

**POST-EVALUATIVE ANALYSIS OF COVID - 19's IMPACT ON
BUSINESS ENTERPRISES IN UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AREA, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: The emergence and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was a global health crisis of the 21st century and stood as the greatest challenge ever faced after World War II. Not only were countries, races, and statuses affected. Organisational health and businesses were equally affected. Up till today, some countries, families and individuals are still grappling with the devastation caused by the pandemic. The paper is a post-evaluation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on selected business organisations in Akwa Ibom State using a qualitative approach. The study design was ex post facto. Two hundred and thirty (230) business organisations were selected using simple random sampling and simple percentage and content analysis were used in the presentation of data. Dynamic Capabilities theory provided an explanatory framework. The findings of the study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected all the business enterprises studied in the state. The pandemic affected enormously the productivity capacity of 220 (84.29%) businesses studied. Many of the businesses (84.29%) could not operate due to the pandemic. About 95% of workers in these enterprises were retrenched, while others were made to work from home remotely. Workers' income (salaries and allowances) was cut, and work relationships were disrupted. The study recommended, among others, the need for business organisations to change their business model in terms of resource and raw material sourcing. Also, the study recommended the need for continued enforcement of safety protocol as it seems to have been slack, even as new variants of the disease have been reported recently in 9 countries of the world.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Post-evaluation, Effect, Businesses, Akwa-Ibom State

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers and workplaces across the globe has been dramatic. The pandemic had devastated the world, causing innumerable deaths to humans and mankind. It also resulted in slowing down the economies of many countries and disrupted interactions in work organisations causing contraction in production by companies across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) noted that COVID-19 pandemic deaths total more than 2.5 million in 21 countries, with the United States of America having over two million cases, Brazil over 700,000 cases, and Russia over 500 000 cases. In Africa, South Africa had over 54,000 cases with Egypt reportedly having 38,000 cases and bore the greater brunt of the pandemic. In Nigeria, the first case of the pandemic was reported by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on February 27, 2020 (NCDC). Between the date when the index case was first reported and May 9, 2020, Nigeria had recorded a total of 4,151 confirmed COVID -19 cases with 128

deaths, with the most affected state being Lagos (NCDC, 2020). By the 27th of September 2021, 204,752 cases had been confirmed, and 2,689 deaths had been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (NCDC, 2020).

In Akwa Ibom State, although there were no large numbers of recorded deaths of persons, COVID-19 was observed to have had a devastating toll on business outlets, corporate organisations, private concerns and public enterprises. Many businesses were affected due to the lockdown, and some enterprises witnessed the layoff of workers and a reduction in salary of the workers while some faced outright closure. Some organisations forced their workers to work remotely as part of adaptation measures, while others required their workers to work on rotation. Equally, customers were required to keep their distance, avoid bodily contact, use sanitisers and wear nose masks as safety protocols of social engagement. These unanticipated restrictions in physical, social and economic activities interrupted the ability to earn a living and turned the world of work upside down in the state. Though comprehensive statistics of businesses affected in the state are not handy, it was quite obvious that the Pandemic had a dramatic effect on jobs, livelihoods and the wellbeing of workers, their families and enterprises/organisations.

Obiakor (2020) noted that the pandemic had negative ripple effects across all sectors and segments of Nigeria's economy. Similarly, Lukama et al. (2020) pointed out that micro and small businesses experienced a larger decline in business activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey by Kingsley (2020) also revealed that COVID-19 had disrupted the value chain of many businesses and organisations in Nigeria, with some business owners murmuring and complaining that their sales have plummeted. Ozelik and Barsade (2018) observed that working- from - home, was the new normal and has been found to have a strong negative relationship with employee's affective commitment, associative behaviour and general performance of the organisation.

Adenomon, Maijama, and John's (2020) observation of the Nigeria Stock Exchange's performance during the period revealed that the profits of many industries nosedived considerably. Another study conducted by FATE Foundation & Budge IT (2020) on the impact of COVID-19 on 1,943 enterprises in Nigeria across the 36 States, including FCT, revealed that 94.3 per cent of business owners recorded negative results during the pandemic, principally in the areas of cash flows, scales revenue and production. Similarly, The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) stated that COVID-19 was not going away in a hurry. The pandemic continues to threaten the livelihood of people, especially those living in poverty who mostly sustain themselves on daily labour, especially small and medium enterprises and organisations. It is important to stress that the concepts of organisation and business enterprises are used interchangeably in the paper to represent the workplace.

Nevertheless, literature has shown that several types of research on the COVID-19 pandemic have been carried out and that macro-economic and health - institutions (NBS, 2020; FATE Foundation, 2020, NCDC, 2020) have also conducted national surveys and collected data on the effect of the pandemic in Nigeria in general but no comprehensive research has been found on the post evaluative impact of the pandemic on business organisations in Akwa Ibom State. Equally, while those surveys heavily relied on quantitative data, this study therefore, took a post-evaluative analysis of the pandemic using a qualitative approach with the view to bridging the gap in the

research literature. Focusing on the effects of the pandemic on secondary and tertiary industries and their responsiveness, this evaluation also assesses the current state of preparedness and precautionary measures adopted by these organisations in the state against future occurrences of disease pandemics.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate how business organisations in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other objectives included:

- i. To examine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the production capacity of some organisations in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. To assess the extent to which workers' social-work relationships in some organisations in Uyo Local Government Area were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. To investigate whether retrenchment of workers was one of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by business organisations in the Uyo Local Government Area.
- iv. To ascertain if pay cuts occurred in some organisations in the Uyo Local Government Area during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

- i. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the production capacity of business organisations in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect workers' social-work relationships in some companies in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?
- iii. Did the COVID-19 pandemic result in the retrenchment of workers in some organisations in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?
- iv. Did pay cuts occur in some business organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC, 2020), Covid-19 was caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. It is part of the coronavirus family, which includes common viruses that cause a variety of diseases, from head or chest colds to more severe diseases like severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Like other respiratory viruses, coronaviruses spread quickly through droplets that are projected out of the mouth or nose when an individual breathes, coughs, sneezes, or speaks. The NCDC (2020) noted that the most likely ecological reservoirs for SARS-CoV-2 are bats, which are regarded as the possible primary source, but it is believed that the virus jumped the species barrier to humans from another intermediate animal host. NCDC (2020) also observed that these intermediate animal

hosts could be domestic food animals, wild animals, or domesticated wild animals which have not yet been identified.

