



Internal environmental factors and employee-resourcing strategies in small restaurant businesses in Zimbabwe.

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1.

2. Abstract

The study examines the relationship between the internal environment in the small restaurant business and the employee resourcing strategies in the firm. The study was motivated by the realization that the SME sector plays a life-or-death role in the Zimbabwean economy and as such attention must be focused on its operations. This attention should specifically focus on the way the firms hire their workforce given the significance of the human resource in the success of such businesses. The study drew inspiration from the Resource Based view (RBV) theory of the organisation in drawing out the relationship between internal business environmental factors and employee resourcing strategies in SMEs in Zimbabwe. Data for this study was gathered using a structured questionnaire from small restaurant businesses in Harare. The data was exposed to regression analysis to test the veracity of

the proposed hypotheses. The findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between the internal environment and the employee resourcing strategies adopted by SMEs. This signifies that the environment is a serious consideration in the success or failure of SMEs in Zimbabwe. The study makes a significant contribution to the body of knowledge as it breaks ground in drawing the relationship between the environmental factors and the operations of SMEs.

Keywords: *Employee-resourcing strategies; SMEs; Firm Performance; Owner-managers*

1. Introduction

The vitality of the Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) sector in driving today's economies and in the creation of jobs is well acknowledged. In any case, there extant literature shows the criticality of small businesses in promoting economic growth and employment creation in developing economies (Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Psychogios et al., 2016). However, despite spirited efforts by various developing economies to capacitate small businesses to attain critical business outcomes, SMEs are marred by a disturbing high failure rate, especially in developing



economies like Zimbabwe (Cant et al., 2014; Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011) and this has been a cause of concern for policymakers.

For example, Cant et al., (2014) observe that two out of seven new small businesses in Westernised survive in their first year while the rest experience constraints. Similarly, as Gatsvaira and Mtisi, (2016) observe, 60% small businesses in Zimbabwe perform badly and eventually fail in the first year of establishment while 25% fail within first three years leaving only 15% surviving. In an attempt to find reasons why small business fail, several factors have been suggested, such as lack of managerial competencies, lack of resources, and inability to respond to internal and external environmental changes (Abor & Quartey, 2010). In terms of resources, known studies on small business performance (Radipere & Dhliwayo, 2014; Michiels, 2017) have not included other factors such as employee-resourcing strategies – which is about the acquisition, retention, development and effective utilisation of the people the business needs (Armstrong, 2013). The reason why employee-resourcing strategies have not been of concern to small businesses is because human resources

functions are usually not given prominence in this sector, yet they take place daily (Cant, 2012).

Meanwhile, extant literature shows the criticality of small businesses in promoting economic growth and employment creation in developing economies (Gatsvaira and Mtisi, 2016; Mbonyane and Ladzani, 2011; Dzansi & Tasssin-Njike, 2014). However, despite spirited efforts by various developing economies to capacitate small businesses to attain critical business outcomes, SMEs are marred by a disturbing high failure rate, especially in Westernised (Cant et al., 2014; Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011) and this has been a cause of concern for policymakers. Radipere and Dhliwayo (2014) posit that small businesses' failure is often attributed to their inability to respond to the environmental uncertainty; as such, they experience decreased performance. This is particularly significant in Zimbabwe where the business operating environment has proven to be turbulent with authorities dabbling with this and that as they seek a solution to the decades long economic crisis. To this end, the extent to which SRBs understand and respond to environmental imperatives can not only be regarded as a grey area that needs to be explored but also



attracts research attention given the significance of SMEs to Zimbabwe's economic development. As such, this study seeks to establish the extent to which internal environmental factors influences employee-resourcing strategies among Small Restaurant Businesses (SRBs) in Zimbabwe.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical framework

According to the Resource Based View (RBV) theory of the organisation, sustained competitive advantage is achieved when an organisation possesses and exploits a set of attributes or resources such as employees' experience and knowledge, reputation and goodwill that will allow it to outperform its competitors (Boxall, 2013). Such resources are regarded as key to a firm's sustained competitive edge. The theory takes an inside-outside approach, focusing on both the internal and the external environment as sources of superior organisational performance. Thus, it can be inferred that an appreciation of the relationship among the environment, employee-resourcing strategies and small business performance can be grounded in the Resource Based View that seeks to explain sources of sustained competitive advantage. RBV is

generally seen as influencing the business performance environment. There is a direct relationship between organisational performance and employee-resourcing strategies.

