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Effect of Covid-19 on Organizational Performance. A case of
Seawork Fish Processors (SFP), Walvis Bay, Namibia



Effect of Covid-19 on Organizational Performance. A case of Seawork Fish Processors (SFP), Walvis Bay, Namibia.

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to assess effect of Covid-19 on organizational performance at Seawork Fish Processor in Walvis Bay, Namibia.

Methodology: The study employed mixed-methods research design, gathering quantitative data from SFP's financial reports and questionnaires, complemented by qualitative data from face-to-face interviews. A total sample size of 338 respondents was used, based on a widely utilized descriptive study sample size estimation formula. Data from the questionnaires were captured using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. After data capture, the researcher analyzed the data using tables, graphs, and pie charts. Financial ratios were applied to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on organizational performance alongside the questionnaire responses.

Findings: The results revealed that SFP's profitability and efficiency in producing returns for shareholders suffered in 2019 but started to improve in 2020 and 2021. Based on the study's findings, companies could implement agile techniques, such as supply chain optimization, cost-cutting measures, and manufacturing process optimization, to efficiently manage comparable crises. It was also determined that investing in digital transformation and comprehensive risk management procedures enhances resilience and adaptation in the face of future challenges.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study offered empirical insights into how a fish processing company in Namibia responded to a global crisis, which advanced the idea of organizational resilience. It provided practical recommendations for firms like to adapt operations, mitigate risks, and enhance performance during disruptions. The findings were a valuable resource for industry associations, business consultants, and policymakers seeking to improve crisis navigation tactics from a policy viewpoint.

Keywords: COVID-19, Organizational Performance, Seawork Fish Processors (SFP)

JEL Codes: L25, M10, D22

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has had unprecedented global consequences, profoundly impacting various sectors, including business and industry. As the virus primarily affects the respiratory system (Velavan & Meyer, 2020), it has necessitated widespread public health interventions, such as lockdowns, social distancing, and travel restrictions, to curb its spread. Global Fishing Watch reported a 6.5% reduction in industrial fishing activity by April 2020 compared to previous years, a direct consequence of COVID-19-related restrictions and closures (Clavelle, 2020). In Namibia, the fishing industry is a crucial component of the economy, contributing significantly to the country's GDP and providing employment to thousands. However, the pandemic's impact on the Namibian fishing industry was severe. According to a study by Erasmus et al. (2021), the number of fishing trips in Namibia decreased from approximately 2,500 in 2019 to about 1,800 in 2020. This reduction in fishing activity led to a decline in total catches and fish processing, subsequently reducing the fishing sector's contribution to the GDP from 4% in 2019 to 3.9% in 2020 (Namibia Statistical Agency, 2020).

Despite these mixed outcomes, the pandemic underscored the importance of adaptability and resilience in the face of unprecedented challenges. In the fishing processing industry, companies that quickly adopted new processes, such as online sales channels, were better positioned to maintain their operations and enhance their performance. Governments also played a critical role by providing financial assistance, grants, and subsidies, which helped businesses survive the economic downturn (Hesketh & Cooper, 2019).

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the substantial body of research on the effects of COVID-19 on global business operations, there remains a critical gap in the literature concerning the specific impact of the pandemic on organizational performance within the Namibian fishing sector. While numerous studies have explored the broad economic consequences of the pandemic, including decreased demand, disrupted supply chains, and reduced revenues across various industries Naseer et al., (2023) and World Health Organization, (2020), there is a notable lack of empirical research focused on how these factors specifically affected organizational performance in small-scale fishing projects (SFP) in Namibia.

Most existing studies, such as those by Musheke and Phiri (2021) and Sa'adah and Rijanti (2022), have primarily examined general organizational performance metrics like employee-employer relationships, employee morale, and communication skills in non-pandemic contexts. However, these studies do not adequately address the unique challenges posed by the pandemic, particularly in the context of the fishing industry, which faces specific issues such as labor shortages, disrupted supply chains, and shifts in consumer demand.