Duong (2021) opined that since the emergence of COVID-19, the virus has undergone thousands of mutations (changes) but that only a small minority of those mutations are likely to be significant and change the virus significantly. Epicentre Health Research (EHR, 2021), reported that it is normal for the viruses to change and evolve as they spread between people over time. They observed that when these changes become significantly different from the original virus, they are known as variants. They suggested that to identify variants, scientists map the genetic material of viruses (a term known as sequencing) and then look for differences between them to see if they have changed. They concluded that since the SARS-CoV-2 virus, that is, the virus that causes COVID-19, variants have emerged and have been identified in many countries of the world.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020 revealed that there was widespread COVID-19 in more than 200 countries as of April 2020, which resulted in huge death figures. In Nigeria, the first confirmed case related to the COVID-19 pandemic was announced on 27 February 2020 when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus caused by SARS-CoV-2 (Maclean & Dahir, 2020). A second case was subsequently reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State on March 9, 2020 (NCDC, 2020). The second case of the virus was a Nigerian citizen who had contact with an Italian citizen (index case), and from there, several other cases were announced, leading to panic and fear everywhere (NCDC, 2020).

COVID-19 and Production Capacity of Organisations

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2020a), noted that due to widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global production and supply chain system of manufacturing companies were mostly disrupted and the consequence was that manufacturing and supply chain organisations were struggling to survive and sustain its business mandate because it was difficult to fully anticipate the negative consequences of the disease. FAO (2020b) equally observed that most of the global markets were shrinking or contracting while industrial managers and policymakers were searching for adequate strategies and methods for revamping production patterns in order to meet consumers' demands. COVID-19 caused enormous disruption in the production of goods, especially in manufacturing industries, thereby creating uncertainties in peoples' lives.

Equally, The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM, 2020) noted that the lack of sustainability of worldwide production and consumption of various commodities due to the pandemic; had resulted in the closure and shutting down of many manufacturing units, markets and other activities of the supply chain across the globe thereby affecting global and national production system and trade on a large scale. The availability and production of many essential items such as food, grocery and pharmaceutical products were drastically reduced, with a huge mismatch observed between the supply and demand. In addition, due to transport and trade restrictions, some manufacturing plants were working with reduced capacities or completely shut down, coupled with the disruption in the supply chain of raw and finished goods, thus negatively affecting production (NAM, 2020).

To slow down the spread of the pandemic, countries-imposed restrictions on people and businesses because the crisis had touched every sector in the world (WHO, 2020). Nicola et al. (2020) found out that since the production value chain, such as the food industry and manufacturing, did not have the work-from-home option, there always existed the need to keep a typical workplace routine. Therefore, the absence of workers due to sickness or travel restrictions imposed by the lockdown not only curtailed the workplace but also disrupted production. Stephen et al. (2020) corroborated this by pointing out that labour shortage due to the COVID-19 crisis caused disruption or below-capacity production in some sectors, such as livestock production, horticulture, planting, harvesting and crop processing, which were relatively labour-intensive. Also, the International Labour Organization (ILOa, 2020) stated that due to the shortage of workforce as a result of illness and physical distancing observed during production, the crisis undermines the ability of farms and agricultural businesses to work.

The widespread COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the disruption of global production across all regions of the world, did not leave Nigeria out of the equation. The executive summary on the impact of COVID-19 on the supply chain industry highlighted that COVID-19 in Nigeria had adversely affected businesses, households and the overall economy. The most affected sector was the manufacturing sector, as manufacturers were finding it really difficult to import raw materials from overseas for their production especially as the countries which supply most of the raw materials witnessed a downright shutdown or slowed down in industrial activities. This resulted in the decline of the production of some consumable and finished goods. Noticeably, some manufacturing companies in Nigeria shut down their operations as a result of the shortfall in the supply of raw materials. COVID-19 also had a cascading impact on businesses in Akwa Ibom State as many businesses, mostly in the informal sector, were observed not to have operated to full capacity or were completely shut down due to lockdown and movement restriction measures of the government. Hotels, schools, banks and churches were adversely affected.

COVID-19 and Workplace Social Relationships

The workplace is one of the few social environments where people are ‘engaged’ in relationships. By their nature, workplace environments are made up of a blend of diverse groups of people, many of whom would have very little interest in freely meeting or socializing outside of the workplace. Through the promotion of positive oral interactions, workplace relationships can be a source of individual and collective growth, learning and flourishing. Work relationships through social interactions play an essential role in wellbeing, which, in turn, has a positive impact on employee’ engagement. Gallup (2015) opined that organisations with higher levels of employee engagement are likely to have lower business costs, improved performance outcomes, lower turnover and absenteeism, and fewer safety incidents.

Studies have indicated many benefits of workers’ social relationships in organisations. It is observed that group ties with coworkers provide opportunities to facilitate innovative thinking. According to Wang et al. (2015), the strong ties developed by work relationships and social interaction assist innovators in the search for inspiration, sponsorship and support within the workplace. Consequently, Norlan and Kiipers (2009) asserted that social interactions at the workplace are found to increase self-reported positive feelings at the end of the workday. There

has been a rapid transformation of the workplace in many organisations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively impacted workers' social work relationships. With the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations were left with no other option but to redesign business models and methods by re-evaluating how people work in the workplace. According to Atilola (2020), COVID-19 opened a different vista to life due to attitude and behavioural changes that were caused by the shock the virus gave to the world, which had a drastic impact on work and social relationships, leading to changes in the working lives of the employees. The pandemic, in the view of Williams (2020), has changed social lives and the displays of emotions in the workplace and heightened the level of tensions as society struggled to adjust to widespread illness as well as the death of friends, families and colleagues. Furthermore, another challenge faced by many organizations was the re-organization or redesign of work, which resulted in a reduction in how work was done in order to reduce physical contact. The emerging changes in work practices abruptly impinged everyday work routines, causing an acceleration of trends like Working from Home (WFH), working online or in virtual environments, as well as the observance of physical distance. The re-organization of the workforce witnessed a particular cadre of the workforce working while others stayed at home.

Working from home or remote working has become the new normal, and workers have gone from digitizing the relationship between firms and customers to digitizing the relationship between employers and employees and among employees. In view of this, Howcroft and Taylor (2021) noted that since many workers were forced to work from home (WFH), a lot of challenges were experienced which did not necessarily correspond to the confines of the traditional workplace. It posed the glowing need for automation, digitization, and online education for the organisation and its employees. In light of this, Howcroft and Taylor (2021) saw that employees' social relationships and interactions were greatly challenged. Prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the working environment was characterized by workers interacting and communicating with each other as they carried out their tasks, and as such, they shared feelings about some aspects of work or working conditions, developed personal bonds, shared a bit of their personal life, connect intellectually and formed a friendship which helped them create a space to connect outside the office work. These activities were as important as having a professional or work relationship with each other. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these elements were far-fetched.

