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EFFECT OF TEAMWORK ON SURVIVAL OF MANUFACTURING SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In many industries, teamwork is critical to enterprise existence. However, many manufacturing small and medium firms (SMEs) in Nigeria have failed to survive before their fifth birthday. The aim of this positivistic study is to examine the effect of teamwork on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria. A structured questionnaire is used to collect data from 364 owner-managers of manufacturing SMEs selected using stratified random sampling technique. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to analyze data. Results show that teamwork has a strong, positive, and significant effect on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria. More specifically, the dimension of communication is a strong predictor of SME's survival, followed by recognition, team spirit, and collaboration. The study concludes that there is a variety of critical dimensions of teamwork for the survival of manufacturing SMEs. The study also recommends that if manufacturing SMEs are to survive and thrive in Nigeria, owner-managers must demonstrate and promote a multi-dimensional and nuanced vision of teamwork. The study's findings have key pragmatic and research implications.

Keywords: Teamwork, SME Survival, Manufacturing SMEs, Dimensions of Teamwork

1. Introduction

Teamwork is vital for bringing together all employees' capabilities to maximize their potential and enhance both group and individual productivity in enterprises (Nwankwo and Kyangale, 2022). However, most entrepreneurship research has focused on individuals rather than teams (for example, the role of cognitive and behavioral processes such as self-efficacy and goals). Individuals in teams behave fundamentally differently than when making decisions alone. In this way, the knowledge in entrepreneurship that we have about the individual behavior of entrepreneurs does not apply to team behavior. Brattström *et al.* (2020) are explicit that whereas individual entrepreneurs set their expectations and intentions in their mind – in teams,

individuals need to negotiate; discuss, disagree and reconcile before forming expectations and intentions. In entrepreneurship, teamwork provides a platform for combining individual, social, and interactive processes that have not previously been studied in the context of individual entrepreneurs and their team environment. In SMEs, teams actively communicate information and resources among members and coordinate their actions to complete critical tasks for the firm's survival.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (1966), the word "team" relates to the "action of pulling" or "set of draft animals yoked together". Subsequently, scholars transferred this old meaning of team to humans to connote a group of people working together (Xyrichis and Ream, 2008). Thompson (2018, p. 276) defines a team "as a group of interdependent people who combine their efforts, resources, skills and information to achieve a common goal". Scholars of entrepreneurship must rigorously investigate how team members in SMEs collaborate to accomplish desired outcomes in the context of new venture development or the survival of existing SMEs. Entrepreneurs are self-contained, but they do not always operate alone, especially as the company expands. Team members are vital as they have complementary skills which generate synergy. Coordinated efforts allow members to maximize their strengths and minimize weaknesses in the new venture or established business (Weiss and Hoegl, 2015). "Team members need to understand how to help one another realize their true potential and thus create an environment that allows everyone to move beyond their limitations"(Naresh, 2009, p. 47). Developing a culture of teamwork in a SME requires the ability to provide opportunities for employees to share their creative ideas, value interdependencies and unity of purpose.

Adair (1973) first introduced the concept of a team into business. Over the past four decades, scholarly interest in the concept of "team" has steadily grown and focused on various issues. For example, scholars such as Blyton and Jenkins (2007) delved into the effectiveness and efficiency of teams. The notions of team diversity and performance based on diversity, desirable outcomes of diversity in a team, and team knowledge diversity have been highlighted in research by Patricio and Franco (2022). Abarca *et al.* (2020) recognize the renewed importance of virtual teams during the Covid-19 pandemic. Technology advances have changed how we socialize, communicate and work in a team and amplified the value of team communication, collaboration and team spirit in SMEs.

Schmutz *et al.* (2019, p. 2) surmise that a team "involves dynamic social interaction with meaningful interdependencies, shared and valued goals, distributed expertise and assigned roles and responsibilities". According to McEwan *et al.* (2017), team effectiveness reflects performance and the firm's survival. In the current study, the focus is on teamwork and its relationship with SME survival.

