the MSEs' short life cycle and their valuable contribution to the economies of many countries, and the finding that there are very few studies focusing on their longer-term survival and growth. The objective of this article was to delineate the strategies that build and sustain MSE resilience over the long term; specifically identifying entrepreneurial factors that enhance resilience, and analysing strategic initiatives and strategic resources that the enterprise can leverage to enhance resilience. This article is based on a systematic review of 161 theoretical and empirical studies, that met inclusion criteria, documented in books, official government and private institutional publications, peer-reviewed articles, and conference papers, accessed from library collections, and the internet. An ecological approach was used in the analysis of the findings. The review identified personal entrepreneurial characteristics and psychological traits of the business enterprise owners/managers as the basic behavioural disposition which embeds the development and implementation of resilience strategies. The study identified strategies that are internal and external to the firm, all of which constitute the enterprise's capability to build resilience.

Key terms: micro and small enterprise resilience, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial competence, internal capability, agility, external resource dependence, co-opetition, collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) take different definitions in various countries, with some defining them in terms of employees, others turnover, and others by both the number of employees and turnover (Sobir, 2020; Republic of Kenya, 2012). What is defined as a small enterprise in one country is a medium or large enterprise in another. In Kenya, a micro-enterprise is one with less than 10 employees and an annual turnover of up to Kenya Shillings 500,000 (≓US$ 3,846, while a small enterprise is defined as one with 10 to 50 employees and a turnover of between Kenya Shillings 500,000 and 5,000,000 (≓US$ 38,461) (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Medium enterprises employ between 50 to 99 people (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In comparison, micro and small enterprises in the UK have the same number of employees as defined in Kenya, but medium enterprises have between 50 and 249 employees (Hutton, 2024). While the focus of this article is on micro and small enterprises (MSEs), the literature review has included studies that encompass micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that capture the range of small enterprises from which this article drew valuable lessons in resilience strategies

MSMEs play a significant role in the global, as well as regional, and local economies. Worldwide they represent about 90% of businesses and contribute more than 50% of employment and up to 40% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in emerging economies (World Bank, 2019; Begum et al., 2022). In ASEAN countries, MSMEs comprise between 88-99 percent of enterprises and employ 51-97 percent of the workforce (Aladin, et al., 2021). Their contribution to employment reaches 90 percent in Indonesia (Tjahjadi et al., 2019), and between 70 and 80 percent in Bangladesh where they also contribute 45% of manufacturing value and 22.4% of GDP (Hossin et al., 2022). In the United Kingdom, private sector micro and small enterprises constitute 99% of the businesses and employ 48% of the workforce (Hutton,2024); while in Sub-Saharan Africa MSMEs constitute 90% of businesses and employ about 60% of workers, and they contribute to incomes, production of goods and services, growth of economies, and creation of employment opportunities for the population (Sobir, 2020). They comprise 90% of business enterprises and account for 80% of total employment as well as 60% of GDP in Ghana (Sasu, 2023). And in Kenya, MSMEs employ 83% of the workforce, contributing up to 30% to the GDP (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020; Viffa Consult, 2019).

MSMEs utilize local resources and provide solutions to problems of poverty, insecurity, unemployment, and overpopulation (Abdin, 2019). In rural and urban areas, MSEs distribute incomes among men and women, advancing inclusive growth and development (Amoah & Amoah, 2018; Bhorat, et al., 2018). MSMEs are backbone, central, and significant to inclusive growth, employment, and basic livelihoods in developing countries (Alberti et al., 2018). However, this significance is undermined by their short life cycle, with empirical studies over the last 30 years suggesting that most micro and small enterprises die within the first five years of their existence (Nelson & Johnson, 1997; AfDB, OECD & UNDP, 2017).

In the 1990s in Kenya, for example, private informal sector entrepreneurs spontaneously created small enterprises in response to increasing unemployment, but these rarely grew to medium-sized enterprises because the owners had limited technical skills and capital, and low product quality. Additionally, the enterprises traded on and had an oversupply of similar goods in the market. The entrepreneurs had limited educational knowledge, and business experience, and were unwilling to take necessary risks to expand their businesses. Further, the enterprises operated in a less enabling policy and technology infrastructure environment (House, et al., 1990; Mwaura, 1994; Githeko, 1996; Nelson & Johnson, 1997). The failure of small enterprises has also been attributed to survival entrepreneurs, those who were pushed into business because they had no other option for work. Those who were opportunity-driven were more productive and likely to survive much longer. But even these failed before their fifth anniversary because they had less access to formal sources of external finance (AfDB, OECD & UNDP, 2017). Relatively fewer micro and small enterprises (MSEs) (with 1-19 employees) grew to be medium-sized enterprises (20-50 employees) because they had a very high death rate (Milder, 2008). This is accounted for by their risk profiles characterised by small size and limited resources, cash flow constraints, cost, and type of financing; (collateralized short-term loans that did not enable them to make decisions for expansion in the long term) as well as restricted access to techniques and processes to facilitate adaptation to risk exposure (Vandersypen, et al., 2023; Rastegar et al., 2023). Thus, most of the micro and small enterprises are not resilient enough to survive and grow beyond five years.