According to Prem et al. (2020), part of the measures to slow down the COVID-19 outbreak was the introduction of social and physical distancing protocol. In workplaces, colleagues seek help from one another, but with the COVID-19 period, physical distancing among co-workers has reduced the amount of help in the workplace (Flynn & Lake, 2005). As noted by Donnelly and Proctor (2022), COVID-19 disrupted the nature of work, creating a culture of ambiguity with shifting priorities for individuals, organisations and wider communities. This was exemplified by physical distancing in the workplace and resulted in the loss of social connections and feeling a sense of belonging. Similarly, Cacioppo et al. (2022), asserted that worse than the loss of social connections was the feeling of loneliness in the workplace. Loneliness is a psychological painful emotion that results from people's subjective feelings that their intimate and social needs are not adequately met. Consequently, workplace loneliness has been shown to have strong negative relationships to employee's affective commitment, affinitive behaviours and performance (Ozcelike & Barsade, 2018).

Hallier and Baralou (2021) noted that people's work and working lives were increasingly fragmented as workers struggled to adapt to 'individualized workplaces', which brought with them a distinct lack of mutual support from colleagues and negative implications for career progression. Consequently, there was also the psychological stress of separation from professional colleagues and the social banter and buzz that constituted an office environment. On the whole, online platforms which were an aspect of working from home using virtual technology, eroded the sense of belonging among workers in the workplace.

Another unprecedented dimension and change in the workplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to workers' social relationships was the new wave of employee discrimination, which affected the lives of millions of workers worldwide. According to Victoria Legal Aid (2020), discrimination in the context of COVID-19 includes being unfairly treated when someone has COVID-19, has contact with infected persons, previously had COVID-19, employer thinking that workers will contact COVID-19 in the future as well as cultural or racial background. As countries began to reopen their economies, employers implemented the testing requirement. Employees who were COVID-19-positive were more likely to suffer discrimination, and this thwarted the existing bond and closeness that hitherto existed in a workplace, resulting in social dislocation, thus creating negative work and social relationships between employers and employees among employees.

There was also an emerging workplace policy in favour of workers' immunity to contagious disease (COVID-19) in countries such as the U.S.A., Britain, Germany etc. According to Karcher (2020), as countries began to re-open for business, the antibody test now becomes the parameter for which employees are immune to COVID-19 and, therefore, be allowed in the workplace. Consequently, most employers no longer ensure the confidentiality of employees' medical information about their health status, expressing whether or not an employee is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (Baillon, 2020). The trust and confidentiality that was the norm before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was no longer in existence, resulted in employees bearing grudges and hating their employers, thereby impinging on workers' social work relationships.

COVID-19 and Workers Retrenchment/Layoff in Organisations

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been documented across countries in terms of revenue loss, business closure, mass layoff and Liquidity (Dai et al., Hu, Zhang 2020). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic had a more devastating effect than the 2008 Global Financing Crisis. This was so because of the disruption in the global value chain and widespread shocks to organisations and the labour markets, resulting in the risk of job losses and over 94% of workers all over the world experienced some form of workplace closure and employee layoff.

Pangban (2004) conceives layoffs as the termination of work relationships between workers and employers, which are caused by various reasons and, as such, bring the rights and obligations between workers and employers to an end. Also, Djumuji (2005) stated that layoffs are "the termination of work relationship due to certain things that result in the termination of rights and

obligations between workers /labourers and entrepreneurs”. The World Bank (2020) reported that during the COVID-19 Pandemic, the worst hit were the workers in the informal sectors, which are the largest in low and middle-income countries and engage over 2 billion workers (62 %) of the global workforce. This situation showed that workers in the informal sector suffered massively in their capacity to make a living. This was so because when workers in the informal sectors had no work, it invariably meant they had no food, no security and no future. For instance, the United Nations News (2020) noted that women migrant workers and youths who constituted the majority of the workforce in the informal sector, especially in the US, were more likely to work in these vulnerable low-paying informal jobs where there were few protections. It was in view of this that the International Labour Organization (2020b) disclosed that many women, especially in the informal sector, have continued to work, risking their health, while some more were in vulnerable jobs with high risks of job losses and reduced hours.

Globally, COVID-19 accounted for the devastating losses in working hours, as it was expected that an estimated 6.2 % of working hours would be wiped out in the second quarter of 2020, and this was equivalent to some 195 million full-time jobs. The worst hit were the Arab states at 8.1 %, equivalent to 5 million full-time jobs, Europe at 7.8 %, which equals 12 million full-time jobs and Asia/Pacific at an estimated 7.2 %, which equals 125 million full-time jobs. The upper middle countries were expected to lose 70 % of working hours, equal to some 100 million full-time jobs (International Labour Organization, 2020).

In the United States of America, the pandemic has caused millions of Americans to suspend their normal daily activities and stay at home. In a survey by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), it was reported that more than 5,800 small businesses in the United States were financially fragile and that 43 % of small firms were expected to be closed down (Bartic et al., 2020). According to Cox (2020), it was reported that millions of Americans have already lost their jobs due to the coronavirus crisis, and the worst of the damage was yet to come as total employment reductions of 47 million, which translated to a 32.1% unemployment rate was expected. Consequently, Farlie (2020) disclosed that the majority of active business owners plummeted by 22 % from February to April 2020. Furthermore, the gloomy picture was confirmed in research by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2020), where many organisations laid off workers in order to stay solvent because layoffs in many organisations in the US became the first line of defence against financial devastation. Many employers have little or no choice but to reduce payroll in response to income lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. The employment response to the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Hall (2005), was firms providing leave or reducing hours of work and wage deductions. Also, Barrero et al. (2020) reported that temporary layoffs and furloughs account for 7.7 % of gross staffing reduction in the first month of the crisis in the United States.

In Africa, the results from phone surveys in four African countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda) by Michael et al. (2020) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market indicated that by June 2020, many people simply stopped working. In Nigeria, it was 45 % compared to 17 % in Uganda, 8% in Ethiopia and 6 % in Malawi. They found out that urban informal jobs were the worst hit, with little or no protection against the effect of the COVID-19

pandemic, as urban jobs were lost in higher proportion in all four countries, with 56 % in Nigeria, 29 % in Uganda, 12 and 8 % for Ethiopia and Malawi respectively.