Teamwork was formally recognized in human relations over half a century ago (Ying and Fang, 2019). Team studies in more established organizational settings have revealed that teamwork is an essential precursor of team creativity, effectiveness, and innovation, according to Brattström *et al.* (2020). However, existing literature has ignored teamwork as a dimension of entrepreneurial marketing. This gap has prompted scholars such as Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2020b) to embrace the concept of teamwork in their new integrative model of entrepreneurial marketing. In essence, teamwork involves shifting from working as an individual to working as a team (Obiekwe *et al.* 2021). Teamwork involves a wide range of activities such as improving team performance, positive communication, self-development, leadership skills, and collaborative problem solving (Fapohunda, 2013).

Two interesting issues for researchers of teamwork from an entrepreneurship viewpoint are the nature of research on teamwork in general and concerning entrepreneurship in particular, and the approach to developing teamwork. First, it is explicit that "the conceptual and empirical literature examining teamwork is fragmented and research examining teamwork effectiveness is spread across disciplines including medicine, psychology and organization science" (Schmutz *et al.* 2019, p. 1-2). For example, psychologists have studied human team processes since the 1950s, focusing on how team members relate and interact. Psychologists have also focused on how organizational or working environments affect teamwork. HR scholars have focused on approaches to teamwork and how teams use members' capabilities

and talents to tap into the workforce's expertise and skills. Researchers in the field of entrepreneurship, on the other hand, frequently lack a common conceptual framework for studying teamwork in SMEs.

Second, a one-size-fits-all approach to cooperation may not be acceptable, and team training attempts cannot overlook the significance of context. For example, some routines and conventions of collaboration are bound to context (Schmutz *et al.* 2019). In this regard, nascent and mature stages of entrepreneurial SMEs present different contexts which may affect the nature of teamwork. It is prudent that researchers adopt contextualized meaning of teamwork if they are to support different SMEs to survive beyond their fifth birthday.

This paper aims to examine the effect of teamwork on the survival of mature manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria. The study adopted a multi-dimensional view of teamwork, including team communication, team spirit, team recognition, and team collaboration.

2. Multi-dimensional view of teamwork

Teamwork is an elusive concept. It is crucial to initially acknowledge that teamwork is very distinct from team composition (e.g. gender, experience or age of team members) and team tasks. Brattström *et al.* (2021, p. 311) state, "task work represents what the team does, and teamwork represents how the team is doing it together". Task work is an individual's interaction with tasks, tools, equipment, and systems. While task work is independent of other team members, it is important to remember that teamwork refers to how team members interact with one another.

Three ontological positions of teamwork traceable in literature are teamwork as a social process, teamwork as a mental and emotional state, and teamwork as shared mental models. First, teamwork is a social activity that explains interactions among team members who pool their resources to solve problems (e.g., giving clear orders). Teamwork is an adaptable, dynamic, and episodic process involving team members' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to pursue a common goal (Rousseau *et al.* 2006).

According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), teamwork inside the firm's environment is vital for generating innovation, which leads to job satisfaction. People who operate in a team are needed for SMEs to reach their stated goals effectively and efficiently (Agwu, 2015; Khan and Al Mashikhi, 2017). Collaboration among team members is critical to a team's success. Teamwork is essential in business before building and establishing working teams (Johnson *et al.* 2016). A working team requires communication, team spirit, collaboration and recognition. Findings reveal that employees are more committed to their organization when there is a culture of teamwork (O'Neill *et al.* 2012). Studies by Kovács and Talpoş (2015) and Mongcolpitakkul (2016) revealed a positive relationship between teamwork and employees' commitment. Common behaviors of team members define teamwork. These behaviors include what team members do, believe or feel and cognitions (what team members know or think) to complete tasks (Mustafa *et al.* 2017).

When the goal of the cooperation is to improve an assembly line, actions must be focused on assembling different pieces of a product (Nwankwo and Kanyangale, 2020b). Improved firm performance and employee well-being, reduced implementation inconsistencies, improved worker morale, and an environment that allows knowledge sharing and information exchange are some benefits of teamwork (Kovács and Talpoş, 2015; Mongcolpitakkul, 2016). Teamwork also promotes increased accountability and job satisfaction (Hanaysha, 2016; Neneh and van Zyl, 2017).

