

Entrepreneurial Intensity and Corporate Robustness of Small and Medium Enterprises in Port Harcourt, Rivers State

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***Abstract:** This study explored into the relationship between entrepreneurial intensity and corporate robustness of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The cross sectional survey was utilized while covering a population of 1200 Small and Medium Enterprises. A sample size of two hundred and ninety-one (291) respondents were drawn from the population and the systematic sampling technique was utilized while employing copies of structured questionnaire in gathering data. The data were critically analysed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation in order to establish the link between the dimensions of entrepreneurial intensity (proactivity and risk-taking) with the measures of corporate robustness (structural robustness and instrumental robustness). The findings portrayed a positive link between entrepreneurial intensity and corporate robustness. It was concluded that improving proactivity and risk taking by entrepreneurs will help boost the corporate robustness of SMES in Rivers State. Hence, it was recommended that the managers of the SMEs should be proactive to identify changes in the business domain and adapt to it so as to enhance the robustness of the organization.*

***Keywords:** Proactivity, Risk-Taking, Structural Robustness, Instrumental Robustness.*

1.0 Introduction

Corporate entities operate in a domain that are subject to competition and the ability to adjust the operations of the organization in alignment with the present realities will help the firm to stand firm and robust among rivalries. Creating a robust organization is relevant for firms that wishes to maintain an enviable position in the business space. A robust firm remain persistent and is unweaving even in the midst of turbulence. Robustness, in a broad sense, refers to the capacity to tolerate or survive external shocks, to maintain stability in the face of uncertainty (Bankes, 2010). The unprecedented happenings in the environment of business can affect the effective functioning of the organization. Organization operate generally as a system and the improper functioning of an aspect of the system can truncate the effective functioning of the entire system. A robust organization. Robustness has been defined as a system's ability to endure structural perturbations without compromising its function (Jen, 2003). In all cases, robustness refers to a complex system's ability to continue functioning in the face of functional shocks or disturbances (Mens *et al.*, 2011). Achieving corporate robustness is crucial in this time and season since it shows that the organization can continue to be administratively, operationally and functionally efficient in spite of shifts and upheavals that are mirrored in its surroundings.

The small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) require high level of corporate robustness in this harsh business domain in order to remain in business. It has been observed that most SMEs fail during the first five years of operation and only little percentage are able to weather the challenges. This challenges thus make it necessary for the entrepreneurial to intensify their entrepreneurial spirit as such could make them device strategies that are geared towards enhance the firms robustness. According to Heilbrum (2008) entrepreneurial intensity assesses an individual's level of initiative, willingness to take risks and inventiveness in order to positively turn around the firm's fortune and general success. Entrepreneurs that are very proactive are able to scan the environment and easily identify prospects and take advantage of relevant opportunities. Remaining robust require that organizations take calculated risk and also focus on events that could enhance the stand of the organization in the industry. The problem of low corporate robustness has become critical in recent tie mostly among the SMEs in Rivers State. The inability to maintain corporate robustness has reduced the survival rate and resilience ability the SMEs. Work has been done on robustness over the years, however, there are paucity of empirical studies that has examined how corporate robustness of small and medium enterprises can be enhanced from the standpoint of entrepreneurial competence. This study intend to fill this lacuna.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study is to examine the relationship between;

- i. Proactivity and structural robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- ii. Proactivity and instrumental robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iii. Risk-taking and structural robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iv. Risk-taking and instrumental robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses below were stated and tested in this study;

H₀₁: Proactivity and structural robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Proactivity and instrumental robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₃: Risk-taking and structural robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H₀₄: Risk-taking and instrumental robustness of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria

2.0 Review of Related Literature

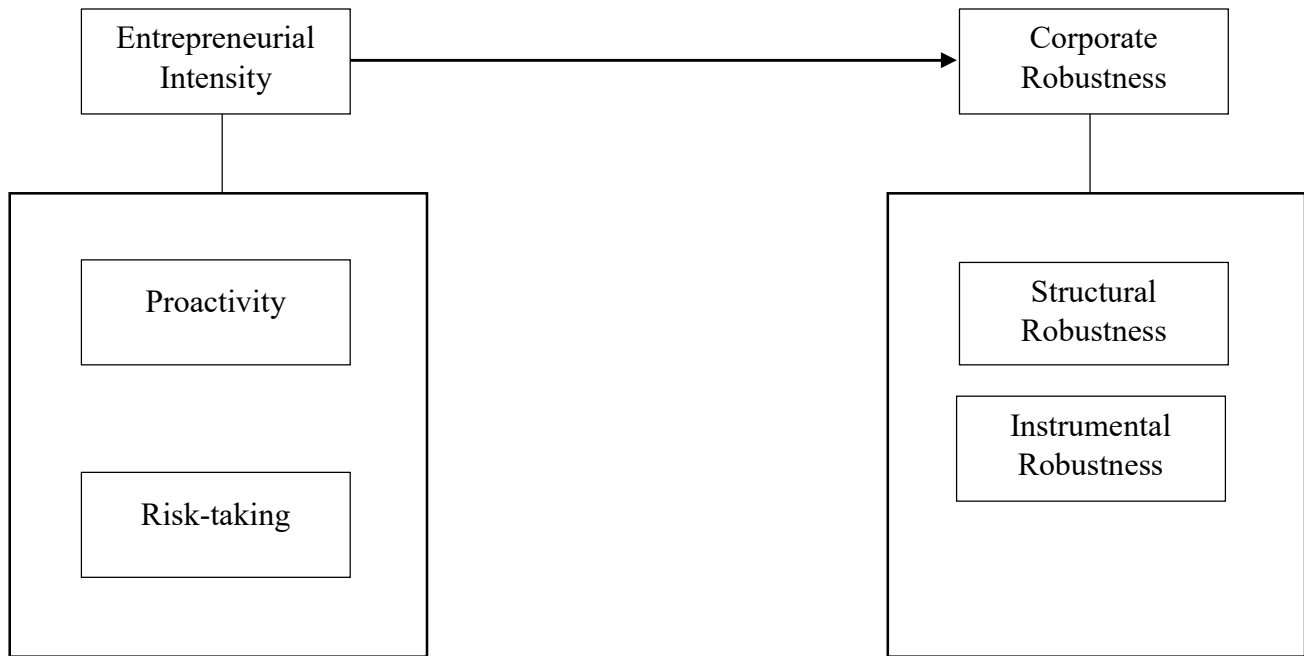


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the link between entrepreneurial intensity and corporate robustness.

Source: Conceptualized by the researcher

Entrepreneurial Intensity

According to Erasmus and Scheepers (2008), the concept of entrepreneurial intensity was developed on the presumption that different forms of entrepreneurial behaviour could differ in terms of proactivity, risk-taking, and distinctive qualities. Scheepers, Hough, and Bloom (2007) state that these behavioural traits have a variety of effects, including the creation of new services, products, commercial ventures, and procedures. The term "intensity of entrepreneurship" refers to the measurement of the degree and frequency of the fundamental aspects of being an entrepreneur as well as the analysis of how these aspects or fundamental traits of an entrepreneur are applied in a systematic manner in order to attain goals or success. According to Heilbrum (2008), intensity just assesses an individual's level of initiative, willingness to take risks, and inventiveness, whereas frequency counts the quantity of entrepreneurial events held. Entrepreneurs are defined by Tahseen (2012), Sefalafala (2012), Morris & Sexon (1996), Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson (2005), and other scholars as individuals or groups who adopt a proactive approach, take calculated risks, engage in innovative activities, and possess a self-autonomous mindset with a dedicated mindset to market new products and services in order to generate profits and expand their business. Innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness are the three main aspects of entrepreneurial intensity, as defined by Morris and Sixton (1996). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) added two more elements to the mix—competitive aggressiveness and autonomy—totaling five dimensions.

Proactivity

According to Lumpkin and Dess (1996), proactivity in entrepreneurship refers to the inventive and proactive actions taken by business owners to spot and seize possibilities as opposed to passively responding to the state of the market. It is frequently considered to be an essential component of entrepreneurial intensity, demonstrating the innovative and dynamic character of entrepreneurial endeavours. Additionally, research conducted by Shepherd et al. (2015) has demonstrated that proactive entrepreneurs have greater levels of creativity and adaptability, which helps them to react to changing market conditions. Proactive businesspeople shape the competitive environment by not just anticipating but also inventing new trends. According to Lumpkin and Dess (1996), proactiveness is really concerned with the significance of initiative in the entrepreneurial process. Research by Avlonitis and Salavou (2007) demonstrates that proactive behavior—as opposed to taking risks—contributes significantly to the success of new products. The findings indicates that new product uniqueness—a key component of product innovativeness—distinguishes active from passive entrepreneurs. According to Kraus, Rigtering, Hughes, and Hosman's (2012) research findings, proactiveness has a strong and favourable correlation with an enterprise's performance.