Generally, the pandemic had an outsized socio-economic impact on Nigeria, which has one of the highest rates of multi-dimensionally socio-economic issue in the world, such as unemployment and poverty coupled with insecurity and dwindling oil prices. It was reported that a mother of two, Florence Adeoye, among others, was laid off from work following the long closure of schools by the Federal Government of Nigeria to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kabir, 2020). It was further reported that Access Bank of Nigeria sacked a massive number of employees despite the outcry and directives of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) not to lay off staff amidst the pandemic. Access Bank, through its Managing Director, Herbert Wigwe, disclosed that the mass sack and layoffs of its workforce was the product of the COVID-19 lockdown. Similarly, Angela Diaro was laid off from her job at a travel company in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), spiking the rate of unemployment in Nigeria as a result of COVID-19 (Udo, 2020). Consequently, Vice President Osinbajo stated that the government was anticipating a 39.4 million jobs loss by December 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The negative impact of the pandemic was the massive disengagement and early retirement of some staff. According to the *Daily Trust* report, employers in different sectors of the economy disengaged workers to mitigate the negative effect of COVID-19 on their enterprise (Alabi, 2020). Also, the report by the National Vice President, North Central of the National Association of Small and Medium enterprise (NASME), Engineer Auwal Bununu Ibrahim, projected that about 50,000 workers would have been disengaged in the micro small and medium enterprises MSMES sub-sector of the economy while 10,000 MSMES businesses collapsed across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, data across the country revealed that workers were disengaged from several industries, namely Aviation, hospitality, banking, construction, manufacturing, media, sales and services. Many hotels laid off their worker in the wake of the pandemic, with many staff asked to stay away from work without pay. Also, many media outlets either slashed workers' salaries or converted them to freelance staff in order to cut costs. In the maritime sector, job loss was witnessed as clearing agents were not able to get jobs, and freight forwarders asked their staff to stay back home. The banking sector was lucky due to the CBN directives of banks not to lay off their staff except for Access Bank, as earlier stated, while insurance and other financial sectors experienced a few job losses as a result of layoffs. The above scenario shows that employers had little or no capacity to absorb the shocks inflicted upon industries by the COVID-19 pandemic (Adaramola, 2020).

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) reported that over 42 % of Nigerian workers lost their jobs as a result of the impact of COVID-19, with the resultant effect of diminishing about 79 % of household income in Nigeria. It was further reported in a survey of 3,000 businesses that 20 % of their full-time workforce lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and there were several restrictions on operations in these businesses, organizations and enterprises in order to curb the spread of infections. These restrictions included lockdowns, restrictions on movement and other public health measures. According to Offiong (2020), no fewer than 3,000 workers in

the Dangote Group of Companies were laid off because of Covid-19. Akwa Ibom State was not an exception; notable among it was the sack of workers in Exxon Mobil. Aside from Exxon Mobil, there were other work organisations that laid off their workers due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the state, though not documented in the literature.

COVID-19 and Pay Cuts in Organizations

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered the world of work, which had a detrimental impact on the lives of millions of workers worldwide across numerous sectors. The shutdown of operations, the laid off of workers and compelling workers to keep working with insufficient safety mechanisms in place, resulted in many workers becoming stranded in countries where they typically remain excluded from accessing social protection (ILO, 2020). According to Horowitz, quoted in the Department of Justice Office (2020), sectors such as retail, food services providers, airlines, factories and small businesses, especially in the informal sector around the world, shut down as the coronavirus pandemic spread. As a result, many companies, factories and organisations announced plans for weathering the pandemic, which included new plans with regard to conditions of services in the workplace. However, there was heterogeneity in organisational strategies across the globe. Some organisations focused on layoff, some focused on furloughing and some on reducing or deducting workers' pay (Vasel, 2020). In the UK, Capiello (2020) reported that Icoh Company furloughed 127,000 store employees. Smith (2020) reported that Gap Inc. furloughed 80,000 store employees. Also, Trentmann & Broughton (2020) reported that some firms focused on cutting the pay of those in the upper management. An example of a salary cut was given by Lee (2020), who reported that Columbia Sports Wears Company announced salary reductions of its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to \$10,000 while pledging to maintain employees' wages.

Unlike private sector employees, government employees in many countries enjoy employment protections and earn 10% more than their private sector counterparts with similar skill mix (IMF, 2020). This wage premium tends to decline during upturns but increases significantly during economic downturns, as government wages do not decrease, unlike private wages (IMF, 2020). In order to weather the storm created by the pandemic, governments around the globe have announced pay cuts for the purposes of social solidarity and burden sharing between employers and employees. In Paraguay, the government announced pay cuts of 10 and 20 % for public employees whose salaries exceeded five and ten times the minimum wage, respectively. Also, in Uruguay, the government had announced that the salaries of better-paid public officials would be reduced by up to 20 % with savings directed to the newly established COVID-19 fund. Similarly, in San Marino, there was a reduction in public sector pay to help finance the spending needs in the health sector. Furthermore, the governments of Albania, Brazil and Rwanda have considered pay cuts for employees, while the Government of Burkina Faso has announced mandatory actions to cut the salaries of some employees in response to the crisis (IMF, 2020).

Equally, AlShurafa (2020) observed that, in response to salary reductions, the government of Saudi Arabia, on a ministerial decision, had allowed companies in the private sector to reduce salaries of employees by 40 % as well as the termination of contracts owing to the economic hardship resulting from the covid-19 pandemic. In the same vein, in the United Arab Emirates, salary

reduction had been implemented without the consent of employees as stipulated in Articles 2 & 5 of the Ministerial Decision No 279/2020 of Dubai. Also, in Malaysia, it was reported that employers began to cut salaries as the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic began to bite their bottom line. As such, 46.6 % of the workers were experiencing a reduction in salary, while 35 % of the workers were on a 90 % pay cut. This was so because the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) reported that more than 50 % of the companies (respondents) in Malaysia revealed that their revenue had dropped by more than 50 %, which has led to their inability to sustain operations, thereby resulting in salary deduction of employees (FMM, 2020)

According to the National Herald's Political Bureau (2020), amid the lockdown, India's national carrier- Air India, deducted 10 % of the salary of all employees except cabin crew members. The deduction in allowances was implemented in a bit to tide over the stress arising out of the coronavirus pandemic. In the report of a survey by *Economic Times*, Mehta (2020); revealed that 39.1 % of the 3,074 respondents who took part in the survey were facing salary cuts, especially in those workers in consumer, retail, e-commerce, financial services, manufacturing, automotive, pharmaceuticals and healthcare. Furthermore, in the U.S., there were reports of imposed pay cuts, especially for top senior managers. In a survey of 340 U.S. employers, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2020) reported that 38 % of employers had implemented or were considering pay cuts, especially for their executive staff. Also, the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE, 2020) reported that the top 25 United Kingdom companies had reduced workers' salaries by 20%, while some other companies were cancelling bonuses and incentive plans. Yousho Cho (2020) reported on the Nikkei Asian News that a growing number of Chinese employers in Shanghai cut employee pay as the novel coronavirus outbreak wreaked havoc on industries such as automobile, retail market, technology and advertising.