Furthermore, while research by Erasmus et al. (2021) and the Namibia Statistical Agency (2020) provides valuable insights into the overall economic impact of COVID-19 on Namibia's fishing sector, these studies have not delved into the specific strategies that organizations like SFP implemented to mitigate the performance deficiencies caused by the pandemic. This leaves a significant gap in understanding the practical measures that can be employed to enhance organizational resilience and sustain performance in times of crisis.

This study aimed to fill these gaps by providing a detailed analysis of the factors that contributed to decreased organizational performance in the Namibian fishing sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also explored the strategies that organizations successfully employed to adjust their operations and improve performance. By focusing on a sector that has been underrepresented in existing literature, this research contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the pandemic's impact on organizational performance, offering valuable insights into both academic research and practical applications in crisis management within the fishing industry.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose section sought to review existing literature, aiming to fill the knowledge gap. The coronavirus infected the first person on November 17, 2019, in Wuhan City, as confirmed by the Chinese authorities. The cause could not be ascertained from that day; it had since been an unknown virus, initially and later given the name COVID-19, as it was spreading around the world from travelers originating from Wuhan City in China to all parts of the world. Others as contacts of the infected persons (Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020). On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a world-wide epidemic (WHO, 2020). COVID-19 has a multitude of effects, and among these are diminished organizational performance and dampened overall growth in the economy. Operational routines are disturbed during these extraordinary occasions (for example, COVID-19).

In the wake of this global turmoil, COVID-19 unfurled a tapestry of consequences, each strand weaving a tale of disrupted normalcy and economic downturn. Namibia was not isolated, and its impact on organizational performance was nothing short of devastating, casting a pall over growth trajectory and leaving local economies grappling with unprecedented challenges. The very fabric of fishing operational routines, once steadfast and predictable, was disrupted by the seismic shockwaves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The literature emphasizes the crucial influence of crises on organizations, specifically citing studies by Kahn, Barton, and Fellows (2013) and Wensley and Cegarra-Navarro (2015), which demonstrate substantial losses and the risk of collapse. Furthermore, it highlights the connection between organizational actions and the attainment of goals, as expressed by Julius, Nuugulu, and Homateni (2020), and examines the evaluation of organizational performance with respect to established objectives. Moreover, the UNDP (2020) emphasizes the correlation between organizational behaviors, activities, and goals. Kulkarni (2019) presents the cumulative capabilities hypothesis, which posits that the progressive enhancement of manufacturing

capabilities (namely cost, quality, flexibility, and delivery) is essential for generating sustainable performance improvement.

2.1 Theoretical Literature review

2.1.1 Crisis Management Theory

Crisis management can be applied to understand how organizations respond to and navigate through the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This framework explores the strategies, decision-making processes, and adaptive capabilities of organizations during crisis situations (Coombs, 2014). Crisis Management Theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organizational performance of a fish processing company. To understand how organizations deal with crises, such as those that impact public health, crisis management theory proves invaluable. Crisis Management Theory offers a unique perspective on the impact of COVID-19 on the durability of the fish processing industry.

Crisis Management Theory focuses on crisis preparedness mitigation planning. Within the fish processing industry, companies that had existing crisis management strategies demonstrated a better ability to mitigate the challenges caused by COVID-19. Such plans should include processes that focus on ensuring employee safety and well-being, increasing supply chain resilience, creating financial contingency plans, and maintaining communication channels with stakeholders (Coombs, 2014).

The ability to make quick and definitive decisions is important, and even more so in times of crisis. These decision-making skills are critical for organizational survival in the fish processing industry. This is especially important because these decisions must include making choices around human resources, supply chain issues, operational costs, financial decisions, and making tough choices regarding mitigating the impact of the pandemic (Helgason & Pálsson, 2020).

Organizations must be adaptive to allow them to respond to and recover from unexpected crises. This adaptiveness includes identifying potential challenges, adjusting accordingly, and implementing changes that are necessary in the fish processing industry. Adaptive capabilities include embracing fishing and sales technologies, innovating marketing and advertising processes, and introducing products that align with the changing market demands.