Risk-taking

Risk-taking is described as an enterprise's readiness to seize chances even when the probability of success is uncertain and to act courageously without considering the repercussions (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Risk-taking, according to Wiklund and Shepherd (2003), is the propensity to undertake audacious acts like branching out into uncharted territory and investing a substantial amount of capital in projects with unpredictable results. According to Kreiser and Davis (2010), there is a curvilinear relationship between risk-taking and entrepreneurial firm performance. According to research, businesses led by entrepreneurs who take intermediate risks outperform those who take extremely high or very low risks in the marketplace. Research shows that an entrepreneur's capacity to take risks is influenced by a variety of elements, including the process of developing a risk problem, the outcomes of prior risk-taking, and the capacity to operate in hazardous situations (Stewart & Roth, 2001; Swierczek & Ha, 2003; Lichtenstein & Brush, 2001). The risk-return tradeoff is linked to common risk-taking behaviours including taking on a lot of debt, investing a sizable amount of one's assets in a project, or acting when faced with uncertainty (Hornsby, Kuratko & Zahra, 2002). An attitude towards risk-taking denotes a readiness to allocate resources towards tactics or undertakings when the result may be very unpredictable (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). By doing trials, analysing the market, learning about it, and utilising networks, risk can be controlled.

Corporate Robustness

According to Beno's (2018) the key to prospering in the modern corporate world is having well-aligned systems, human resource content, and organisational structures that support and propel the organization's robustness goals. Being robust means having the capacity to endure shocks from the outside world and maintain stability in the face of uncertainty (Ivanov, Dolgui, Sokolov & Ivanova, 2016; Kennon et al, 2015). The capacity of a system to tolerate structural disruptions without

experiencing a change in function is the precise definition of robustness (Monostori, 2016). The ability of an intricate structure to continue operating in the midst of traumas or disruptions is always linked to robustness (Ivanov et al., 2016). Certain academics (Herbane, 2019; Razig & Maulabakhish, 2015) believe that flexibility and organisational robustness are comparable. This is true in the sense that organisational robustness is change-oriented and can only achieve and sustain its degree of uniformity in the face of environmental changes because of its proactive nature and ability to anticipate change and make the required adjustments in advance of it. Thus, firms that are able to comprehend market changes and implement functional approaches that successfully correspond with them are considered robust. According to Monostori (2016), robust organisations have an inclination to ride the waves of change because of their adaptive characteristics, which enable them to anticipate and make plans for potential changes in their surroundings.

Structural Robustness

In the context of business, structural robustness describes how resilient an organization's internal design is to different shocks and stresses. It includes the capacity of an organization's systems, procedures, and organisational structure to tolerate shocks without losing functioning or flexibility. Johnson et al.'s (2007) research emphasises how important structural robustness is for boosting company resilience. They contend that businesses that have strong structural designs are better able to withstand adversity, including pressure from competitors, technology upheavals, and economic downturns. Redundancy in the organisational structure is a crucial component of structural robustness. Redundancy reduces the risk of single points of failure by providing many parts or routes that can perform crucial tasks. Several organisational components, such as decision-making procedures, communication routes, and resource distribution systems, might incorporate this redundancy. Moreover, adaptability and agility in the face of unanticipated obstacles are essential components of structural robustness. In reaction to shifting market conditions or unforeseen occurrences, businesses with flexible organisational structures are able to quickly reorganise their operations, redirect resources, and change their strategies. A company's capacity to withstand setbacks, seize new opportunities, and maintain long-term competitiveness in an unstable business environment can all be improved by giving structural robustness top priority.