Second, teamwork is "a mental and emotional preoccupation in individuals or groups, motivating them to help each other achieve group goals and share work responsibility" (Ghorbanhosseini, 2013, p. 1020). Finally, some researchers have stressed the importance of team cognition in comprehending teamwork. As a result, defining collaboration needs to hinge on notions of shared knowledge or mental model that coordinate behaviors by anticipating and forecasting each other's requirements and responding to job demands. Team members can use shared models to coordinate their behavior better and communicate depending on the situation. Teams must have knowledge frameworks that allow them to predict behavior based on shared

performance goals to coordinate their actions successfully. In this way, congruence of team cognition is necessary for teamwork.

For this study, teamwork is a collaboration among colleagues/partners to achieve a common goal through shared decision-making or task ownership. A team is effective when activities and pre-determined goals are completed to their maximum potential. Internal communication, coordination, and planning are essential in the relationships between organizational personnel and employers. Teamwork is conceptualized as multi-dimensional and consists of team communication, team spirit, team recognition, and team collaboration. This multi-dimension view of teamwork is helpful to get a nuanced understanding of how teamwork affects business survival. Figure 1 describes the conceptual framework of teamwork as a multi-dimensional concept constitutive of four dimensions.



Figure 1. Conceptual model of teamwork

Source: Author

Below is a discussion of each dimension which constitutes teamwork and affects the survival of SMEs.

2.1. Team communication

Communication is a two-way process of expressing meaning to create shared understanding. Good communication skills are essential for preventing and managing conflicts within and outside the organization (Nwankwo and Kanyangale, 2022). Communication is a veritable means of transferring information to a target audience. The transfer of meaning occurs when communication is successful. Proper communication will not happen if this transmission of meaning does not occur as anticipated (Nwankwo and Kanyangale, 2022). Effective communication entails reaching a common understanding of the current situation and, in some situations, a clear path of action. Vertical and lateral communication between team members, supervisors and owner-manager in SMEs are vital aspects of team communication and social interaction within and between teams. According to Omori (2018), proper communication necessitates a wide range of general communication abilities, ranging from bargaining and listening to goal setting and assertiveness, and applying these fundamental skills in many contexts and situations.

The challenge for owner-managers is to encourage constructive conflict to assist team members in seeing different perspectives, viewpoints, and methods of doing things. Team communication is essential for avoiding and resolving negative conflict that impedes productivity. A nasty disagreement between two employees can decrease a department's morale, lowering production and efficiency. Team communication is essential for embracing different ideas and worldviews to take the SME closer to its goals and mission. Research on the link between team communication and company performance has found that communication is favorably associated with company performance (Omori, 2018). However, there is a lack of evidence to show that team communication positively affects SMEs' survival. In light of this, the current study focused on the relationship between team communication and SME survival.

Therefore, team communication is the collective transfer of information among team members to enhance productivity and survival.

2.2. Team-spirit

Team spirit, also known as *esprit de corps*, is a group's faith in itself and the intensity with which its members spend energy on the group's behalf (Omori, 2018). Silva *et al.* (2014) assert that there are two views of team spirit. First, team spirit as the individual process happens as a result of individual actions and contributions (e.g. star players or knowledgeable members helping the team succeed). Team spirit suggests that some sacrifice by individuals is vital "because not all members can be stars either all the time or in synchrony" (Silva *et al.* 2014, p. 292). Team spirit manifests by encouraging, assisting, trusting others, sharing ideas, and coming up with common group goals (Wanyeki *et al.* 2019). A person with a high work spirit is well-adjusted, with a strong sense of harmony, positive energy, conscientiousness, and a spiritual bent (Omori, 2018).

Second, the team-based view sees team spirit as a team process. Thus, "team spirit is something located not within the individual psyche, but as something that is located in the collective entity of the team" (Silva *et al.* 2014, p. 291). The team-based view of team spirit is associated with team members developing a sense of belonging, group thinking, group identity, and team potency to achieve mutual group goals. Peng and Vasudevan (2020, p. 1) define teamwork "as the spirit of a set of at least two members or more who work interdependently and accountably to achieve specified, shared goals". Organizational staff with team spirit are concerned about each other's problems and possible solutions (Skripak, 2016). Many businesses have survived because their team members are united in a spirit of high harmony, making achieving their set and desired objectives easy. This study adopts a team-based view of team spirit, which relates to camaraderie, working together to improve success and productivity in a particular work environment.