Resilience is a multifaceted concept that refers to the ability of a business to avoid, absorb, respond effectively to, recover from, and survive events, shocks, crises, advances in technology, fierce competition, and other environmental disturbances; and to confront, adapt, grow, benefit and sustain its operations through dynamic changes in the internal and external environment in the long term (Ates & Bititci, 2011; Christman et al., 2011; Lampel et al., 2014; Papagiannidis et al., 2020; Forliano et al., 2023). In the face of turbulence, which refers to the measure of the frequency of unpredictable changes affecting the ability of a business to create and sustain value (Sull, 2010), and other economic uncertainties, as well as the resource limitations of MSEs, the adverse impact and the high failure rate imply that micro and small enterprises face challenges in developing the capacity to be resilient (Rastegar et al., 2023). And yet up to 20 percent of micro and small enterprises survive beyond their fifth anniversary and others grow and sustain their businesses despite the turbulence and other disturbances in the operating environment

This article aims to glean the strategies, from older and recent literature, that have helped some MSEs in the long run to overcome their internal capacity limitations; build and strengthen the resilience that has taken them through economic downturns, competition, turbulence, and other environmental changes that adversely affect their business. The specific objectives of the article are to: 1) identify entrepreneurial behavioural characteristics that drive resilience activities; 2) analyse strategic initiatives that MSMEs undertake to build resilience capability; 3) assess strategic resources within the operating environment that a firm can leverage to strengthen its resilience capacity.

This study is justified because there have been comparatively few studies on the resilience of MSEs especially in developing countries despite their vulnerability and crucial role in the economies of those countries; and the existing studies focused on shorter-term events rather than long-term dynamic phenomena (Bhamraet al.,2011; Conz et al.,2015; Page & Söderbom, 2015; Alberti et al., 2018; Rastegar et al., 2023; Mondragon, et al., 2023; Skouloudis et al., 2023; Thekkote, R., 2023; Elia, et al., 2023; Pevkur, 2024)

For instance, slightly over a decade ago, Bhamra et al., (2011), concluded that there was little empirical evidence on how micro and small enterprises may achieve progress toward resilience. In 2015, Conz, et al., found that the resilience of micro and small enterprises was under-investigated, and the results were inconclusive. In the same year, Page and Söderbom, (2015) found that studies on business firm resilience were limited despite the myriad and ongoing challenges faced by micro and small enterprises in tough environments in developing countries. The situation had not changed by 2017 when Linnenluecke reached the same conclusion. Owner-managers of micro, small, and medium enterprises were reported to be inadequately prepared for the impacts of disasters on their business (Skouloudis et al., 2022). Lately, the resilience of MSEs has been confirmed as comparatively less studied in both developed and developing countries despite their significance to their economies (Alberti et al., 2018; Rastegar et al., 2023; Pevkur, 2024). Further, previous studies focused on specific or event-based disruptions such as COVID-19 rather than ongoing, dynamic competition, turbulence, and other disruptive phenomena; and rarely on how MSEs achieve resilience (Mondragon, et al., 2023; Skouloudis et al., 2023; Thekkote, R., 2023; Elia, et al., 2023). Additionally, a study on MSME resilience is desirable because they play a crucial role in many countries' economies but are vulnerable and significantly impacted by turbulence and other uncertainties (Robert et al., 2022; Rastegar et al., 2023). This fact has made MSME resilience an area of interest in entrepreneurial, managerial, and strategic studies (Saad et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the literature review of books, official government and private institutional publications, peer-reviewed articles, and conference papers, accessed from library collections, and the internet. A systematic review-of-literature methodology was adopted to reduce subjectivity in the process of review and analysis of articles and conference papers (Hodgkinson &Ford, 2014; Fink, 2019). The approach entailed searching for specific terms in titles in identified databases or other internet sources. Further, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. The search terms were those related to this article's focus. Various databases were searched including JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Key terms and phrases which implied the relevance of the articles searched in the databases were "SME resilience", "business resilience", "organizational resilience", "strategies for MSME resilience", and "business survival through turbulence". Articles based on survey research, literature reviews, and theoretical works focused on enterprise owners' strategies, entrepreneurial characteristics, and psychological traits that enhanced the resilience of micro, small, and medium enterprises, were considered relevant and included in the reviewed set. Also included were background articles that discussed the significance of micro, small, and medium enterprises in the economies of developed and developing countries. Finally, while the date of publication was not a criterion for inclusion or exclusion, the search turned out the most relevant articles from 2011; the fewer articles published since the 1970s provided the ancestry of resilience strategies as conceptualized by Cooper (2017). Full-text articles were screened against the inclusion criteria, duplicates were removed, and those not meeting eligibility criteria excluded. A total of 161 relevant publications (listed under references) comprising 125 peer-reviewed articles, 3 conference papers, 15 public and private institutional publications, 14 books, and 4 unpublished dissertations, were reviewed. As a guide to the analysis of information and ideas relevant to the topic of this article, an ecological systems approach (Crawford, 2020 was adopted which informed the identification of various levels at which enterprise resilience is built including the entrepreneur's personal and psychological characteristics, and firm internal capabilities and external resources that resilient firms build or strengthen to enhance their resilience. These became key themes around which findings were analysed.