Communication is an integral component in maintaining trust and managing stakeholder expectations; hence, crisis management theory highlights the need for transparent, timely, and open communication. In the fish processing industry, clear channels of communication with human resources, suppliers, clients, and regulatory authorities are necessary to ensure continuous organizational improvement and compliance (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009).

Proponents of the crisis management theory suggest that problems present opportunities for earnings and resilience within organizations. Adaptable organizations learn from crises and improve their processes and strategies. Considering this, lessons can be learned from the pandemic,

leading to the diversification of supply chains, implementation of innovative technology solutions, and strategic risk management practices (Helgason & Pálsson, 2020).

2.1.2 Supply Chain Resilience Theory

The supply chain resilience theory examines the ability of supply chains to effectively manage and adapt to interruptions and uncertainty (Cohen et al., 2022). Resilience is more than simply returning to the original condition; it also involves acquiring knowledge, generating new ideas, and undergoing significant changes (Holling, 1973). Resilience encompasses several elements, including operational, strategic, financial, social, and environmental aspects (Christopher & Peck, 2004). The complexity and interconnection of supply chain networks also affect resilience. Resilience can be assessed using several metrics, including robustness, redundancy, modularity, variety, entropy, vulnerability, and fragility (Cohen et al., 2022).

Having a sustainable supply chain is a key component in the weathering of the impact of COVID-19 on fishing and other sectors. This framework enables organizations to assess their ability to anticipate, adapt, and recover from supply chain disruptions (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009). Supply chain resilience theory in the context of the fishing processing industry provides an opportunity to analyze organizations and their strategies for maintaining operational performance.

Supply chain resilience theory focuses on anticipating potential disruptions. In the fishing industry, COVID-19 has caused labor shortages, logistics problems, and changes in market demand.

In the fishing industry, these challenges include dependency on specific suppliers and limited contingency plans across the supply chain. Within this context, measuring the effect of coronavirus entails a thorough investigation to determine organizational vulnerabilities and to withstand future disruptions (Helgason & Pálsson, 2020).

Resilient supply chains are flexible and adaptable. The fishing processing industry had to adapt its operations abruptly because of the evolving market conditions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These adjustments have changed sourcing locations, distribution channels, and production (World Bank, 2020).

Supply chain resilience focuses on collaboration and building alliances with all relevant stakeholders. More specifically, within the fishing processing sector, these relationships include fishers, contractors, merchants, and retailers for the successful logistics of raw materials, sustaining market access, and meeting customer needs during the pandemic. In this context, resilient supply chains learn from changes to enhance their future performance (World Bank 2020).

The theoretical foundation of this study examined several perspectives, such as the Crisis Management Theory, Supply Chain Resilience Theory. These perspectives were used to gain insights into how organizations in the fish processing industry responded to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1.3 Analysis of Empirical Studies:

Pálsson and Helgason (2020) studied the impacts of COVID-19 on the seafood industry. Icelandic Fisheries Laboratories Report, 2020/040 provides insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the seafood industry, including the fishing-processing sector. It discusses challenges related to market demand, supply chain disruptions, and the financial performance of organizations.

Zhao and Gao (2021) also studied the COVID-19 impacts on the seafood industry in the United State. This study examines the effects of COVID-19 on the seafood industry from a global value chain perspective. This highlights disruptions in the fishing processing sector and their implications for organizational performance. Additionally, FAO. (2021) investigated the impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) provided an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. It discusses the challenges faced by organizations, policy responses, and measures to mitigate the impact.

Moreover, Ali, Liu, and Zeb (2020) looked at the impact of COVID-19 on organizational performance and the mediating role of employees' uncertainty and fear. This study examines the mediating role of employee uncertainty and fear in the relationship between COVID-19 and organizational performance. This suggests that higher levels of uncertainty and fear among employees led to lower organizational performance during the pandemic. Barua, Venkatesh, and Desai (2020) probed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy, focusing on SMEs and rural livelihoods. This study focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and rural livelihoods. It highlights the challenges faced by these sectors and their subsequent effects on organizational performance.