2.3. Team recognition

Team recognition is a crucial aspect of achieving team performance and organizational survival. There are formal and informal aspects of team recognition supporting and reinforcing certain behaviors (e.g., outstanding accomplishments) (Omori, 2018). People's contributions must be recognized shortly after they have occurred, with specified targets or performance levels that the employee meets. Team awards can be monetary or non-monetary (for example, verbal acknowledgement, trophies, certification, plaques, and tickets) (World at Work, 2010). Omori (2018) stresses that organizations should positively recognize the efforts of team members. Positive recognition involves identifying continued performance, outstanding performance, and improved performance.

Additionally, modeling dynamic teamwork and human-agent collaboration processes, according to Omori (2018), requires knowledge of the impact of this dimension. Employees in every firm strive for a job well done, which includes being recognized for their efforts (Blanchard and Thacker, 2007). However, when deserving employees are not well rewarded or recognized, their good performance and the spirit of hard work fade away with every unrecognized achievement (Blanchard and Thacker, 2007). As there is scanty research linking team recognition, employee performance, and firm survival, this paper intends to evaluate the effect of team recognition on SME survival. In this study, team recognition refers to acknowledging or giving extra attention to employee activities, behaviors, efforts, and performance.

2.4. Team collaboration

In today's environment, teamwork is the foundation of collaboration and is critical to every organization's success and survival (Nwankwo and Kanyangale, 2022). Team collaboration is the driver of performance (Nwankwo and Kanyangake, 2020a). It is a critical factor that affects the sharing and diffusion of the tacit and explicit knowledge and success in conflict resolution

(Rainey, 2005). The ability to seek out and perform unplanned and unforeseen activities among team members is known as team collaboration (Omori, 2018). According to Crow (2002), effective collaboration necessitates effective teamwork. For the organization to learn and function successfully and efficiently, employees and employers must understand and trust one another. In SMEs, conflicts often occur among staff, between staff and employer and between staff with customers. The way owner-managers address conflicts may positively or negatively affect team collaboration.

A collaborative approach to decision-making is positively related to organizational learning and various organizational performance measures (e.g., budget adherence, efficiency, performance, productivity, growth and survival) in SMEs (Omori, 2018). For this study, team collaboration is defined as the state to which the members of a firm stress internal cooperation among themselves in performing business activities and making business decisions. This study's multi-dimensional approach to teamwork emphasizes that team members may not always get along. Individual efforts on shared goals pose challenges to completing tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible, necessitating a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teamwork.

2.5. SME survival

SME survival is a crucial subject to consider when looking into the actions of entrepreneurs. In today's competitive world, an organization's key goals are survival and expansion. Every organization strives to be different from its competition to fulfil goals and become market leaders. Survival, according to Merriam-Webster (2015) is "the act or fact of living or persisting longer than another person or object." According to Gwadabe and Amirah (2017), SME survival relates to operating for more than five years in the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment. Factors responsible for the survival of businesses are often categorized into two broad groups, namely, firm-specific characteristics (e.g. size, location, the liability of smallness, liability of newness, finance) and owner/founder profiles (e.g. education, prior experience, investor) (Pasha *et al.* 2018). To survive, it is pivotal that SMEs produce products or services that satisfy the needs and wants of the people. Some firms have good products or services, but no customer wants to pay for them, or worse still, pay for the products that will not be enough to allow the company to make a profit. Studies investigating SME survival have shown that duration as a measurement of SME survival in countries slightly differs from country to country. Pasha *et al.* (2018) claim that more than one-third of US firms survive more than ten years, and 50 per cent survive for five years. Despite efforts by the Nigerian government and other supportive agents, Gwadabe and Amirah (2017) found that 85 per cent of firms in Nigeria do not survive until their fifth birthday. Between the sixth and tenth years of its existence, the small fraction that survives beyond the fifth-year collapses, leaving roughly 5 to 10% surviving (Gwadabe and Amirah, 2017). An SME must provide goods or services people want or need at a price that customers are willing to pay and consequently make sufficient profit to sustain its operations. In this study, survival is measured based on SMEs that have lived beyond five years of age and can produce what satisfies the customers about the firm's profit maximization.