Concept of Resilience

From the literature reviewed, resilience is a multidisciplinary concept that describes the ability of an entrepreneur to react and positively adapt a business firm to survive, or anticipate and adapt to adverse, uncertain, and challenging economic circumstances. Some literature considers the concept as a process comprising readiness, response, recovery, and adaptation. In contrast, others identify it as a recovery process that entails a firm's ability to return to its earlier position before a disturbance or turbulence, to absorb or withstand shocks; and ability to maintain its performance despite the turbulence (Martin & Sunley, 2015; Adobor & Mcmullen, 2018; Stone & Rahimifard, 2018; Bênê, 2020; Hartmann, et al., 2022). While Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, (2015) defined resilience as the ability to anticipate, avoid, and adjust to environmental disruptions and changes, Robert et al. (2022) described it as the ability to protect the firm from situations that threaten their existence, absorb, react and recover from phenomena such as competition, advances in technology, increasing customer demands or natural disasters. Other studies pointed to the elements that constitute capabilities inherent in resilience, comprising management practices that include agility, flexibility, redundancy, collaboration, and human resource management which support continued survival and business performance beyond disruptions over time (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015; Hohenstein, et al., 2015; Tukamuhabwa, et al., 2015; & Sâ et al., 2019). Other than collaboration with external parties, these elements appear to be internal to the firm, indicating that resilience resides in the strategies and resources within or available to the firm. This is supported by Conz et al., (2015) who found that the resilience of MSEs is driven by internal resilience strategies, and adaptive capacity, fostered by internal decisions. Further, Pevkur (2024) proposed that resilience should be evaluated as an internal issue and understood, perceived, and cultivated as a core value within a firm's culture. According to him, resilience is a result of preparedness, which depends on a firm's readiness to make quick decisions and adapt to new changes. Earlier, Vogus and Sutcliff (2007) concluded that resilience implies the availability of resources that can be activated, combined, and recombined in new situations to cope with emerging challenges. While internal capabilities are key to resilience, as shown in a subsequent section, firms also depend on external resources, including suppliers of inputs and markets for products. In addition to these resources, the personal and psychological factors that affect resilience are about the entrepreneurs themselves.

Personal and Psychological Factors and Resilience

A key personal characteristic that influences the resilience of MSMEs is entrepreneurial orientation, which comprises practices, processes, and decision-making activities to grow their enterprises through entry into new markets or developing new products for existing markets (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Entrepreneurial orientation is demonstrated by individuals innovating new products and processes, acting autonomously, taking risks, taking an aggressive approach to the competition, and proactively identifying and seizing new markets. These actions make them better prepared to face disruptions (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Zighan et al., 2022), and have a positive impact on the resilience of MSMEs (Al-Hakimi & Borade, 2020). Further, entrepreneurial orientation helps MSMEs to be resilient by balancing short-term and long-term objectives and taking action to respond to changes in the environment while ensuring that they maintain their position relative to their competitors (Zighan et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial orientation has been demonstrated to contribute to business model innovation and product development capabilities, thus playing a strategic role in business resilience (Ferreras-Mendes et al., 2021). Finally, Al-Hakimi et al., (2022) in their study concluded that entrepreneurial orientation has a positive impact on the resilience of the supply chain of small and medium enterprises.

The other personal characteristic that embeds MSME resilience is entrepreneurial competence, which was defined by Boyatzis et al., (2002) as the ability to utilize knowledge and skills to achieve very high levels of performance. In operational terms, entrepreneurial competence entails searching for opportunities, conceptualizing business ideas, establishing relationships, organizing, and taking strategic and operational risks to realize benefits from opportunities and business ideas (Man & Lau, 2000; Kuratko, 2011). Entrepreneurial competence is part of intellectual capital which is instrumental in sustaining the resilience of MSEs (Agostini & Nosella, 2022).

In their study, Nikolaev, Boudreaux &Wood (2020) found that previous research on entrepreneurship resilience has mostly focused on resources required to muddle through events and trends that threaten their continued survival and growth, but they isolated psychological traits associated with entrepreneurial orientation and competence, including independence, risk-taking, proactiveness, innovativeness, competitiveness, as well as ability to establish relationships and organizational skills. These are entrepreneurial function factors which, together with psychological function, comprising emotional, cognitive, social, and previous experience with difficulties, influence the resilience of entrepreneurs and their firms (Ahmed et al., 2022). According to Cascio and Luthans (2014), resilience is itself a psychological trait that enables an individual to endure and recover from adverse situations. The authors indicate that resilient entrepreneurs can grow and transform their firms in turbulent conditions. Personal characteristics and values such as reliability, integrity, and work ethics are important in building resilience (Kotsios, 2023). Further, individuals displaying resilience can create a positive influence on future generations of entrepreneurs and thus shape the behaviour of their successors (Jaskiewicz et al., 2015). Additionally, resilient individuals learn from business failure, pick up the pieces, and craft new ventures and strategies (Williams et al., 2019). When entrepreneurs build resilience, they can proactively solve problems, and they have a sense of moral purpose, self-reliance, realistic optimism, and a feeling of being part of the community (Shepherd et al., 2020).

Firm Internal Capabilities and Resilience

Like other businesses, micro small, and medium enterprises’ survival, growth, and sustainability have been influenced by turbulence in their operating environment (Robert et al., 2022; Rastegar et al., 2023). According to Ansoff et al., (2019), turbulence refers to frequent, rapid, unpredictable change brought about by complex factors such as the entry of competitors, economic crises, disruptive technologies, and other market disturbances. The authors further theorised that firms survive when their response to environmental turbulence is matched by aggressive strategic behaviour (innovative, creative approaches, including the generation of successive products, technologies, and marketing techniques that are deployed with appropriate speed and agility to cope with rapid changes), supported by commensurate capability. A firm’s capability comprises the skills, knowledge, and experience of the owners/managers together with the culture, structure, and information system, all working and supporting each other (Ansoff et al., 2019).