The RBV theory might also be utilised to examine the competitive environment facing the small restaurant business, by taking into account the role of the internal environment in guaranteeing organisational performance. This is evident when considering that, the theory identifies a business' internal resources, core competencies and distinctive capabilities as of paramount importance in the formulation of organisational resource strategies that are needed to achieve important organisational outcomes (Armstrong, 2013). The theory regards an organisation's internal resources as key determinants of positive business performance. Within the context of SRBs, it is possible to argue that the business' internal resources are likely to give return on capital if owner/managers are able to 'identify, develop, protect and deploy resources and capabilities residing in the business that will allow them to perform better than their competitors' (Boxall, 2013). Every business' internal environment consists of both intangible and



tangible resources, but best performers are the ones which are able to exploit the resources at their disposal to increase business performance. As a result, it can be assumed that, in this kind of situation, the intangible resources remain important factors that influence business performance as they cannot be imitated (Barney, 1991). Thus, a small restaurant business' internal environment can inform its strategic choices to effectively leverage the external environment advantages.

2.2 Significance of the SME sector in Zimbabwe

Chingwaru (2014) assert that small businesses have contributed more than half of the total industrial establishment in Zimbabwe. The hospitality industry ranked third after agriculture and mining (Chipunza(2014) – showing its criticality to Zimbabwe's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. Meanwhile according to According to Dzansi & Tasssin-Njike (2014), small restaurant businesses in the industry contribute immensely to employment creation. This view is supported by the World Travel & Tourism Council (2018), which asserts that the hospitality industry's total contribution to GDP in Zimbabwe was USD420.1 million

(11, 4% of GDP) and the total contribution to employment was 8.2% of total employment (98000 jobs) in 2013 – and these figures are expected to rise. Hotels and restaurants contributed 3.9% to the real GDP in Zimbabwe. Indeed, the 2014 Labour Force and Child Labour survey revealed that there was a general increase in the number of people employed in the distribution, restaurant, and hotel sectors (from 74000 employees to 82000 employees). Thus, it is not surprising to note that the hospitality industry needs more attention than before to avoid a slackening back in terms of performance, but continually contribute to the sustainability of the country's economy.

2.3 The restaurant sector in Zimbabwe

Restaurants in Zimbabwe play a critical role in the tourism sector as most visitors spend a lot of their money on food and beverages while on holiday (Gatsvaira & Mtisi, 2014). They are associated with high employment creation and high contribution to national economic growth and development (Chingwaru, 2014). The restaurant business in Zimbabwe is mostly represented by the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe (HAZ). Zimbabwe is



synonymous with rapid growth of restaurants, particularly coffee shops and fast-food businesses through the use of the franchise system, such as the one used by Nando's and KFC (Dlamini & Schutte, 2020). The growth in the restaurant business could be attributed to an increase in the number of people eating out. This is supported by (Gunhidzirai & Tanga, 2017) who explained that out of a possible 13 million people in Zimbabwe, 2 million people were recorded in 2011 to have been eating out. Thus, most fast food, coffee shops and take-away restaurants in Harare are believed to be very competitive. The line of business for most restaurants in Zimbabwe is fresh chips, sausages, hamburgers and pies and the like which seem to be in high demand. Some of the small restaurants also sell sadza, which is Zimbabwe's staple food, spaghetti, rice, beef, quails, pork, chicken, fish, offals while yet another lot sell bread, coffee, pizza, soft drinks, ice-cream and cream doughnuts. However, most small restaurant owner/managers do not own the buildings where they operate from. Thus, according to Bomani and Derera (2015) rentals for restaurants in Harare (Zimbabwe) are normally very expensive, and can start from US\$500 per month going upwards,

depending on the size and location of the premises. Above all these costs, the restaurant owner also needs to source equipment such as stoves, tables, chairs, fridges, pots, cutlery, plates, pans, sinks, point systems etc. All these considerations imply that the owner/manager of the small restaurant needs to carefully weigh the business potential. Chipunza (2014) argues that new entrants may need to carry out thorough needs analysis research before establishing themselves in order to avoid facing viability challenges.