Further, Bartik et al. (2020) examined the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses' outcomes and expectations. Another study by Belas et al. (2021) analyzed the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of SMEs. This study scrutinized the impact of the pandemic on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), examining the financial, operational, and strategic challenges faced by these organizations and their subsequent effects on performance. Budría and Swedberg (2020) examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on subjective well-being and its implications for organizational performance.

In a recent study, De La Fuente et al. (2021) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on business and organizational psychology. It explored psychological factors such as stress, burnout, and job satisfaction, and their effects on employee well-being and organizational performance. Hu and Liu (2020) looked at understanding the impact of COVID-19 on employee work stress. Their findings highlight the importance of managing employee stress levels to maintain productivity and organizational effectiveness.

The study done by De Vincenzi et al. (2022) examined the impact of COVID-19 on remote working. Exploring the difficulties of remote work, this study reveals that it has a negative effect

on organizational performance. This is because of obstacles in communication, less cooperation, and an increase in employee cuts.

Gurbuz et al. (2023) highlighted the negative outcomes of the pandemic on global supply chain risks. The study highlighted the negative impact of interruptions, such as delays, rising expenses, and difficulties in acquiring materials, on organizational performance, hindering both output and profitability. Musella's (2023) study corroborated these results, highlighting extensive disruptions in global manufacturing operations, specifically in Asia, where lockdown measures resulted in the closure of factories, leading to substantial delays and shortages in vital sectors, such as healthcare, automotive, and microchip manufacturing.

Bieńkowska et al. (2022) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a decrease in employee motivation, contentment, and commitment, which has had a negative influence on both work performance and organizational performance. McKinsey's findings in 2021 also emphasized the impact of pandemic-related disruptions on work experience, leading to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and reduced engagement. In addition, Sari et al. (2021) showed that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the efficacy of transformational leadership and remote work in relation to employee performance.

Kianto et al. (2021) looked at unlocking the future and how COVID-19 was a turning point in enhancing organizational resilience. This study explored the role of COVID-19 as a turning point in enhancing organizational resilience. It examines the strategies and capabilities organizations have developed during the pandemic to navigate uncertainty, adapt to change, and improve long-term performance. Leal-Rodríguez, Leal-Millán, and Roldán (2020) examined the role of absorptive capacity and organizational learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

Conversely, studies by Bailey and Kurland (2020) show that COVID-19 has led to improved organizational performance due to the advantages derived from new policies that emerged during the pandemic, such as working from home. They argued that it brought about flexibility, convenience, autonomy, trust empowerment, and increased overall productivity. With travel restrictions and disruptions in international supply chains, there has been growing emphasis on supporting local and domestic industries. This shift in consumer behavior has presented opportunities for fishing-processing companies to cater to the increased demand for locally sourced fish and seafood products.

Moreover, Blumberg and Luke (2020) examined wireless substitution; their study analyzed wireless substitution trends in communication tools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides insights into the adoption of remote communication technologies as organizations adapt to new ways of operating and their impact on organizational performance.

Diab (2022) conducted research that examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on many aspects of organizational procedures, such as accounting, management accountability, control, and social responsibility. The study emphasizes the significance of considering the impact of the pandemic on both the financial and non-financial dimensions of organizational performance. The

study further discovered that implementing CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic might lead to favorable employee-level benefits, such as bolstering self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism.

In a study by Qadri et al. (2023), the financial performance of businesses in South Asia's banking sector was analyzed both before and during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research utilized various financial parameters to evaluate banks' profitability, liquidity, solvency, and efficiency. The findings indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted banks' financial performance, while technological advancements positively influenced organizational performance. This chapter explores the literature on the relationship between COVID-19 and organizational performance, a topic marked by uncertainty and lack of consensus. It integrates theoretical literature with empirical studies to examine this intricate relationship.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