Internal resources, strategies, and core values determine the resilience to adapt and cope with emerging challenges (Vogus & Sutcliff, 2007; Conz et al., 2015; Pevkur, 2024). In his resource-based view theory, Barney (1991) posited that when a firm acquires valuable tangible and intangible assets and capabilities that are rare, difficult to substitute, and to imitate, it is enabled to utilize and take advantage of other resources that it controls and exploit opportunities and neutralize threats, thereby getting a competitive advantage. Firm capabilities include valuable resources, collaborations, networks, teamwork, employee cooperation, knowledge, and skills for performing certain tasks (Teece & Pisano, 2004; Rothaermel, 2017). These assets and capabilities that a firm controls and uses to gain competitive advantage enhance business resilience. By acquiring or developing such resources and capabilities, an enterprise can build resilience (Vershinina & Rodgers, 2023).

However, building and owning organizational capabilities and valuable assets are necessary but not sufficient to sustain competitive advantage and business resilience. Firms need dynamic capability, that is, to own capacities to integrate, build, reconfigure, and renew their internal and external competencies to respond to and manage the dynamic business environment and thus enhance their resilience (Teece et al., 1997). To build resilience, a firm needs the ability to sense or absorb, that is, identify, acquire, process, analyse, interpret, understand, and transform valuable external information and knowledge and apply them to exploit profitable opportunities (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). With this knowledge, firms can seize, transform, and reconfigure, as well as continually align and realign (shape) tangible and intangible assets to constantly implement the seized opportunities (Alinaghian, 2012; Teece, 2014). Secondly, they need to identify, discover, create; and mobilize, as well as allocate resources to seize emerging opportunities; and continuously reconfigure and renew (transform) resources and capabilities to take advantage of those opportunities in the face of environmental changes to enhance their competitiveness and resilience (Teece, 2009, 2012, 2014).

Dynamic capabilities therefore constitute a firm's ability to renew its competencies over the long term to enable it to adapt and respond to changing business environment (Matarazzo et al., 2021; Junaid et al., 2023; Awad & Martin-Rojas, 2023). Dynamic capabilities activities, broadly comprising absorbing, sensing, seizing, and shaping, require strong leadership to deliver the desired outcomes (Teece, 2014). Therefore, a firm's strong leadership is critical for building and sustaining resilience.

Leadership and management

The central role of leadership in developing resilience capacity and facilitating adaptation of the enterprise to crises, competition, technological advances, and other environmental dynamics that threaten the survival and continuity of the business has been established by theoretical and empirical studies (Mintzberg, 1973; De Olivera &Werther, 2013; Teece, 2014; Seville et al., 2015; Hughes, 2018; Ansoff et al., 2019; Zutshi et al., 2021). Leaders develop other leaders at all levels of the firm, articulate a vision, and espouse values that inspire people in the firm to unite, work together, do what is right, and focus on achieving shared long-term objectives. In addition to being accessible and visible to their internal and external stakeholders, leaders make timely decisions during crises. And finally, leaders make resilience everyone's responsibility and thus encourage wide contributions in ideas, innovations, efforts, and initiatives to cope with environmental disturbances (Seville et al., 2015).

Leadership and innovation

There is a high correlation between leadership and employee, team, and organizational creativity, on the one hand, and innovation, as well as firm resilience, on the other (Hughes, 2018). Leadership of the business firm influences innovation around business models, processes, products, and services, which improves the

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capacity of the firm to be resilient in turbulent and uncertain environments. According to Zutshi et al., (2021), competitive advantage and resilience can be achieved through innovation, which entails investing in transferable skills and resources and applying them in adapting to change and improving existing or creating new organisational processes, products or services, as well as change that favours customers. Earlier, de Olivera &&Werther (2013) found that the innovation process and its management, form the foundation of resilience, pointing out specifically that anticipatory innovation builds the resilience capability of firms by creating an internal environment embedded by leadership, strategic planning process, a culture of open and trusting relationships, and innovation made a way of life. The leadership employs digital technology to foster a firm's innovativeness, promotes collaboration with external actors, enables the collection of market information; transforms the way the firm does business and creates value; and improves competitiveness and performance (Papagiannidis et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al; 2022; Muninger et al et al., 2022; Forliano et al., 2023). Digital platforms enable product and service inquiries as well as agile support systems. They improve service innovation including customer experience, which is critical in enhancing firm resilience (PWC Philippines, 2020; Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021). The adoption of digital technology enhances innovation, performance, productivity, and embracing new skills and digital opportunities; hence providing business resilience and ensuring survival, profitability, and growth in a competitive, turbulent, and dynamic operating environment (Zutshi et al., 2021; Do et al., 2022; Forliano et al., 2023; Su & Junge, 2023)