The small restaurant business in Zimbabwe is known to use a lot of casual labour which include owner/managers, cooks and waiters, security guards (Dlamini & Schutte, 2020). All these are considered as designated skilled workers who enjoy job security. For waiters and cooks, trade tests are set before they are engaged. Workers in the small restaurant sector in the country are mostly members of the Zimbabwe Catering and Hotels Workers' Union (ZCHWU), an affiliate of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). Now and then, one hears of cases of sexual harassment in the restaurant sector. For example, research in Zimbabwe, indicates that, stigmatisation of female workers,



particularly waitresses is seen as rampant because society sometimes views women employees working in restaurants as 'people of loose morals' (Dlamini & Schutte, 2020). This stigmatisation can have implications on employee resourcing as knowledge female workers may end up shunning the restaurant business for fear of victimisation. This could be the reason why this sector is mostly made up of seasonal workers (Mkono, 2010).

2.4 Employee resourcing in SMEs

In today's competitive business world, adopting the best employee-resourcing strategies is always seen as holding a competitive advantage which can bring about increased business performance (Boxall, 2013). As such, virtually every organisation, small or large, tries to actively seek the most effective and efficient strategies of engaging the right people with the right capabilities for particular jobs – and finding the best ways to retain them. However, finding the right employees in small businesses is an area that has not received much attention, both in literature and practice. The reason is that human resources functions do not have, in most cases, a dedicated division, and most of these functions are performed by owner-

managers. Interestingly also, employee-resourcing strategies such as workforce planning and succession planning, have remained a grey area in small business research. Even in Zimbabwe where growths in small businesses is recorded to be exponentially increasing (Bomani & Derera, 2015; Dzansi & Tasssin-Njike, 2014), the nature of employee resourcing strategies used in the small businesses is still scant. Available literature (Cant et al, 2014; Makanyeza & Dzvuke, 2015) can be criticised for focusing on other aspects of small business performance, such as innovation and financial support while ignoring the key HRM functions side of a business, such as staffing. Employee staffing or resourcing has long been associated with organisational performance (Makanyeza & Dzvuke, 2015). The problem is that such evidence has not yet been established in the hospitality industry in emerging contexts. What we currently know in the hospitality industry, especially small restaurants, is that it has many employment challenges since it usually employs on a short-term basis (ILO, 2010). To that effect, ad hoc, rather than proper and well-structured human resourcing strategies are adopted, resulting in high staff attrition, due to low pay, long working

hours, lack of training and career development, low productivity and business shrinkages (Gatsvaira and Mtisi, 2014). With this observation, it is possible to argue that the scope for further investigating employee resourcing strategies in small restaurant businesses cannot be overemphasised.

2.5 The environment and employee resourcing

Armstrong (2013) argue that human resource management activities and functions in any business do not take place in a vacuum; their content and form are affected by various internal and external factors. This view is supported by Ahmed-Butt and Zeb (2016) who suggest that employee resourcing activity is contingent upon the organisation's internal and external environment. However, the external and internal factors affecting employee resourcing may differ across provinces. Therefore, exploring the internal and external environmental factors affecting the adoption of employee-resourcing strategies for business performance and employee-resourcing activities and functions of restaurant SMEs in Zimbabwe might highlight the challenges and/or opportunities in the



country. It is assumed that an understanding of these factors may help prepare the SRBs to effectively deal with the factors.

2.5.1 Owner/manager's expertise and experience

There is a high failure rate of small businesses in Zimbabwe despite the availability of many small business programmes that provide assistance to SMEs (Bomani & Derera, 2015). This raises critical questions on individual owner/manager's capabilities and competencies to ensure superior organisational performance. Managerial competencies entail sets of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitude necessary for the survival and growth of small business (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). For example, a research carried out by Chimucheka (2013) deduced that a lack of management skills and expertise is hampering the growth of small businesses in Zimbabwe, in terms of human resources. What this entails for restaurant SMEs is that the planning and proper staffing of their businesses with qualified and competent employee resources requires managers' sound managerial competencies.