3. Methodology

The study focused on owner-managers of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria's South-east geopolitical zone. These are owner-managers who have been in business for at least five years. The study adopted a stratified random sampling method to select 364 owner-managers. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire after a pilot study. Cronbach alpha coefficients have been carried out to find reliability in this study. The findings were confirmed using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Using IBM SPSS-AMOS version 25, structural equation modeling (SEM) evaluated the assumptions. To avoid violating the assumptions of homoscedasticity, linearity, multicollinearity, and normality, a preliminary multivariate analysis study was performed. The following criteria were employed in the

preliminary test. The model's overall fitness and the degree of discrepancy between the covariance matrices and the sample were assessed using the chi-square value. This study gave the relevant P-value and degree of freedom, and the established rule stipulates that the normed-chi-square value (CMIN/DF) must be more than 5.

The goodness of fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) are two methods for determining the degree of variance coming from estimated population covariance and the structural model's fitness. GDI and AGFI have a value range of 0 to 1, with 0.8 to above 0.9 considered an excellent match. A root mean error of approximation (RMSEA) is another critical metric for evaluating the fitness of a model like the one presented in this paper. The number ranges from 0.05 to 0.1, with less than 0.08 suggesting an acceptable fit estimate.

The normed fit index was used in the study as an incremental fit index. This tool compares the chi-square and null models' chi-square values. The values range from 0 to 1, implying that the values must be more than 0.9 for the model to be considered a good match. The comparative fit index (CFI) is a modified NFI version. A CFI value more than or equal to 0.9 indicates a good match, whereas a CFI value greater than or equal to 0.95 indicates a perfect match. Two other incremental fit indexes utilized to assess model fitness in the study were the incremental fit index (IFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index.

4. Data analysis

The dimensions used to evaluate the effect of teamwork on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria include communication, team spirit, recognition, and collaboration. The association coefficients between teamwork and SMEs' survival in Nigeria are shown in Table 1, which indicates EFA loading, the mean score, and the standard deviation.

Table 1. An exploratory factor analysis of teamwork measurement

| Item | Mean | SD | Factor loading | Item total correlation |
|--------------------|------|-------|----------------|------------------------|
| Teamwork | | | | |
| Team spirit | 4.52 | 0.500 | 0.984 | 0.498 |
| Team communication | 4.57 | 0.496 | 0.586 | 0.327 |
| Team recognition | 4.44 | 0.497 | 0.494 | 0.238 |
| Team collaboration | 4.33 | 0.600 | 0.418 | 0.177 |

Note: KMO = 0.654; $\chi^2 = 310.835$; $P < 0.000$; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.690$; DF=6; Percentage of variance explained = 53.503%

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to examine the internal consistency of components, or factors, and their related items that emerged through EFA using IBM SPSS version 25. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for teamwork was 0.690. The structural model is illustrated in Figure 2 after the items in the constructs were validated using EFA and Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