Governance and management

Leadership drives dynamic capability activities and ensures necessary changes to adapt to emerging situations (Teece, 2014). In a study that investigated the relationship between firm ownership and governance, Lampel et al., (2014) found that employee-owned firms (as some of the MSEs are) that exercised flexibility and open communication benefitted from resource mobilisation which consequently facilitated resilience. A study on how small firms strategically planned for and managed crises identified leadership, decision-making, culture, and situational awareness as key enablers, and further explained that to achieve resilience, firms should encourage creativity and innovation, adopt a democratic and decentralised structure, and leaders must communicate optimism, hope, and must make decisions quickly (Vargo & Seville, 2011). The ability of the management to make decisions that they can implement, based on their experience and intuition, and which match the severity of the turbulence, determines a business firm's appropriate response and adaptation to environmental changes (Mintzberg, 1973; Ansoff et al., 2019). Resilience is also enhanced by systems established by a business firm's management to enable it to obtain internal and external information and use it to continually scan the environment, proactively identify risks, and make timely decisions that can help it adapt to and sustain its operations beyond environmental shocks and other disturbances and "achieve a higher degree of resilience" (Sundström & Hollnagel, 2006).

Business model & strategy

A firm's leadership conceptualises and implements an appropriate business model and strategy that responds to deregulation, technology, competition, or other changes in the environment that threaten the survival, profitability, or growth of the firm. A business model takes an ecosystem perspective and is a "system of interconnected activities performed by a firm that creates value and a profit logic, comprising cost structure and revenue sources, that captures at least some of that value" (Snihur and Eisenhardt, 2022. p.4). Characterised by innovation, change, evolution, and design, (Wirtz, 2016), a business model encompasses organisational processes and structures that create value that offers competitive advantage and a degree of resilience (Snihur & Eisenhardt, 2022). But while a business model refers to how businesses create and capture value for their owners, a strategy is the choice of a business model through which the business will operate in the marketplace to create the best value for its stakeholders (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010). The business leadership would guide management and staff teams to prepare strategies and business plans, and train employees on the activities and their roles in what needs to be implemented to get desired

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performance outcomes. Further, by sharing the vision, goals, and firm objectives, as well as performance culture with employees, the leadership creates a “strategy-as- practice through collective sensing” (Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023). To support strategy as practice, an atmosphere of knowledge, trust, and innovation is needed to foster a dynamic interplay of stability, adaptation, and adaptability, influenced by individual, organisational, and market environments (ibid). Leadership also causes the adoption of strategic tools such as digital technologies that facilitate the updating of business strategies and provide information on trends and impacts that facilitate diagnosis and prompt proactive action against disruptions in the operating environment (Dwivedi et al., 2020).

Leadership and management, firm’s agility & responsive supply chain

Enabled by access to relevant information and knowledge to predict problems and enhance resilience, leadership integrates strategic plans, business plans, and programs that address risk, business continuity, emergencies, and crises as a single process within the management ethos and way of operating (Pevkur, 2024). Access to information and knowledge further facilitates a firm’s agility or its capacity to identify and capture opportunities more quickly than competitors in turbulent situations (Sull, 2010). Agility comprises three dimensions: strategic agility- spotting and seizing game-changing opportunities; portfolio agility- capacity to shift resources quickly out of less promising areas to more attractive ones; and operational agility- exploiting opportunities within a focused business model (Sull, 2010). Strategic agility strongly impacts micro, small, and medium enterprises as it appropriately aligns the firm’s business model, innovates, and responds to competitive challenges, thus securing the sustainability of operations beyond crises or other volatile situations (Susilawati, 2024). Supply chain flexibility, agile production processes, and effective risk management practices strengthen operational resilience (Mohezar et al., 2023). Operational resilience contributes significantly to enterprise success by influencing efficiency in the supply chain as well as maintaining overall cost-effective processes (Hejazi et al., 2022; Bhatti et al., 2022). In summary, agility is an effective strategy, framework, system, or management practice that enables a firm to adapt its activities and strategies to respond flexibly to a changing environment (Robert, et al., 2022; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023).

Agility encompasses flexibility which when applied to the supply chain system provides alternative options (flexible supply, production, transportation, capacity, and labour arrangements) to deploy during disruptions, which enables fast operational adaption to change (Purvis et al., 2016; Adobor & McMullen, 2018; Shashi et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021). A responsive supply chain during disruptions also requires proactive resilience capabilities including collaboration, redundancy (contingency planning and strategic inventory stock), disaster readiness/risk management culture, financial strength, and market orientation (Shashi et al., 2020; Ali, et al., 2021). The use of digital technology to distribute products and deliver services as well as connect with suppliers and customers to build resilient strategies jointly helps in overcoming limitations during disruptions (Seville et al., 2015; PWC Philippines, 2020). Earlier, Bourletidis and Trainfafyllopouos (2014) found that MSEs needed to replan and adapt existing products to existing markets to match declining demand due to economic downturn or other adverse conditions, in addition to finding ways to reduce costs, negotiating better terms with suppliers, and accordingly adjusting prices. Further, they indicated the need for firms to communicate and engage the stakeholders at all stages about the effects of a crisis, downturn, or other disturbance on supplies and prices, as well as measures they adopt to cope with the situation. Enterprise resilience is also enhanced by embedding resilience into operational excellence. This is done through establishing simple, standardised, and sustainable operating routines; providing adequate resources for operations; ensuring the availability of complete, reliable, and timely data as well as information and knowledge, shared among employees (Seville, et al., 2015).