In Nigeria, the Federal and state governments and businesses were also faced with challenges, mostly in the area of paying employees' salaries. Some states were set to take fresh economic challenges as the federal allocation had dropped to a four-year low (dwindling revenue) right from the COVID-19 period. There was a revenue problem and the Federal government even had to introduce a "bailout" to help states. Due to the dwindling revenue, there was no doubt that some states found it hard to pay salaries (Otufodurin, 2020). In view of this, some states in Nigeria, especially Niger and Kaduna State, were imposing reductions in salaries to curb the economic impact of COVID-19. Those to be affected by the pay cut included the Governor, Deputy, Commissioners, Special Advisers and all other political appointees. In Kaduna State, a 25% salary cut for all senior civil servants was proposed, but this was rejected by the Kaduna Chapter of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). As the pandemic continued to wreak havoc on many businesses in Nigeria, the media houses and media professions were not left out. It was reported that media houses in Nigeria were facing unprecedented hard times as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, measures such as layoff, leave without pay, salary slash and shutdown of some services were lined up in order to remain in business. Media houses like *Punch* Newspapers, Television Continental (TVC), Aim Group Owners of Nigeria-Info, Cool FM, Wazobia, Arewa Radio and National Newspaper) communicated the decisions and plans to their staff (*Punch Newspaper*, 2020).

In a report by *Punch Newspaper* (2020), the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Television Continental, Andrew Hanlon, announced a slash of salaries of staff of the organisation to cushion the effect of the pandemic as broadcasting across the world was also battling with losses. In a bid to save jobs and not lay off any staff, salary cuts became expedient. Also, the percentage reduction was based on the salary scale of the staff, with the lowest percentage for the junior staff and management staff with the highest percentage of deductions. Aside from media houses, other organisations like Dangote Group, Access Bank, Sheraton Hotel, Airport Hotel, Arik Airline, etc., in order to stay afloat, also came up with different plans, including slashes in the salaries of workers. Consequently, Abdulhamid (2020) reported that the President of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce disclosed that about 83 % of businesses in Nigeria were planning to reduce salaries as well as downsize their workforce in order to sustain operations as demand for goods had reduced significantly and revenue severely affected as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

It is pertinent to note that in some states in Nigeria, the Government faced stiff opposition from Union members in the course of reducing the salaries of workers to cushion the effect of the pandemic. Abdulhamid (2020) reported that a Federal High Court in Kano had issued an interim injunction restraining the state governor alongside four others from further deduction from the salaries of members of the State Chapter of Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) as the deduction in salaries affected the 55,505 mainstream Civil servants in the state. Akwa Ibom State was equally hit by the pandemic as many businesses, especially in the informal sector, were shut down due to government-imposed lockdown and movement restrictions, thus resulting in a negative multiplier effect on workers as many employers either slashed salaries or outrightly refused to pay their employees. It was on this note that the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Akwa Ibom State Council warned uncharitable employers that, on no account should any worker be made to suffer the brunt of the pandemic by refusing to pay or slashing workers' salaries (Isaac, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This work was anchored on Dynamic Capabilities (DCs) Theory as its theoretical framework.

Dynamic Capabilities (DCs) Theory

Dynamic Capabilities (DCs) Theory was proposed by David Teece, Gary Pisana and Amy Shuen (1997). They posited that this phrase, "Dynamic Capabilities", means managing uncertainties in the business environment. Agreeing with this, Zaefarian et al. (2017: 16) defined Dynamic Capabilities (DCs) to mean 'continuously renewing an organisation's business processes or organisational capability to align the company's resources as per the changing business environment to gain a competitive advantage'. Thus, this theory espouses the ability of an organisation to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments through new and innovative forms of managing uncertainties, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The central idea is that an organization's basic competencies should be used to create short-term competitive positions that can be developed into longer-term competitive advantages by pursuing business model transformation with the change in dynamic capabilities related to the adaptation of digital technologies and digital skills. In relation to this

study, the DCs theory is relevant in providing ideas in response to the volatile, criticality and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by migrating to virtual technology platforms as a coping mechanism to stay afloat in business

METHODOLOGY

Research Design/ Study Area

This study used ex-post-facto research. It was carried out in the Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The Local Government is vast and has the following businesses: transportation, small-scale businesses, cottage industries, fabrication and production, and craft and agricultural practices.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of all workers in registered business organisations in Uyo Local Government. The total number of registered business enterprises in the area was 230, with a staff population of 4665 (Ministry of Trade and Investment, 2023). These organisations included Hotels, Small/Medium Enterprises, Marketing/Distribution Companies, Banks, Hotels, and production companies.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size of this study was determined using Yard Formula, and a sample size of 368 was derived (See Appendix 1). The yard formula is a simple way of determining sample size where the population size is known. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 23 business organisations from the 230 registered business organisations in the study area. These represented 10 % of the registered business organisations that have 18 employees and above. A proportional sampling technique was then used by the researchers to select the 368 respondents in each of the 23 selected business enterprises (See Appendix II).

Instrument for data collection/ data collection technique

Data for the study was obtained using a questionnaire and interview guide. A total of 368 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the 16 employees in each of the selected business organizations, while In-depth (IDI) Interview and Key Informant Interviews (KII) was conducted on eleven (11) workers and seven (7) managers of the selected business organisations. The managers in each of the 23 business organisations assisted in the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaire instrument. A total of 261 questionnaires were retrieved and found useful for data analysis. This represented a 72.3% response rate.

Validity and reliability of the instrument

To ensure that the instruments were valid, they were assessed by experts in test and measurement for content validation. Equally, a pilot test was conducted on 20 samples, and all ambiguities were

removed before the actual respondents were administered. Given these, the instruments were considered valid and reliable.

Method of Data Analysis

Data gathered from the questionnaire were analysed using simple percentages, while data derived from In-depth Interview (IDI) and Key Informant Interview (KII) were presented using content and thematic analysis.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According by Personal Characteristics (N = 261)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age Brackets		
18-22	24	9.15
23-27	40	15.14
28-32	33	12.68
33-37	70	26.76
38-42	51	19.72
43+	43	16.55
Total	261	100
Sex		
male	161	61.97
female	100	38.03
Total	261	100
Marital Status		
Single	88	33.80
Married	117	44.72
Divorced /Separated	30	11.62
Widowed	26	9.86
Total	261	100
State of Origin		
Akwa Ibom	131	50.35
Abia	31	11.97
Cross River	17	6.34
Anambra	36	13.73
Enugu	22	8.45
Rivers	7	2.82
Imo	15	5.64
Ondo	2	0.70
Total	261	100
Nationality		
Nigerian	261	100
Foreigners	0	0