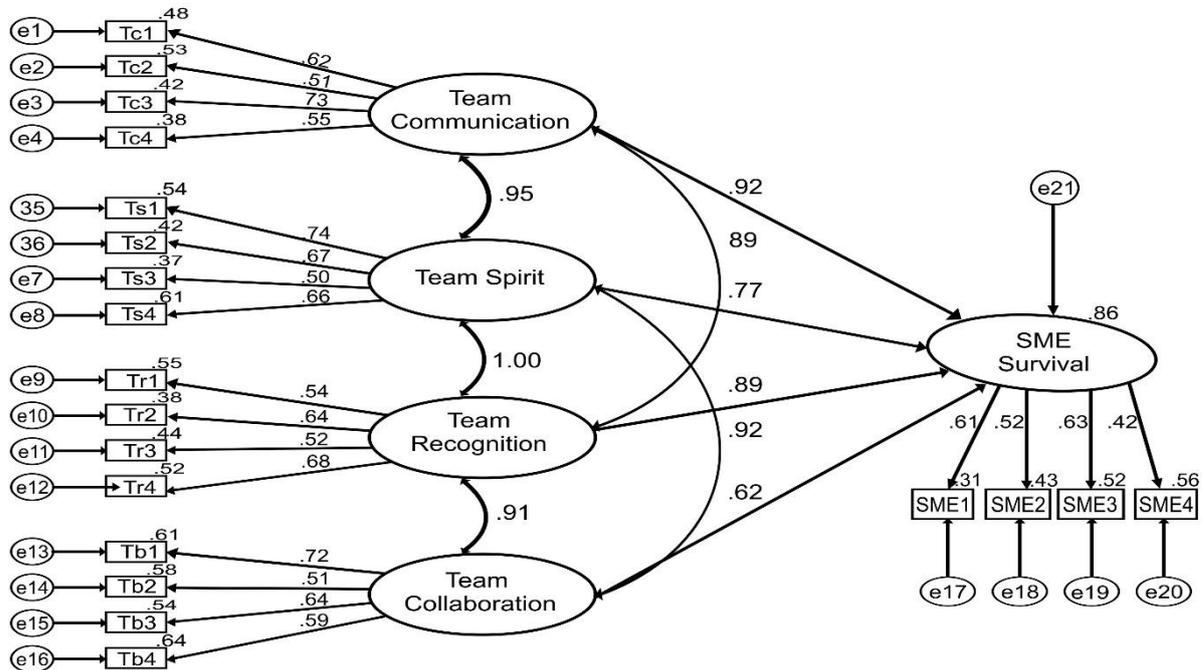


Figure 2. Structural model demonstrating confirmatory factor analysis and the effect of teamwork on the survival of Nigerian manufacturing SMEs

Note: Chi-square =22.696, DF = 18, P-value = 0.003, CMIN/DF = 1.261, GFI = 0.984, AGFI = 0.969, NFI = 0.972, IFI = 0.994, TLI = 0.991, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.027.

The study used communication, team spirit, recognition, and collaboration to investigate teamwork as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. These teamwork factors correlated highly with the latent variable, as shown in Figure 2. The estimated/standardized regression weights (ESRW) or estimated/standardized coefficients (ESC) were used to represent the loadings from the latent variable in the structural model. The four multi-dimensional dimensions of cooperation in Nigeria have a significant, strong, and favorable effect on SMEs' survival. As a result, the null hypothesis is ruled out. Table 2 presents a snapshot of the effect of each teamwork dimension in their sequence order.

Table 2. Selected AMOS text output with standardized regression weights

| | | | Estimate |
|--------------|------|--------------------|-----------------|
| SME_Survival | <--- | Team communication | 0.923 |
| SME_Survival | <--- | Team recognition | 0.892 |
| SME_Survival | <--- | Team spirit | 0.771 |
| SME_Survival | <--- | Team collaboration | 0.624 |

Source: IBM SPSS-AMOS version 25

According to the structural model and the standardized regression estimate or weights, team communication contributed the most to the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria (0.92), followed by team recognition (0.89), team spirit (0.77), and team collaboration (0.62).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that teamwork has a significant and favorable effect on the survival of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria. This finding is interesting because many scholars have ignored teamwork as a critical factor in entrepreneurship research, tacit organizational learning and the survival of SMEs (Brattström *et al.* 2020). The current study not only deconstructs the constitutive elements of team competency for owner-managers but also

illuminates the relative contribution of each element to the survival of SMEs in Nigeria. This study underscores the importance of teamwork in manufacturing SMEs, heavily vested in team communication, spirit, recognition, and collaboration. Clarity of the spectrum of the elements of teamwork and their respective effects on SME survival is vital. Entrepreneurship research has predominantly focused on the solo entrepreneur. The current study adds credence and impetus to scholars focusing on team-oriented perspectives of entrepreneurship and the operation of SMEs (e.g. examining the process, context, outcomes and formation of an entrepreneurial team in SMEs) (Lazar *et al.* 2018). This study situates the owner-manager as an entrepreneurial leader mobilizing team-level resources. Jensen and Luthans (2006, p. 646) reveal that "creating and sustaining business ventures demands vision and financial capital and leading others to transform that vision and financial capital into a successful reality".