Instrumental Robustness

March (1991) presents the concept of instrumental robustness as a potentially useful paradigm for assessing organisational resilience. According to Pettit et al. (2016), instrumental robustness is the ability of an organisation to accomplish its strategic goals in a variety of circumstances and to modify its plan of action in reacting to shifting external factors. In contrast to conventional metrics that concentrate on static performance indicators, instrumental resilience highlights an organization's ability to adapt and be dynamic (Makridakis et al., 2019). A more comprehensive and prospective method of evaluating organisational robustness is provided by instrumental robustness, which integrates many resilience dimensions such as operational, strategic, and cultural elements (Fiksel, 2015). Through the application of a systems approach, instrumental robustness acknowledges the interconnectedness of customer requirements, outside dangers, and internal capabilities. This helps organisations better predict and manage risks (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Finally, organisations can improve their ability to manage disturbances, take advantage

of opportunities, and produce lasting advantages for clients by adopting the concepts of instrumental robustness.

Empirical Review

Oshi, Ule and Ogah, (2017) examined entrepreneurial intensity and corporate sustainability in the Nigerian extractive industry. A quasi experimental design with simple random sampling technique used to select 400 personnel from five major extractive firms. These employees, who are primarily managers and stakeholders, offer a personal opinion sample regarding the sustainability of their companies through entrepreneurial intensity. The study, which makes use of multiple regression analysis, found that an entrepreneurial degree of innovation, proactive nature, and risk-taking inclination can help organisations continue sustainable development. Based on the study's findings, organisations should develop plans for tracking and stopping personnel deviations and unethical behaviour, as well as government participation in this resource-rich sector.

Okeke (2023) studied entrepreneurship intensity and internal business processes of small and medium scale enterprises in Anambra State. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. 1,800 small and medium scale enterprises made up the population of the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The study's findings showed that there is no correlation between risk-taking and the process quality of SMEs, but there is a significant correlation between proactiveness and process quality of SMEs and innovation. The study found that internal business procedures of SMEs and the degree of entrepreneurship are significantly positively correlated. Therefore, rather than just being risk-takers, the study advised small and medium-sized businesses to reorient themselves towards a larger tolerance for risk in order to integrate the culture of riskiness into their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Urban and Sefalafala (2015) examined how entrepreneurial intensity and capabilities at the firm level influence performance, while at the same time considering environmental influences on this relationship. An initial electronic survey provided a total of 612 qualifying firms which were coded into a database and a random numbers program was applied to randomly select 50percent of these firms (306) as the final sample. This multistage screening generated a final sample of 117 responses, giving a 38 per cent response rate. With the aid of the Statistical software system, version 10, the descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated. While, the hypotheses were tested with the hierarchical regression analysis to determine the relationship of the variables in terms of their prediction value. Overall, the results are consistent with the assumptions that entrepreneurial intensity and capacities are positively correlated with both intelligence nationalisation and company performance; however, there is insufficient evidence to support the moderating role of environmental hostility. Therefore, it is advised that in order to improve performance and raise their degrees of internationalisation, businesses should encourage greater levels of innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness while building human, social, and technological capacities.

Craig, Pohjola, Kraus and Jensen (2014) explored the relationships among Proactiveness, Risk-Taking and Innovation output In Family and Non-Family Firms and used data from a stratified sample of 2,227 firms contained in the Business Register of Statistics, Finland, to test the hypotheses. The sample was drawn from the full population of all firms with five or more employees and a random sample of the smaller firms. The survey targeted top management

team of the firms like chief executive officer, owner-manager through computer-aided telephone interviews. A total of 532 respondents representing a response rate of 23.9 percent were received. The main independent variable items were loaded into an exploratory factor analysis, which generated a two-factor result where neither of the factors accounted for the majority of the variance. Proactiveness, taking risks, and innovation output were found to have different associations in family-run businesses compared to non-family-run ones. In family businesses, innovation output is unaffected by risk-taking; nevertheless, in non-family organisations, innovation output is enhanced by risk-taking. This point was particularly highlighted. Likewise, innovative production is positively influenced by proactive family enterprises as opposed to proactive non-family firms.

3.0 Methodology

The cross sectional survey was utilized in this study and a population of 1200 SMEs were covered. A sample size of two hundred and ninety-one (291) respondents were drawn using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. The systematic sampling technique was utilized while employing copies of structured questionnaire in gathering data. Entrepreneurial intensity was measured using Proactivity and risk-taking while the criterion variable (corporate robustness) was measured using structural robustness and instrumental robustness. The items were rated on a 4-point likert scale which ranges from 1-strongly disagree to 4-strongly agree. The data were analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation so as to determine the relationship between the dimensions of entrepreneurial intensity with the measures of corporate robustness.