Leadership and financial & risk management

are better equipped to absorb or adapt to financial and environmental shocks, and maintain liquidity that can support their operations and invest in growth opportunities Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) that can source funds for their capital and operations from diverse sources and have sound systems for financial management including budgets, contingency and business continuity plans, integrated information systems, as well as supplementary financial resources, and strategies for diversification of risks, (Roffia & Dabic, 2023; Elia et al., 2023 Susilawati, 2024; Apasrawirote & Yawised, 2024). This reinforces the finding of a survey by PWC Philippines (2020) which showed that before and after crises, firms needed to address financing and working capital sources as well as alternative revenue streams. It can therefore be observed that financial stability and preparedness are critical for an enterprise's resilience

Leadership and other strategies for resilience

Adaptive capacity

Building MSE resilience takes deliberate initiative and effort from the enterprise leadership to help it survive and thrive in a competitive environment. One strategy is to make adaptive capacity a core competency. Adaptive capacity requires risk intelligence, that is, the ability to collect information and pick weak signals and trends that challenge the adopted business model. It also requires flexibility to change and redesign the business model to cope with the environmental dynamics. Adaptive capacity also encompasses change readiness, which entails fostering a culture of responsiveness and proactive response to changes in the operating environment. It enables a firm to sail through the impacts of disruptions and take advantage of emerging opportunities in the marketplace. Further, it requires continually questioning assumptions, reinventing organisational structures, increasing responsiveness, and continuously experimenting with innovation (Seville, 2015).

Continuous learning

One strategy to cope with technology disruptions, operational volatility, rapid market shifts, and increasing competition is for enterprise leadership to enhance a culture of continuous learning. The firm needs to create learning processes, make knowledge-sharing and management available and accessible to all employees, and create a culture of trust where employees freely share and propose new and diverse ideas. A learning organisation can potentially build resilience (Seville, 2015). Enterprises that benefit from business development training, mentoring, and modelling to build entrepreneurial, marketing, networking, and resilience capacity help the firms to survive disturbances and other events in the operating environment (Bullough & Ranko, 2013)

Sustainable resilience strategies

Sustainable entrepreneurship is a broad and overarching strategy that subsumes resilience. The concept relates to an entrepreneurship venture prioritising the conservation of nature (planet) and improving communities' lives (people). It creates innovative products, services, and processes that deliver economic advantages (profit) to firm owners and society (Shepherd &Patzelt, 2011). This "triple bottom line", as it is called, (Heizer, et al., 2020) has evolved into people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships (United Nations, 2015), underscoring the need for an enterprise to pursue profit while ensuring that the products, services, and processes preserve the environment and serve the interests of the community as a means of assuring resilience and sustainability.

In the face of turbulence, four sustainable resilience strategies. First is survival, which is finding creative ways to deal with crises that may arise. The second is continuity, which involves finding ways to access resources and markets. Third is reorientation, which entails evaluating attitudes and decision-making processes in response to changes in the operating environment. And fourth is synergy, which comprises building joint capabilities with networks, and other stakeholders to cope with changes in the environment

(Branicki et al., 2018; Ahmed et al., 2022).

The strategic deployment of digital technology

Firms have adopted digital technology to increase their competitiveness by fulfilling digitalisation prerequisites such as access to the internet and attendant devices and using them in operational processes such as customer service, production, supply chain, and marketing. Digital technology has also been used to enhance resilience by using it to facilitate product and service innovation, network relationships and to improve overall customer and stakeholder relations (Pesce et al., 2019; Jha et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Tamvada et al., 2022)

External Resources for MSE Resilience

While internal capability is critical for enterprises' survival and sustainability, businesses depend on resources, networks, collaborations, linkages, and competitors from outside the firm. A firm's internal capability to leverage external resources significantly increases its resilience capacity (Kotsios, 2023),

External Resource dependence

Pfeffer & Salancik's (1978) resource dependency theory underscored the dependence of firms on the various resources they require and are available in the external environment. To optimise the benefits of these environmental resources, firms need a strategy that builds, nurtures, and exploits opportunities provided by networks that control resources that may constitute inputs to a firm's production or facilitate operations, distribution, and delivery of goods and services to customers (Berman, et al., 1999).

Networks

Networking refers to any relationship, tie, or linkage, that MSE entrepreneurs or their employees enter into with other businesses, suppliers, customers, individuals, or business support organizations, including research organisations, banks and financial institutions, trade associations, law firms, and non-governmental organisations, to obtain critical economic resources they require to start and grow their business (Yen et al., 2015; Arifon & Vanderbiest, 2016; Horak & Nihalani, 2016; Neumeyer & Santos, 2018; Purbasari et al., 2020; Vissera et al., 2021). Networks can provide access to private information, entrepreneurial opportunities, financial capital, social capital, service innovation, skilled labour, and tacit knowledge through sharing information that would ordinarily not be readily available. It also provides new and valuable ideas, practical assistance, and emotional support to micro and small business entrepreneurs (Seville et al., 2015; Wagner, et al., 2021; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023). Additionally, networks provide support services such as transport, information, accounting, tax, mentorship, consulting, and advisory required by businesses at competitive prices; services that MSEs need to grow and sustain their businesses (Desta, 2015; Yen et al., 2015). Networking facilitates strategies to mitigate the risk of resource dependency (Desta, 2015). Empirical studies have established a positive relationship between networks and the performance of MSEs (Ogunjemilua et al., 2015). As concluded by Vershinana & Rodgers, (2023), network building is one way of developing an enterprise's social capital and resilience capacity. Taken together, network resources enhance MSE resilience.