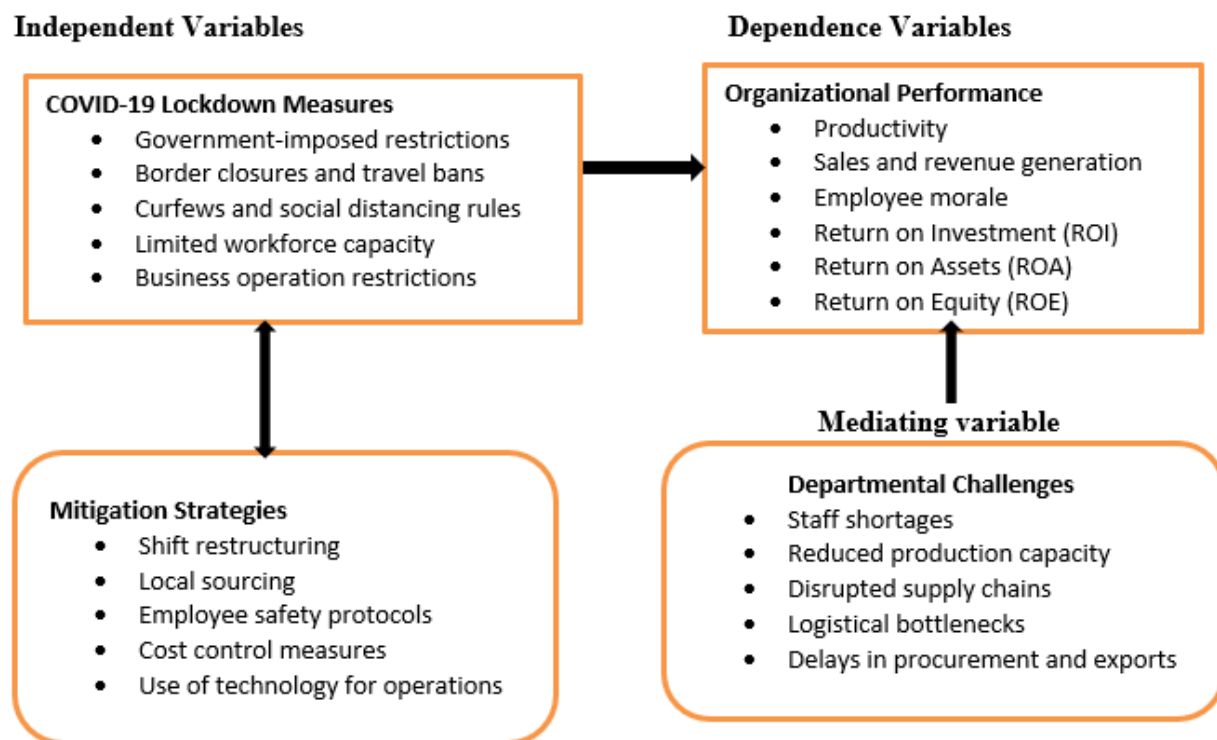


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2023)

2.3 Research Gaps

While the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted industries globally, there remains a lack of localized, sector-specific analysis in developing nations, such as Namibia, particularly in the critical fishing and fish processing sector. Existing research often examines broad economic impacts, neglecting detailed firm-or departmental insights. This study addresses these gaps by exploring the pandemic's impact on Seawork Fish Processors (SFP) in Walvis Bay, using Crisis

Management and Supply Chain Resilience Theories to provide a strong theoretical framework. It also adopts a mixed-method approach to combine quantitative data with qualitative perspectives to deliver a comprehensive view. By focusing on challenges within specific units and offering actionable strategies, this research not only deepens understanding but also enhances organizational preparedness for future disruptions.

3.0 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study followed a convergent parallel mixed research design using both quantitative and qualitative research methods at the same time. The total population size was 2800 employees. All selected employees worked onsite at the SFP in Walvis Bay, Namibia. The total sample size of 338 respondents was adapted by the study. The questionnaire was one of the primary research instruments used in this study. The questionnaire contained a list of open-ended and closed-ended questions for which the respondents' provided answers. Furthermore, to maintain focus and clarity while discussing important topics that the questionnaire did not cover, the researcher used an interview guide. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analyses to assess the impact of COVID-19 on organizational performance in Namibia's fishing sector. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and Excel, incorporating financial statement analysis with key accounting ratios (ROE, ROA, and ROCE) from 2019 to 2021 to evaluate profitability and financial stability. Thematic content analysis, facilitated by Atlas.ti, was used to identify patterns in the qualitative data, complementing the quantitative findings. By combining statistical evaluation and thematic analysis, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of COVID-19's effects on business resilience and financial performance.