In terms of the relative contribution of the constitutive dimensions of teamwork to SME survival, the study is explicit that team communication is a major predictor of SME survival. This element is followed by team recognition, spirit, and collaboration. Nyfoudi *et al.* (2022) agree that information is a highly valuable interpersonal resource. However, this resource is helpful when team information and knowledge that are created or embedded in processes and experiences of team members are shared and applied to create value. In SMEs, sharing tacit knowledge and understanding are vital to ensuring efficiency and speed and avoiding repeating past mistakes. Employees in SME teams feel they are major contributors in contexts where knowledge is shared freely such that they are in a better position to choose the right course of action. These employees are different from others who work in contexts with diminished team communication and sharing of knowledge related to processes, staff, and customers (Nyfoudi *et al.* 2022). Owner-managers need to create an environment conducive to team communication, learning and sharing tacit and explicit knowledge resources in the SME to enhance business survival.

Furthermore, this study asserts that team recognition is another team dimension that significantly contributes to SME survival. Owner-managers need to recognize and reward the entire "team" for accomplishments reached together. The strategic use of team recognition and reward in a resource-constrained SME is key to focusing mainly on the actions and behaviors that owner-managers want to be duplicated by employees. It is also crucial for employees in a SME to understand not only the necessary actions and behaviors but also the nature of applicable team recognition and rewards affordable in an SME (Kankisingi and Dhliwayo, 2022). As team members are different, owner-managers must diversify team recognition and rewards (e.g. monetary, non-monetary, social recognition) despite the resource constraints. Team communication and recognition are necessary but inadequate without team spirit.

Interestingly, the camaraderie, mutual appreciation, ethos of collective unity and psychological safety associated with team spirit are critical for SME survival (Agwu, 2015). Owner-managers are advised to address problems of team spirit such as free riding and social loafing, which can jeopardize the survival of SMEs. Omori (2018) is fully aware that the positive impacts of teamwork include subordinating personal interests to organizational interests. Team spirit as an attitude is key to team dynamics as it affects how team members cooperate, bond, learn from each other, and use knowledge to improve performance and expand the understanding of other team members (Nyfoudi *et al.* 2022).

Employees' attitude, willingness and desire to work well together and support each other are critical mindful that SMEs often work with limited resources and expertise. An owner-manager may nurture team spirit in a SME by promoting constructive conflict, building mutual trust, and team bonding (Peters *et al.* 2017). Owner-managers must avoid simplistic views that narrowly see teamwork in terms of team spirit, collaboration, communication or recognition, as this misses the holistic value of the interrelated elements.

It is interesting to note that the findings of this research are similar to studies on teamwork in different contexts and bring to the fore the issue of the level at which teamwork affects performance. For example, the results of this study agree to an extent with the findings of Omori (2018) that recognition, collaboration and communication are significant for employee performance in Nigerian public service. Omori (2018) recommends that adequate attention be paid to teamwork and training as these would improve employees' performance in Nigerian

public service. However, it is imperative to highlight the contextual difference of the study by Omori (2018), which was the public sector. Notably, employees in a public sector are different from a SME with resource constraints and under owner-managers as a leader. It is also equally important to underscore the critical difference in the results relating to team spirit found by this study and Omori (2018). The current research found that team spirit positively affects the survival of SMEs. This finding is inconsistent with the study by Omori (2018), which asserts that team spirit has a limited effect on performance at the employee level in public service. Arguably, public servants do not work under similar pressure as employees in a resource-constrained SME to rely much on team spirit. In another study, Agwu (2015) examined teamwork in the Bonny Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Plant by focusing on employee performance rather than SME survival. The importance of teamwork on employees' organizational commitment is also evident in the work of Ghorbanhosseini (2013). Mustafa *et al.* (2017) also investigated the influence of teamwork orientation on personal learning. These studies exemplify the effect of teamwork at the level of individual employee performance. These studies differ from the current research relating teamwork to the organizational level regarding SME survival. In this vein, the present study has extended the empirical evidence on the effect of teamwork to the enterprise level in the domain of SME survival in Nigeria. The level of the impact of teamwork echoes the need for a multi-level understanding of teamwork which involves the creation and sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge in an SME (Hanaysha, 2016). Teamwork is more than improving and potentially raising the individual's performance. It also expands the output of several individuals through collaboration to affect organizational level learning and outcomes in SMEs. With SME owner-managers support, employees work confidently in teams to increase organizational productivity and share knowledge resources.