Linkages

Whereas limited access to markets for products or services severely constrains the start-up, growth, and resilience of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in developing countries (Mattsson &Wallenberg, 2003; Abera, 2016), forward linkages to large and established enterprise customers through contracts provide a great potential for the development and growth of MSEs. These linkages provide inputs to their production or other processes arranged by intermediary business development service providers or at the initiation of the individual entrepreneur (Gudeta & Tulu, 2022). When a micro and small enterprise is sub-contracted by a large enterprise to produce or supply parts, components, subassemblies, or services to be incorporated into the product or service of the contracting large firm, it gets technical advice, improves the transfer of skills and technology, improves its production processes, as well as get a reliable source of business all of which enhance capacity for resilience (Dvôl, 2002). Backward linkages enable access to raw materials required to produce goods and ensure a reliable supply of inputs and the possibility of negotiating favourable purchase terms, facilitating a firm's efficient procurement, seamless production, better quality inputs, and satisfaction of customer needs (Debelo et al., 2015). Overall, market linkages contribute significantly to the growth, and resilience of MSEs (Meressa, 2020; Gudeta &Tulu, 2022).

Co-opetition

The strategies employed by businesses to create value include entering long-term cooperative relationships with market players who complement their products or services so that customers value the firm's product more than if they offered their product alone. Further, a supplier may find it more attractive to provide resources to a firm if it simultaneously supplies a complementor, thus enabling economies of scale that a firm would not achieve on its own. Thirdly, apparent competitors selling similar products in the same location provide a pool and variety of the same goods packaged differently to provide choices that attract many customers and thus each of the sellers benefits from a large market for suppliers and customers. This way, competing businesses become complementing businesses (Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1997; p.16; Goel et al., 2021). According to these authors, this complementary relationship, or co-opetition, creates value that benefits all parties and provides a degree of hedge against environmental disturbances.

Collaboration

MSE resilience is influenced by strong social networks, past experience, and local knowledge, which help understand customers' shifting preferences and overall socio-cultural change, driving culturally appropriate transformative actions and adapting to disturbances (Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023). To promote resilience, collaboration starts with leveraging existing relationships with partner organisations, other local organisations, and communities, and extending across markets and regions (Seville et al., 2015). In addition, open, transparent collaboration with stakeholder networks facilitated by robust channels of communication such as digital technologies assist in accessing support and resources businesses need in times of turbulence (Zutshi et al., 2021; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023). Collaboration with customers and other external partners that exploits interactive features of digital tools strengthens internal capability for communication, knowledge sharing, and service innovation, thus enhancing resilience capacity (Lütjen et al., 2019; de Zubielqui et al., 2019).

In a supply chain system, collaboration entails one or more parties coordinating their work, cooperating, sharing knowledge, facilitating supplier certification, making joint decisions, and developing one and each other, so that all parties obtain advantages such as high-quality goods and services, decreased lead times, improved procurement and production efficiencies, reduction of wastage and flexibility in responding to customer demands as well as a better response to economic turbulence and improving resilience (Scholten & Schilder, 2015; Stone & Rahimifad, 2018; Shashi et al., 2020).

FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Various authors confirm that resilience is a multidisciplinary concept that has similar elements, but which are, however, defined within the context of each discipline. In entrepreneurship, the concept has been defined as taking a proactive approach such as building capabilities to hedge a firm against risks that threaten its continued existence, and to react to challenges arising from turbulence caused by various environmental factors, as well as absorb, survive, recover, and continue operations and performance (Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015; Hohenstein et al., 2015; Tukamuhabwa et al., 2015; & Sâ et al., 2019).