Total	261	100
Religion		
Christianity	258	98.95
Islam	1	0.35
Traditional religion	2	0.70
Total	261	100
Educational Qualifications		
FSLC	22	8.46
SSCE	68	26.06
OND	26	9.86
HND	68	26.06
BSC and above	77	29.56
Total	261	100
Position/Rank		
Chief Executive Officer	22	8.43
Admin Director	42	16.10
Manager	55	21.07
Supervisor	61	23.37
Office Manager	46	17.62
Clerk	35	13.41
Total	261	100
Department:		
Administration	51	19.72
Human resource	50	19.01
Purchasing/Marketing	64	24.65
Production	61	23.24
Account	35	13.38
Total	261	100

Source: Field data (2024)

Data in Table 1 shows that respondents for the study within the age bracket 18-22 were 24 (9.15%), respondents between 23-27 age brackets were 40 (15.14%), and respondents within 28-32 age brackets were 33 (12.68%). Also, respondents within the age brackets 33-37 were 70 (26.76%), respondents in the 38- 42 age brackets were 51 (19.72%), and respondents who were 43 and above age bracket were 43 (16.55%). Also, the study had 161 male (61.97%) and 100 (38.03%) female respondents. Data revealed that male respondents were higher than females in the study. Data shows that 88 (33.80%) respondents were single, 117 (44.72%) respondents were married, and 30 (11.62%) of the respondents were divorced/separated and 26 (9.86%) widowed. Data further revealed that respondents who hailed from Akwa Ibom State were 131 (50.35 %), Abia 31 (11.97%), Cross River 17 (6.34%), Anambra 36 (13.72%), Enugu 22 (8.45%), Rivers 7 (2.82%), Imo 15 (5.82%), and Ondo 2 (0.70%) respectively. All the respondents were Nigerians. In addition, more than half of the respondents were Christians 258 (98.95%), while Islam and traditional religion were 1 (0.35%) and 2 (0.70%), respectively. Moreover, respondents with FSLC were 22 (8.46%), SSCE 68 (26.06%), OND 26 (9.86%), HND 68 (26.06%), while B.Sc. and above were 77 (29.56%). Also, data revealed that respondents made up of 22 (8.43%) Chief Executive

Officers, 42 (16.10%) Admin Directors, 55 (21.07%) Managers, 61 (23.37%) Supervisors, while Office Managers and Clerks, 46 (17.62%) and 35 (13.40%) respectively. Respondents from the admin department were 51 (19.72%), those from human resources were 50 (19.01%), purchasing/marketing 64 (24.65%), production 61 (23.24%), and accounting had 35 (13.38%) respectively

Analysis of Substantive Issue

This section presents and also analyses substantive issues.

Table 2: Distribution of Responses on the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Production Capacity Business of Enterprises in Uyo L. G.A., (N=261)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have you heard about the COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	261	100
No	0	0
Total	261	100
Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your organisation negatively?		
Yes	261	100
No	0	0
Total	261	100
Was your organisation shut down during COVID-19?		
Yes	189	72.41
No	72	27.59
Total	261	100
Was your organisation producing to full capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	51	19.54
No	210	80.46
Total	261	100
Were your goods or services highly patronised by customers during the COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	41	15.71
No	220	84.29
Total	261	100

Source: Field Data 2024

Table 2 presents the results of responses on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the rate of production. The Table shows that all the respondents, 261 (100%), have knowledge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, all of the respondents, 261 (100%), noted that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their businesses 189 (72.41%) respondents said their businesses were shut down during the period, while 72 (27.59%) said they didn't shut down the business. Data revealed that 210 (80.46%) businesses were not working optimally, while 51(19.54%) said they did. 41(15.71%)

stated that they had high patronage, while 210 (80.46%) stated having low patronage of goods and services during the period, especially in hospitality and service/organisations apart from food consumption/grocery businesses, which showed a slide improvement in customers' patronage.

Table 3: Distribution of responses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers' social relationships at the workplace (N=261)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your working relationship with fellow workers?		
Yes	242	92.72
No	19	7.28
Total	261	100
Were you able to relate with fellow workers as you used to do before the COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	0	0
No	261	100
Total	261	100
Were you able to shake hands and embrace a fellow worker during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic?		
Yes	0	0
No	261	100
Total	261	100
Were you comfortable with the waving of hands and use of knuckles in greeting fellow workers?		
Yes	21	8.05
No	240	91.95
Total	261	100
Did social distancing affect how you relate with your colleagues?		
Yes	209	80.08
No	52	19.90
Total	261	100

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 3 shows the result of responses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers' social work relationships. 242 (92.72%) of the respondents stated that the pandemic affected their relationships with colleagues in the workplace while 19 (7.28%) said they were not affected. However, 261 respondents stated that they were unable to relate with coworkers as they used to before the pandemic. All the respondents said they were unable to shake hands and embrace a fellow worker during the period of covid-19 pandemic. The researchers also sought to know if workers were comfortable with the waving of hands and use of knuckles in greeting fellow workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data received shows that 21(8.05%) respondents said yes while 240 (91.95%) said no. Also to find out if physical distancing affects how workers related with one another, 209 (80.08%) respondents said yes while 52 (19.12%) said no. Data in Table 3

revealed, therefore, that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected workers' social relationships in the workplace by not having mutual support from colleagues, promoting social isolation, and enhancing feelings of loneliness and alienation

Table 4: Distribution of responses on COVID-19 pandemic and workers' layoff (N=261)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did your organisation lay off some workers during COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	248	95.02
No	13	4.98
Total	261	100
Were there workers who voluntarily resigned in your organisation during COVID-19 pandemic?		
Yes	140	53.64
No	121	46.36
Total	261	100
Were there any drastic consequences of lay off in your organisation?		
Yes	240	91.95
No	21	8.05
Total	261	100
Was there any reorganisation in your workplace due to workers layoff during COVID-19 pandemic period?		
Yes	246	94.25
No	15	5.75
Total	261	100
Did layoff affected top management in your organisation?		
Yes	11	4.21
No	250	95.79
Total	261	100

Source: Field Data 2024

Table 4 presents the results of responses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and workers' layoffs. 248 (95.02%) respondents were of the opinion that there was applicable to their organisation responses 13 (4.98%) respondents stated that workers were not laid-off during the period of the pandemic. The data revealed that the majority of the organisations used lay-off of workers as a safety net. From among the 248 respondents that reported lay-off, 240 (91.25%) of them stated that the lay-off have some noticeable consequences for the organisation, while 21 (8.05%) it had not. The consequences mentioned by them were workover load, fatigue, absenteeism and low service delivery in the organisation. Equally, 140 (53.64%) respondents stated that some workers resigned during the period. This shows, therefore, that the pandemic had slid an effect on labour turnover in some organisations. Also, 246 (94.25%) of the respondents that is, majority of them stated that the lay-off led to the reorganisation of the organisation. They suggested that the

reorganisation take the form of transfers and upgrades. Also, 250 (95.79%) of the respondents stated that the layoff also affected top management staff.