2.5.2 *Educational qualifications*

Owner/ manager's educational qualifications can have important implications on the adoption of employee resourcing strategies and performance of SRBs. This is in line with Kamunge, Njeru and Tirimba (2014)'s view that, most small business owners/managers lack sound educational background and hence are not well equipped to respond effectively to the turbulent macro-economic environment. A case in point is the research done by Chinomona (2013) that ascertain that, due to lack of sound educational background, some small business owners may deliberately deny their employees an opportunity to go for training. This is possible because restaurant SMEs owners/managers might fear that, if they invest in training and development of their employees, they will challenge the way they manage their business or even leave the organisation after acquiring new skills. However, it should be noted that, workers do not stay in those organisations where there are no training opportunities, and SRBs are the most affected. For example, Bomani and Derera (2015) reaffirm that small businesses in Zimbabwe have a difficulty in recruitment, training and development and retention of their

employees because they do not provide training services yet training of employees is an important ingredient for a business' success.

2.5.3 Business Ownership

The nature of ownership of SRBs might have strong implications for business performance and adoption of formal employee resourcing strategies. This could be true in Zimbabwe due to the fact that, most SMEs are privately owned family businesses (Gomba & Kele, 2016). Research shows that employee-resourcing strategies in family-owned businesses are exposed to the arbitrary whims of family members due to fragmented reporting structures and informalized managerial processes. For example, Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) posit that, recruitment in small businesses occurs informally, drawing from a network of family members, friends and neighbours, particularly for unskilled and semi-skilled labour, which is common in the restaurant sector. A research conducted by Visser and Chiloane-Tsoka (2014) on family businesses and SMEs in Zimbabwe also reveal that businesses rarely utilise a full and complementary range of human resource practices, but rely on traditional

patriarchal authoritarianism, where hiring and firing tend to be in the interest of the family rather than the business. The findings also showed that the traditional methods of recruitment and selection by family members, such as word-of-mouth method and promotions, are riddled by favouritism and nepotism. As such, appraisals are often targeted exclusively at nonfamily members-suggesting the need to distinguish management from ownership. This is in line with Fatoki's (2011) observation that, there is lack of distinction between ownership and control of small businesses, thus their success or failure hinges on skills and abilities possessed by the owners. Those small business owners that are able to make that distinction are assured of superior organisational performance and a longer life (Abor & Quartey, 2010). These different observations indicate that, there is generally no consistency in following laid down rules, procedures and control processes in SRBs. This contributes to a high degree of informality in how these businesses are run. Marchington and Suter (2013) attested to this high informality by small businesses by arguing that, SMEs rely too much on networks of highly informal personal relations. This reliance may have serious



implications on their bottom line as decisions are normally made intuitively and not based on sound and rational business considerations.

2.5.4 Firm Size

Given the size and 'simplicity' of many SRBs, there is a paucity of formal employee-resourcing strategies research relating to them. According to Chipangura and Kaseke (2012), small businesses in Zimbabwe face survival challenges and close to 50% of them close their businesses in the first three years of operation due to their newness, smallness or lack of skilled human capital. Related to this evidence, Hung, Cant and Wiid (2016) argue that, while human resource activities, employee resourcing included, play a crucial role in the performance of small businesses in South Africa and by implication in Zimbabwe, their size is a major handicap as many do not have formal HR departments or professionals, resulting in their failure.

Further to the above, Hung et al., (2016)'s research on the importance of human resources management for small businesses in Westernised revealed that, firm size has significant influence on HRM practices adoption. This implies that, the



implementation of HRM activities such as employee resourcing, may differ between businesses with different sizes. For example, SRBs have informal HRM structures and hierarchies which give them flexibility to adapt to changing environment, unlike bigger organisations which are inclined to develop formal HRM systems as resources are available to implement employee-resourcing strategies (Psychogios, Szamosi, Prouska, & Brewster, 2016). Arguably, informal HR activities could be best suited for small businesses, suggesting that formalisation in employee-resourcing strategies may not be in their best interests (Lai, Saridakis & Johnstone, 2016). However, informality in restaurant SMEs exposes them to inconsistencies in the application of established rules and regulations (best practices) in employee resourcing, which could be costly to the business.