4.0 Result and Discussions

The analysis was based on total of 254 returned questionnaire out of the 291 distributed.

Table 1: Proactivity and Measures of Corporate Robustness

			Proactivity	Structural Robustness	Instrumental Robustness
Spearman's rho	Proactivity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.662	.594
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	254	254	254
	Structural Robustness	Correlation Coefficient	.662	1.000	.030
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.422
		N	254	254	254
	Instrumental Robustness	Correlation Coefficient	.594	.030	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.422	.
		N	254	254	254

The result depict a significant relationship between proactivity and structural robustness with P-value of 0.000 and rho value of 0.662. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected owing to the P-value was below 0.05. Furthermore, proactivity relate positively with instrumental robustness with

P-value of 0.00 less than 0.05. The null hypotheses for Ho1 and Ho2 were rejected and the alternate accepted.

Table 2: Risk-taking and Measures of Corporate Robustness

		Risk-taking	Structural Robustness	Instrumental Robustness	
Spearman's rho	Risk-taking	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.526	.659
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.001
		N	254	254	254
	Structural Robustness	Correlation Coefficient	.526	1.000	.030
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.232
		N	254	254	254
	Instrumental Robustness	Correlation Coefficient	.659	.030	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.232	.
		N	254	254	254

The outcome in table 2 shows that risk-taking has a significant relationship with structural robustness with P-value of 0.000 and rho of 0.526. The analysis also revealed a significant relationship between risk-taking and instrumental robustness with p-value of 0.000 less than 0.05 and rho value of 659. The null hypotheses were rejected and the alternate hypotheses were accepted.

Discussion of Findings

Creating a robust organization is essential in enhancing the general wellbeing of the organization. One of the factor that can help enhance the robustness of the organization is the level of entrepreneurial intensity. An increase in proactivity of the organization will subsequently help enhance the structural robustness of the organization. The correlation between proactivity with structural robustness and instrumental robustness is 0.662 and 0.594 respectively. The coefficient of determination was 0.439 and 0.353 respectively. This indicate that a unit change in proactivity will result in 43.9% variation in structural robustness and 35.3% in instrumental robustness. Similarly, the outcome also indicated that risk-taking relate positively with structural robustness which implies that when organization are able to take calculated risk, such will help boost the instrumental robustness of the organization. Similarly, the instrumental robustness of the organization can also be enhanced by the level of risk-taking of the organization. An entrepreneur who is good in taking calculated risk will enjoy high level of instrumental robustness. This findings agree with that of Urban and Sefalafala (2015) which observed that entrepreneurial intensity help in influencing the performance of corporate entities. This study also concurred with that of Craig, Pohjola, Kraus and Jensen (2014) which maintained that proactiveness, risk-taking and Innovation output of Firms do improve the fortune of the organization.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

A robust organization are able to stand the test of time and they are able to maintain high competitive advantage in the business domain. Improving robustness of Small and Medium Enterprises is thus essential for the organization to navigate tough and challenging times. For organizations to maintain high corporate robustness, such organization must ensure high entrepreneurial intensity in terms of risk taking and proactivity. This implies that organization that lack proactivity and risk taking ability are most likely to suffered setback in improving their robustness. Been robust help organization to easily absorb shock in the business domain and such ability to absorb shock can be enhanced when the entrepreneurial are proactive to environmental dynamism. In conclusion, improving proactivity and risk taking by entrepreneurs will help boost the corporate robustness of SMES in Rivers State. Hence, it is recommended that;

- i. The managers of the SMEs should be proactive to identify changes in the business domain and adapt to it so as to enhance the robustness of the organization.
- ii. The owner/managers of the SMEs should constantly look at for things that could benefit the organization and they should take advantage of the opportunities as such will help improve the structural robustness of the organization.
- iii. The entrepreneur should take calculated risk as such will help them stay agile and robust in the business domain.
- iv. The entrepreneurs should venture into unexploited terrains in the industry as such will enable them to stay robust and maintain a suitable position in the market.

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