Table 5: Distribution of responses on covid-19 pandemic and Pay cut (N=261)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your salary and allowances?		
Yes	191	73.18
No	70	26.82
Total	261	100
Were workers paid full salaries in your organisation?		
Yes	5	1.92
No	256	98.08
Total	261	100
Was there a deduction of salary during the COVID-19 pandemic in your organisation?		
Yes	189	72.41
No	72	27.59
Total	261	100
If there was a deduction of salaries/removal of allowances for workers in your workplace, were there any dire consequences it has on workers?		
Yes	252	96.55
No	9	3.45
Total	261	100
Where workers prepared to accept salary deductions as part of organisation measures to still stay afloat?		
Yes	251	96.17
No	10	3.83
Total	261	100

Source: Field Data 2024

Table 5 presents result on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on salaries/allowances. 191 (73.18%) of the respondents stated that workers salaries/ allowances were affected. Also, 256 (98.08%) of the respondents stated that they did not receive full salaries during the period. 189 (72.41%) of the respondents stated that instead of added salaries, many of the organisations deducted workers' salaries and allowances. Whether salary deduction/allowances had consequences on the workers, 252 (96.55%) said yes while 9 (3.45%) said no. Respondent further disclosed that despite deductions, many workers did not want to lose their jobs.

Presentation of Key In-depth Interview (KII)

(a) Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the production capacities of businesses

Do you know about COVID-19 and how it affects production in your organisation?

“Yes, I know about COVID-19, and I am a worker in this organisation. During that COVID-19 lockdown, there was reduced demand for the products we were producing in low quantities. I was surprised because I thought that the demand for our product would go up. But it did not (Tom, O. ...IDI/ P1/Udobio Street, May 4, 2024).

Another respondent stated:

“I know of COVID-19 very well and I was still at home, and we were not allowed to have physical contact with customers. However, transactions were ongoing through internet usage. But the bank witnessed more withdrawals and out transfers than deposits. In fact, there was a reduction in the amount of money we had before the lockdown”. (Udo, J... IDI/ P2/Udobio Street, May 4, 2024).

Our key informant had this to say:

“I know of COVID-19 and the lockdown in the year 2020. Business was very poor during that lockdown, and there was a time we stayed for two months without any guests. The lockdown brought a serious decline in our business... (Ekanem, A.: Personal Interview.2024, May 4). Business Premises: No. 47, Dominic Utuk Avenue, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

(b) Impact of COVID-19 pandemic workers’ social relationships at the workplace:

How the COVID-19 pandemic affected workers’ social relationships. A participant has this to say:

“Hmm! Thank God we have been able to come out of it. Here in the workplace during that COVID-19 period. We were like worlds apart due to the physical distancing protocol. Interaction with our fellow colleagues was not possible at all. It affected us negatively. So it was not easy” (Imo, E. ... IDI/ P3/ Ikot Ekpene Road, June 1, 2024).

Another respondent responded that:

“It affected us ooh! I myself in this office, I was working here alone during that period. Staying here in the office alone was very boring. I was feeling lonely. It really affected my psyche negatively in that I nearly felt sick

because some of my colleagues were sent home". (Umo, U. ... IDI/ P3/
Ikot Abasi Street Uyo, June 1, 2024).

Also, a respondent stated that:

"That COVID-19 pandemic period really affected us. There was nothing like hugging, no shaking of hands, and sometimes visiting your friend or colleague was like someone was committing a crime. That physical distance thing did not allow us to flow as we used to before COVID-19" Uko, M ... IDI/ P4/
Abak Road Uyo, June 1, 2024)

One of our key informants stated that:

"That period was like hell. It affected business here and also affected us. I, in particular, want to know how one can sit in his or her workplace throughout the day without exchanging pleasantries! No handshake, at times no conversation and no small play with your colleagues. I wasn't comfortable at all. That physical distance of the covid-19 was something else. In short, COVID-19 was a monster" (Imo E. Personal Interview: (2024, June 1).
Business Premises: No. 5 Ikot Ekpene Road, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State).

Another respondent pointed out that:

"The work-from-home option did not really allow for the smooth running of businesses. Certain transactions were delayed and sometimes hampered. This really affected us." (Ofon, A. ... IDI/ P5/ Abak Road Uyo, June 1, 2024)

Our key informant viewed the situation thus:

"This did not add up because, at times, we meet for cross-fertilization of ideas, review things and share ideas in certain tasks where it matters, and also sharing things in common. But the "work from home factor during Covid-19 did not allow for such"... (Akwa, U. Personal Interview: (2024, June 1). Business Premises: No. 5 Ebong Essien Street, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State).

(c) COVID -19 pandemic and worker lay off in organisations

A key informant (managing Director) responded thus:

"You know, the lockdown period really affected businesses. Here in this place, we were also affected. There were no transactions. So, there was a need to reorganise our business module to meet up with the reality at that time. So we need to do what has to be done at that time. Some of the staff

has to go home for the main time because there was no money to pay them due to dwindling revenue". (Gabriel, I. ... IDI/ P6/ Wellington Bassey Road Uyo, June 8, 2024)

Another respondent had this to say:

"About 4- four members of staff were affected here in this department alone (Human Resource department) we nearly folded up. But thank God, we were able to pull through. But we have recalled a few of them because things have started to improve." (Grace D. ... IDI/ P7/ Wellington Bassey Road Uyo, June 8, 2024)

In another response, the Budget Officer has this to say:

"Yes! As I am seated here, I was a victim of layoff. It was not up to 4 months since I was called back and reinstated to my duty post" (Dan, G. ... IDI/ P8/ Kevin Street Uyo, June 8, 2024)

In another response, a key informant contributed thus:

"You know, during that period, so many businesses were really affected. Like in our own case, we were no longer able to pay salaries. And you can agree with me some people don't have patient if they are being owed salaries. So, such people voluntarily resigned. (Ekpo, E. (Personal interview) (2024, June 8).. Business Premises: No. 12 Aka Road Uyo, Akwa Ibom State).

(d) Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and pay cut in organisations

A respondent had this to say:

"Yes, of course. Some of us witnessed it here. I don't know what happened in other places of work ooh with regard to this. But here, we had an understanding with the management that instead of terminating our appointment. It would be better if a certain percentage of our salaries were deducted."... (Victor, O. ... IDI/ P9/ Udo Eduok Street Uyo, June 15, 2024).

Another respondent stated thus:

"Yes, such a scenario was what ensued in many workplaces. Some places of work had to go on pay cuts to stay afloat. Like here, there was a pay cut. Almost 80 % pay cut was witnessed here during that period from line managers upward to the chief executive officer" (Veronica, E. ... IDI/ P10/ Udo Eduok Street Uyo, June 15, 2024).