2.5.5 Workforce-Skills Mix

Organisations which invest in human capital and motivate them well are guaranteed of achieving important organisational outcomes. This is why it is important for Zimbabwean small businesses to equip workers with the appropriate skills (Makumbirofa &

Saayman, 2018). According to Armstrong (2013), incompetent human capital can adversely influence the continuation of small businesses. However, in Zimbabwe, it may not be easy for SRBs to attract highly skilled staff as they are hamstrung financially and cannot afford to compete with big businesses, such as Nando's and KFC. They may end up settling for incompetent human capital and this might have an impact on critical organisational outcomes. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) posit that, small businesses suffer from resource poverty which may hinder their scope to attract specialist managerial expertise critical for enhancement of organisational performance. This could be due to experiences of greater external uncertainty, which often implies that the management style in small businesses is more informal (Lai et al., 2016). Informality might have negative implications on small restaurant business performance as owners/managers may end up paying limited attention to important human resource management concerns, such as employee skills, competencies, work attitudes and commitment needed for attainment of important organisational outcomes. From the above discussion, it is clear that there is a relationship between the



internal environment and employee-resourcing strategies. Hence, to establish this relationship in the small restaurant business context, it is hypothesised that

H¹: There is a significant effect of the internal environment on employee-resourcing strategies.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research approach

The research approach employed for this study is quantitative. The quantitative approach helped in explaining and predicting the influence of internal environmental factors on employee-resourcing strategies in of SRBs in Zimbabwe.

3.2 Research design

An ex post facto research design was adopted. The ex post facto research design was the most appropriate for this research as it helped in making predictions and giving explanations on the nature of relationships among the variables. It also made it possible to explain a consequence based on antecedent conditions, in this case, in terms of internal and external environmental factors and employee-

resourcing strategies without the researcher manipulating any variable.

3.3 Geographical scope, population and sampling

The target population for the research were selected from SRBs in Harare, with less than 50 employees. Only restaurants registered with the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) were considered. The units of analysis of interest were the respective restaurant owners or managers.

3.4 Data collection

A structured Likert Scale questionnaire was employed to collect data from the respondents.

3.5 Data analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods such as the mean, mode, frequencies and standard deviations. Regression analysis was used in testing the hypothesized relationships among the variables in the proposed hypotheses.

4 Findings and Discussion

The discussion of the findings is in line with the hypotheses which states that:

H¹: There is a significant effect of the internal environment on employee-resourcing strategies in SRBs.



The findings of the regression analysis carried out to test the veracity of this hypotheses are shown in Tale 1.

Table 1: Internal environment and employee-resourcing strategies

Dependent variable		Independent variable	Estimate	P value
Employee-resourcing strategies	< -- -	internal environment	0.538	** *

Source: Survey data

Table 1 shows the overall relationship between employee-resourcing strategies and the internal environment. The results of the research indicate a positive and significant effect of the internal environment on employee-resourcing strategies as its p value (***) is lower than .05. This means that when internal environment goes up by 1 standard deviation, employee-resourcing strategy also goes up by 0.538 of its own standard deviation. The strong correlation between internal environment and employee-resourcing strategies is in consonance with results of studies done in India, Nigeria and Indonesia (Adisa et al., 2014), which established that the internal environment

had a significant effect on employee-resourcing strategies. The results are also in line with the RBV Theory which posits that the organisation’s internal environment (the resources, capabilities and competency) is critical for the achievement of important organisational outcomes. The theory holds that the owner/manager can achieve important organisational outcomes when there is good appreciation of the resources’ potential and effective utilisation of those resources that are valuable, rare, hard to copy and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991).