4.0 FINDINGS

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted Seawork Fish Processors (SFP), as evidenced by the survey results and financial indicators. The company faced major operational hurdles, particularly in maintaining employee morale, ensuring supply chain efficiency, and sustaining productivity levels. The survey, with its high response rate of 57% shown by *Table 1*, provided a comprehensive view of the situation, with female respondents constituting the majority *Fig 1*, reflecting the industry's typical gender composition. The impact of the pandemic varied across different departments within SFP, suggesting that some units were more resilient or adaptable than others. Despite these challenges, most respondents reported a relatively modest revenue decline of 0-20%, indicating that the company managed to maintain a degree of financial stability during the crisis as represented by *Table 2*.

SFP's response to the pandemic challenges was multifaceted and largely effective. The company implemented various strategies, including cost-cutting measures, technological investments, and employee training programs as indicated in *Table 3*. These initiatives were well received by the respondents, who rated them as highly effective. Particularly noteworthy were the company's efforts in digital transformation and capacity-building, which received the highest effectiveness ratings. This perspective likely stems from the recognition that digital solutions enable remote

work, online sales, and efficient communication, allowing businesses to adapt to the challenges and limitations imposed by crises (Zhao & Gao, 2021). The positive impact of these strategies is further corroborated by the steady improvement in financial metrics such as Return on Assets (ROA), Return on Equity (ROE), and Return on Investment (ROI) from 2019 to 2021. This upward trend in financial performance, despite the challenging economic environment, underscores the effectiveness of SFP's resilience efforts and indicates the company's potential for long-term viability and growth in the post-pandemic era.

Table 1: Response Rate

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Returned	185	57
Unreturned	139	43
Total	324	100

Note. Frequency refers to the number of questionnaires returned or not returned.

Table 2: Fall in Revenue During Covid-19

Estimated Fall (%)	% of respondents
0-20	65
21-40	24
41-60	7
61-80	4
Total	100

Note. Percentages represent estimated revenue decline as reported by respondents during Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Effectiveness Of Mitigation Strategies Used During COVID-19

Strategy	Mean	STD
Remote work arrangements	3.211	1.431
Strengthening communication channels	3.049	1.411
Diversifying product/service offerings	3.141	1.247
Enhancing employee training and development	3.590	1.371
Collaborating with other organizations	3.212	1.408
Implementing cost-cutting measure	3.659	1.458
Investing in technology and digital transformation	3.778	1.441

Note SD = Standard deviation. Ratings are based on a Likert scale measuring perceived effectiveness where higher value indicates greater effectiveness

*Fig. 1 Gender Distribution of Respondent*

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study highlights the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of the seafood processing industry (SFP), highlighting the need for employee well-being and organizational agility. Key issues include reduced worker morale, remote work difficulties, and adapting to changing consumer behavior. Despite a decline in revenue, the financial analysis showed resilience, cost-cutting measures, and increased demand. The study recommends a comprehensive strategy for SFP, including investing in technology, implementing cost-saving measures, enhancing staff training, promoting telecommuting, and diversifying suppliers. This approach emphasizes the importance of employee development and adaptability for long-term performance and resilience during crises.

5.2 Recommendations

Lockdown measures have primarily affected employee morale, highlighting the need for businesses to prioritize well-being initiatives like mental health support. Cross-departmental collaboration and continuous training programs are recommended to improve adaptability and workforce competence. Regular monitoring of key performance indicators, such as ROA, ROE, and ROI, is advised to ensure long-term profitability. Diversifying supply chains and developing a resilient procurement strategy are also recommended. Adaptive technology integration, such as remote work tools, secure communication channels, and data protection, is a key mitigation strategy.

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Conflicts of Interest Declaration.

The authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist in relation to this publication. The study was conducted independently, without any financial, professional, or personal influence that could have impacted the research process or its outcomes.



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