Another key informant stated that:

“You need not be told. In fact, the pay cut was across the board from the least to the top. though the big Ogas them were affected most as the highest % age of pay cut was from their salaries”. (Emmanuel, B... (Personal interview) (2024, June 8). Business Premises: No. 64 Aka Road Uyo, Akwa Ibom State)

One of the respondents stated thus:

“Hmm, when salaries were not even being paid, you are talking of paying of allowance”. (Emeka O. ...IDI/ P11/ Udo Eduok Street Uyo, June 15, 2024.)

One of the key informants contributed thus:

“Where did you get the money to pay allowance? Some staff were even asked to go and stay at home for the meantime till things normalised, and you are talking of paying an allowance (Dan, I. ... (Personal interview) (2024, June 15). Business Premises: No. 34 Road Uyo, Akwa Ibom State)

FINDINGS / DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study have revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the production capacity of business organisations. Many production companies and service businesses did not carry out their duties as a result of the pandemic. However, consumable items and foodstuffs still enjoyed some degree of patronage, unlike service organisations like hotels and schools, which suffered very low. This finding, therefore, supports the position of FAO (2020) and NAM (2020), who noted that the COVID-19 pandemic led to a massive decline in the production and consumption rate of consumable products. Similarly, Harris *et al.* (2020) also found that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had affected manufacturing activities in so many parts of the world.

In addition, findings showed that there was a serious infraction in work relationships among workers during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Workers were mandated to observe physical distancing in line with COVID-19 protocol. This strongly affected the psyche and social relationships of workers. These findings aligned with the observations of Atilola (2020) and Williams (2020), who found that the pandemic changed the social lives and emotional attachment developed by workers in the workplace and led to changes in the working lives of employees. In addition, Prem (2023) noted that physical distancing as a measure of curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic had affected work relationships in organisations.

Furthermore, the study found that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the laying of workers in some business organisations in Akwa Ibom State. The study found that many workers, especially in service organisations, suffered retrenchment and layoffs due to low patronage and inadequate

revenue. The study discovered that grocery stores and food consumption businesses did not suffer much from workers' retrenchment because their revenue and patronage were relatively stable. The study surmises that workers' retrenchment surged higher in-service organisations but was relatively stable in food production companies and grocery stores. Findings also revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic led to salary deductions, the removal of allowances and pay cuts in some work organisations in Akwa Ibom State during the Covid-19 pandemic. In virtually all service organisations in the state, workers who were retained suffered a slash in their monthly pay while regular allowances were withdrawn entirely. This led to heightened anxiety and economic pressures on the workers and their families. However, this was found to be different in grocery and food business outfits. This finding is in tandem with that of Vasel (2020), FTSE (2020) and Trentmann and Broughton (2020), who reported that some businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic focused mostly on the deduction of salaries of workers as a coping mechanism to cushion the economic effect of the pandemic lockdown.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across sections of business enterprises in Akwa Ibom State. The study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected businesses negatively. The impact is said to be feasible in production industries, manufacturing companies, and hospitality and service industries such as banks, schools, grocery stores, churches, and viewing centres. Workers' social relationship was also affected due to the safety protocols that were put in place in order to forestall person-to-person transmission. Some workers were made to work from home and this hampered team spirit and social connectivity among workers. Some workers were laid off while those that remained had their salaries and allowances cut, due to low business patronage and dwindling revenue and economic resources among business enterprises.

Recommendations

1. Entrepreneurs should put in place effective mechanisms of stocking raw materials so that in times of economic crisis, they can make use of their feedstock for production in the state. Backwards - integration strategy for industries relying on agricultural raw materials for production becomes, therefore, imperative. For example, bread makers and poultry farmers need to stock their raw materials or, at best, plant white and maize to supplement the outsourced ones during the emergency period.
2. Since service businesses in the state were mostly affected by the pandemic, this, therefore, asks them to change their business models by leveraging technology and innovations capable of assisting workers in carrying out their work without also hampering social lives and connectivity away from the workplace in case of future emergencies. For instance, the use of Zoom, radio lessons, telecast, teleconferencing, e-marketing/commerce, e-banking, etc, platforms are a necessity for schools, churches, companies and banks, respectively, in service delivery.
3. Organised private sector should endeavour to establish cooperative societies within themselves that will serve as safety mechanisms for both the organisation and workers in times of emergency. This can help ameliorate the effect of shock during future eventuality.

4. In case of a future pandemic, the Government should consider incentives like tax waiver or exemption and other palliatives to help business organisations struggling to regain their strength and retain their workforce. For example, the exemption of transport operators from levies and tickets and some enterprises from payment of tenement rates and licences.
5. Business organisations should make long-term income and disaster plans to cover for period of uncertainties instead of waiting for the crisis to happen which can disrupt budget plans. Most importantly, safety protocol has been slacked in many organisations, they should be continually enforced.

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Appendix 1: Sample size determination

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + \alpha^2 N}$$

Where:

N = Population

n= Sample size

α^2 = Confidence interval (95% C.I)

$$= \frac{4665}{1 + (0.05)^2 \times 4665}$$

$$= \frac{4665}{1 + (0.0025 \times 4665)}$$

$$= \frac{4665}{1 + 11.65}$$

$$= \frac{4665}{12.65}$$

$$n = 368$$

APPENDIX II

Distribution of respondents in the selected 23 organisations/Enterprises

S/N	Enterprise	No. of Employees	Proportion	Allocated Respondents
1	Angienina Enterprise	25	0.024	9
2	Emmy Enterprise	50	0.048	18
3	Heavy Grace Inc	18	0.017	6

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4	Kendy Bass Enterprise	80	0.077	28
5	Itason Aluminum Services	30	0.029	11
6	Emmjm Hotels & Suites	22	0.021	8
7	Jurison Enterprise	40	0.038	14
8	Capital farms	20	0.019	7
9	Umohorb Venture Limited	35	0.034	12
10	Purely Sportless Ltd	60	0.058	21
11	Remem Bakery	28	0.027	10
12	Albanany Technologies	45	0.043	16
13	Godsgift Resource Company	38	0.037	14
14	Daemoon Nigeria	55	0.053	19
15	Uwem-J metal technology	32	0.031	11
16	Kindy Bass Enterprise	48	0.046	17
17	Access Bank	42	0.040	15
18	Archie Engineering Services	75	0.072	26
19	Havilar Hotel Ltd	29	0.028	10
20	D wise Farms	52	0.050	18
21	Ekojos Investment	65	0.062	23
22	De Choice Mall	58	0.056	20
23	Basse Engineering	82	0.079	29

TOTAL	1042	368
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Source: Field Survey, 2024.