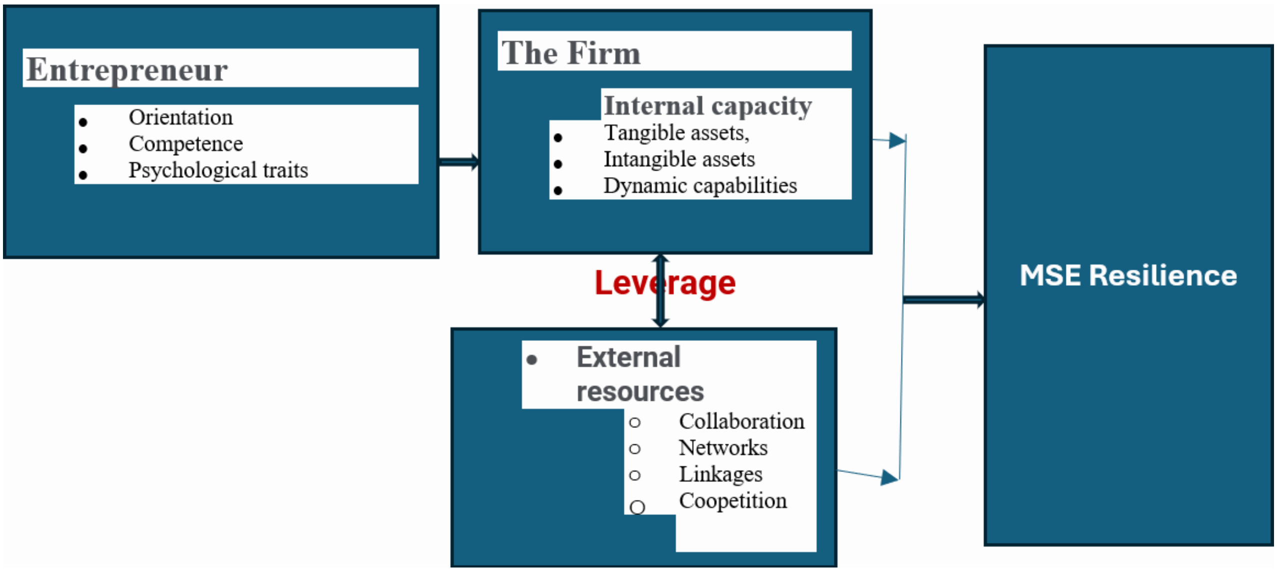
Personal entrepreneurial characteristics and psychological traits embed MSE resilience. Entrepreneurial orientation is presented by an individual's innovation of business model and new or improved products or processes, being proactive, taking autonomous action, taking risks, confronting competition aggressively, and identifying and seizing new market opportunities. Entrepreneurial competence, which is part of intellectual capital, enables the use of knowledge and skills by a business owner to identify business opportunities, conceptualise a business model, chart strategic direction and actions, organise and implement actions, build networks, and collaborations, and take risks to realise set goals. These behavioural characteristics, together with values such as reliability, integrity, and the work ethics of entrepreneurs, contribute to their firms' preparedness to survive disturbances, thus positively influencing MSE resilience (Al-Hakimi et al., 2022; Agostini & Nosella, 2022; Boyatzis et al., 2002; Kotsios, 2023; Kuratko, 2011; Man & Lau, 2000; Zighan, et al., 2022). While resilience is by itself a psychological trait that enables individuals to bear and recover from adverse situations (Casio & Luthans, 2014), the psychological functions associated with entrepreneurial orientation and competence including emotional, cognitive, social, and previous experience, influence a firm's resilience (Ahmed et al., 2022). Thus, resilient entrepreneurs can take their firms through turbulent conditions, grow and sustain them over time.

Personal and psychological traits reside in the owner/manager of a micro and small enterprise (MSE). These traits, alongside the intangible assets comprising the skills, knowledge, experience, culture, values, structure, and information systems, together with tangible assets owned and controlled by the firm that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate and substitute, are internal to the firm. While these internal assets constitute the firm's capability to develop and implement competitive strategies, the firm needs dynamic capabilities, the ability to integrate, build, reconfigure and renew their competencies to respond to, adapt, and survive environmental disturbances (Barney 1991; Teece et al., 1997; Teece & Pisano, 2004; Ansoff et al., 2019; Pevkur, 2024). Dynamic capabilities require leadership and management to implement the requisite activities and realise the desired outcomes. Specifically, firm leadership articulates a vision, long-term objectives, and values, as well as aligns and inspires employee teams to take responsibility for performance and resilience. Firm leadership facilitates team productivity, performance and profitability through the innovation of business model, development of appropriate strategy and implementation plans, and adoption and diffusion of digital technology which is used to innovate processes, products, and customer relationships. This ensures survival, business growth, and resilience in difficult environments (de Olivera & Werther, 2013; Seville, et al., 2015; Heinenon & Strandvik, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2022; Tamvada et al, 2022; Snihur& Eisenhardt, 2022; Forliano et al., 2023). Finally, leadership develops and ensures the implementation of management systems that comprise supply chain flexibility, risk management/business continuity and resilience plans, effective financial management, digitally-enabled information systems, continuous learning and adaptive capacity, and stakeholder collaborative mechanisms as well as practices that make the firm agile and able to respond, adapt, and grow despite turbulence in the environment (Sull, 2010; Bullough & Ranko, 2013; Seville, 2015; Bhatti et al, 2022; Mohezar et al., 2023; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023; Robia & Dabic, 2023).

In addition to the findings on the role of internal capability in building firm resilience, the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed reemphasised that enterprises require external resources for survival and sustainability. Thus, resilient enterprises were shown to access external resources through networks, collaborations, linkages, and mutually beneficial associations with otherwise competing firms. An enterprise's ability to leverage external resources significantly enhances resilience capacity (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Nalebuff & Brandenburger, 1997; Dvôl, 2002; Goel, et al., 2021; Vissera et al., 2021; Zutshi et al., 2021; Gudeta & Tulu, 2022; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2023Kotsios, 2023). However, other authors showed that high dependence on external factors coupled with weak internal resources and capabilities lower a firm's ability to sustain itself in the face of turbulence or other environmental disturbances (Pfeffer &Salancik, 1978; Pal et al., 2014). This underlines the critical role of a firm's internal capabilities in enterprise resilience.

In summary, the personal and psychological traits of an entrepreneur, while not strategies by themselves, constitute the basic necessary conditions for creating strategic internal and external resource capabilities that build or enhance an enterprise's resilience and assure survival, growth, and sustainability in the face of environmental turbulence. The overall conceptual framework arising from the findings is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



RECOMMENDATION

Whereas the resilience strategies identified for micro, small and medium enterprises are supported by theoretical and empirical literature, limited studies have been carried out in Kenya. It is therefore recommended that some of the strategies for resilience identified be investigated and tested in Kenya to determine the extent to which MSEs employ them to build resilience.

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