This study is valuable because it has examined the linkage between teamwork and manufacturing SMEs' survival in Nigeria, which many scholars have omitted in entrepreneurship for a long time. Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2022) are some of the few scholars who have recently explored the link by incorporating and examining teamwork as a dimension in the new integrative entrepreneurial marketing model. Outside Nigeria, scholars such as Neneh (2011) examined the impact of entrepreneurial characteristics and business practices on the long-term survival of SMEs in South Africa. This study concluded that marketing practices (84.3%), performance management practices (77.9%), strategic planning practices (72.7%), and teamwork practices (72.7%) are the four business practices that determine long-term firm survival. It is clear that although teamwork is vital to entrepreneurs in South Africa, it is not among the top three practices that influence SMEs' long-term survival. Nonetheless, some entrepreneurs recognize the significant role of teamwork as a competence or business practice key for business survival.

The current study upholds that the owner-managers of manufacturing SMEs in Nigeria communicate with their subordinates, share tacit knowledge, promote team spirit, recognize each other's skills and lapses and collaborate for the survival of manufacturing SMEs. If used effectively, teamwork helps to foster the employees' trust, loyalty and organizational citizenship behaviors, which are particularly important due to scarcity of resources in SMEs.

6. Conclusion

Owner-managers of SMEs need to understand intra-team orientation in their respective enterprises, primarily because this significantly impacts the enterprise's survival. This study is valuable not simply because it has illuminated the relative contribution of the various dimensions of teamwork to SME survival. More importantly, it has clarified how teamwork is one of the critical competencies for owner-manager to ensure that their SME survives beyond the tenth birthday. The study has illuminated the spectrum of dimensions necessary for creating, maintaining and improving teamwork for SME survival. Owner-managers must develop team-oriented competencies to benefit from collective effort, learning and sharing tacit and explicit knowledge among team members. The four dimensions are the building blocks of effective teamwork for the survival of a manufacturing SME in Nigeria. If owner-managers of this type of

SME ignore these building blocks of teamwork, they will likely experience challenges when trying to survive in the competitive market.

In this study, two core limitations were observed. The first is providing a snapshot of the effect of teamwork on SME survival. The study adopted a cross-section design that cannot capture the dynamic and temporal complexity of teamwork and SME survival over time. Future research needs to introduce time and change to get a processual understanding of teamwork and the entrepreneurial process of SME survival as circumstances change. Second, this study collected self-reports on teamwork and SME survival measures from the viewpoint of owner-managers. In this way, it excludes the views of supervisors and employees as team members. Future research must provide a multi-level understanding of teamwork concerning SME survival, mindful that employees are nested in a team or teams. This necessitates collecting nested (or hierarchical) data to embrace the perspectives of employees and supervisors and ensure a more holistic view of teamwork and its effects on SME survival over time. It is imperative for scholars and practitioners of teamwork in SMEs to get a nuanced understanding that embraces the perspectives of both owner-managers at the top and the lower-level employees as together they form a team or group. Finally, future research needs to examine the effect of externally oriented teamwork and team climate to explore how these affect SMEs' survival during the enterprise's various stages.

The findings of this study have pragmatic and research implications. First, the practical implication is that trainers and business development specialists have precise dimensions of teamwork which are necessary and key to guiding the design of training programs aimed at developing teamwork competence for owner-managers and employees to enhance SME survival. As teamwork is multi-dimensional, it is critical for trainers and business development specialists to ensure that owner-managers and entrepreneurs master not only some but all of the identified dimensions, including team communication, team spirit, team recognition and team collaboration in an entrepreneurial context. While teamwork is intuitively appealing as a vehicle for business growth and survival, it is often abstract, challenging to unbundle, and apply as a critical competence for owner-managers and entrepreneurs in a competitive context. Owner-managers and entrepreneurs need to fully understand that without demonstrating the identified set of team competencies, they may compromise the survival of SMEs.

Second, the findings illuminate the need for more entrepreneurship research embracing team-oriented approaches to entrepreneurship to understand how teams and teamwork are critical for both SME survival and business start-up and SME growth. The emphasis on teamwork orientation brings to the fore the notion of a culture of teamwork which is possible if owner-managers model it in their SMEs through their team-oriented practices. Owner-managers need to refrain from individualistic behaviors and create an environment marked by the shared belief that SMEs can survive and thrive when team collaboration, communication, team spirit and recognition are collectively at the heart of identifying and pursuing opportunities that leverage team resources and competencies.

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