The findings could be interpreted as follows: internal factors such as high wage demands, business size, existence of established legitimate HR practices and availability of institutional support, have a positive and significant effect on employee-resourcing strategies such as workforce planning, recruitment, selection and retention in SRBs. This is corroborated by Michiels (2017) who posit that employee-resourcing strategies of an organisation are influenced by their environment and circumstances. The findings show that SRBs’ employee-resourcing strategies are shaped by their internal environment, which seems to determine the calibre of staff to be recruited, and how they are

retained in the organisations. The positive and significant effect of the internal environment on employee-resourcing strategies is in sync with the best fit/contingency approach, which argues that organisations are influenced by their context and circumstances (firm size, owner's experience, age, ownership etc) in coming up with appropriate resourcing strategies (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2015).

By implication, the results also indicate that SRBs' understanding of the internal environment helps them in coming up with effective workforce planning policies which are internally consistent with the organisations' mission statements. This is considered important as Armstrong (2013) argues that a proper manpower planning will ensure that every business' department has an effective and efficient staff, and appropriate workload at all times. However, extant literature (Ahmed-Butt & Zeb, 2016; Boxall, 2013; Cacciolatti & Wan, 2012; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018) contradicts the findings when it posits that, workforce planning could be a challenge in small businesses, especially when there is a mixture of family and non-family employees who may not share the same vision and also lack established legitimate



Hr practices, resulting in workforce planning being done arbitrarily and in an ad hoc manner. Most small businesses including SRBs, in Zimbabwe could be failing to gain competitive advantage as owners hold onto networks of highly informal nature (Fatoki & Chingwaru, 2013; Bomani & Derera, 2015).

This finding showing that internal environment strongly influences employee-resourcing strategies also confirms Ogunyomi and Bruning's (2016) observation that the context and circumstances of an organisation determine the type of strategies and policies that will be adopted in managing its human resources. For example, small businesses are struggling to attract competent human resources because they are hamstrung financially, forcing them to settle for mediocre staff (Chingwaru, 2013; Chimucheka, 2013). Because of this, authors such as Blackman (2006) assert that knowledge workers in developing countries such as Zimbabwe shun small hospitality businesses including restaurants because of their inability to pay better remuneration, and this acts as a constraint to their growth and development. In light of this evidence, it can be suggested that SRBs' internal

factors such as lack of finance can influence the process of employee-resourcing strategies.

The current results are showing that employee-resourcing strategies such as selection are influenced by the internal environment. This is because selection is considered a critical consideration in SRBs as poor selection can have an adverse financial impact and it is imperative to get the process right from the beginning). For example, for an organisation to perform well, the selection process should be able to identify someone with the right skills and competencies. Selection of employees is based on person-job fit and person-organisation fit which ensure coherence, guaranteeing staff retention. This is in tandem with the observation by (Abor & Quartey, 2010) that, if individuals can cohere with the broader organisational attributes, they will stay with the organisation. The selection process is also influenced by the salary requirements of the job candidate. However, SRBs may fail to attract candidates requiring higher salaries as they rely on transient labour and do not want to make investments in their staff (Dlamini & Schutte, 2020). For example, Young-Thelin and Boluk (2012) note that



most hospitality businesses, including small restaurants make use of casual, part time and contractual waiters to lower administration costs.

Finally, Michiels (2017) identify internal environmental factors such as compensation, job characteristics, training and development, career opportunities, work life balance and organisational commitment as key to staff retention. This is in concurrence with the finding from this research, which submits that employee-resourcing strategies, such as training and development, work life balance, job security, employee empowerment and flexible work arrangements seem to be linked to internal environmental issues such as high wage demands, business size, existence of established legitimate HR practices and availability of institutional support in SRBs. The retention of staff is more important in small businesses where staff attraction remains a challenge; as such, staff attrition has dire consequences for the organisation (Psychogios, Szamosi, Prouska, & Brewster, 2016; Kruger and Rootman, 2010) demonstrate how small businesses can influence employee retention and commitment of staff when



management takes care of employees' 'happiness' within the organisation.

5 Conclusions

The results reveal that internal environment has a positive and significant effect on employee-resourcing strategies. This could be attributed to the fact that Zimbabwe acknowledges the importance of small businesses in economic development and employment creation, hence, investments are made in SRBs (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018; Bomani & Derera, 2015; Dlamini & Schutte, 2020). But the bold conclusion that emerges from this finding is that the internal environment in an SME has a strong effect on the employee resourcing strategies adopted in that SME.

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