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COVID-19 and business continuity management: a case of Pakistan, contributing to mixed methods research

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and increasing competition have enforced businesses to develop ways to avoid disruptions and continuing business operations in all situations. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 throughout the world is far above expectations, for which the existing business continuity plans with the organizations around the world are lagging behind. This study has tried to find a link between COVID-19 and existing business continuity management systems available with the organizations in Pakistan, being a developing country. Moreover, relationships among employee satisfaction, BCP and health provisions in BCM have also been identified through the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Hence, this study is a Contribution to Mixed Methods Research.

Key Words: COVID-19, Business Continuity, Employee Satisfaction, Employee Training, Pakistan and Mixed Methods in Research.

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I. Introduction

Business continuity and disaster recovery plans do not directly contribute to profit. Furthermore, they add a cost for the organization. However, these are vital for the long-term sustainability of business (Jorrigala, 2018). Performance of Jordanian banks and financial institutions improved after application of business continuity management (BCM) therein. Hence, the BCM should be considered a tool of risk management rather than an essential practice to improve organizational performance, supporting increasing profits (Sawalha, 2013). Small businesses are a significant segment of Pakistan's economy. However, they were not usually having business continuity plans in place and were not prepared for the disasters and unexpected circumstances, including natural calamities. Hence, necessary support should be provided by all related agencies in terms of both training as well as financial support (Asgary et al., 2012).

The lack of necessary preparations to deal with the troublemaking events may expose organizations to severe consequences that may not be reverted. Therefore, Business Continuity Plan is a strategic framework that starts from the phase of business impact analysis for various products, assesses risks for the same, and prepares a BCP accordingly (Soufi et al., 2018). The risks in businesses enhanced after being more open to the world and being more dependent on its counterparts. Moreover, external dependencies also increased due to an upsurge on dependence over information technology. However, the recent occurrence and outburst of COVID-19 are far above expectations for which the existing business continuity plans with the organizations around the world need reforms. This pandemic obligated the businesses to let employees continue working from their homes. Nevertheless, most businesses in Pakistan, being a developing country, do not have the required equipment and capabilities to do the same. Hence, this study discusses the outbreak of COVID-19 related to the existing business continuity strategies of various organizations in Pakistan.

This research aims to identify the presence, awareness and status of business continuity planning in various sectors of Pakistan's economy. This identification will help determine a line of action to be taken to improve business continuity management in organizations to enhance employee satisfaction and resultant organizational performance.

II. Materials and Methods

This study analyzes the status of business continuity management in multiple sectors of Pakistan's economy during the COVID-19 outbreak. Mixed Methods Research is undoubtedly supportive in all the researches containing behavioral aspects. Hence, it often gets impossible to rely on either the quantitative or only qualitative aspects to draw fair conclusions in such cases. Therefore, this research makes a valuable contribution to mixed methods research under the field of management sciences. Earlier studies related to business continuity and disaster recovery management in organizations have been thoughtfully reviewed for analyses. Moreover, the researcher has also collected responses from 92 individuals working in different sectors of Pakistan's economy through closed-ended survey questionnaires to validate findings from earlier studies and link the same with current pandemic of COVID-19. This survey has been conducted during the period from May 11, 2020, up till July 31, 2020. Though it was an open study for all provinces of Pakistan, about 95% responses have been received from Sindh and only 5% from Punjab. No responses could be collected from the other two provinces of Pakistan. Therefore, this work can mainly analyze the BCP during COVID-19 in the province of Sindh and some extent in Punjab.

III. Results and Discussion

Discussion over pertinent studies

The detailed discussions of the earlier studies clearly propose business continuity management in all types of businesses and organizations. Fani and Subriadi (2019) evaluated the framework for business continuity plan that may be useful for various businesses. They provide a framework to maintain business continuity plans as well as to modify the same with changing needs and circumstances. These studies also highlight the importance of learning from the events that occurred and caused massive disruptions due to the absence of an appropriate business continuity management system in organizations. This fact has also been highlighted by Soufi et al. (2018).

Demographics

The data collected from individuals working in diverse sectors of economy in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, where response sharing from Sindh is ninety five percent. While looking at the demographics of these individuals, male and female responses are 62% and 31% respectively with 55% being married.

Economic sector and job positioning

The major share of respondents belongs to banking (49%) and education/literacy (19%). The remaining 32% belongs from the other sectors of the economy of Pakistan including leasing, insurance, automobile assembler, cable and electrical goods, chemicals, engineering, fertilizers, food and personal care products, glass and ceramics, pharmaceuticals, refinery, communication, textiles, transport and real estate. Almost ninety percent of people working in the above mentioned sectors of

Pakistan’s economy are from officer to executive levels, whereas only ten percent are below the officer level. The majority of the individuals who became part of this study require their physical presence at the workplace, while only two percent individuals are exempted from the condition of physical existence. Moreover, 37% of the total respondents never worked from home even in the lockdown situation due to COVID-19. Now, why most of the employees are required to be present at workplaces physically despite the massive technological progress globally? That is why it was challenging to work under pandemic for around 65% of the selected individuals.

Responses obtained from education/literacy

A considerable (44%) of the individuals (who either do not have an idea of BCP existence at their organization or the BCP does not exist in their organizations) pertains to the education/literacy sector that highlights another doubt on the state of literacy in the country.

Risk coverage in BCP

Business continuity plans are prepared in various organizations. Nevertheless, they are mostly concerned with the incidents related to fire, flood, theft and some technological disorders. It is essential to make immediate decisions when any situation of disaster occurs. It may be possible if a well-organized structure is available. Hence, community awareness about the disaster risk factors contributes to the reduction of the disaster risk (Alam et al., 2015). Taking on the disaster risk reduction strategy has been considered to be the preeminent method to transform disaster into development. The measures that are acquired for this strategy often bring surprising benefits even if the disasters do not occur (Palliyaguru et al., 2008). It has been observed that the organizations where BCPs exist are not much concerned about the health crises. Even the seven percent of responding organizations do not include health crises in their BCP.

BCP Trainings in organizations

The below depiction reflects that on average, all staff and even the selected/essential staff are trained for BCP sometimes. Less often, the employees are trained regularly (Table 01).

Table 01. BCP trainings in organizations

	N	Mean
Training to all Staff	92	3.4348
Training to selected staff	92	3.3696

Employee’s job satisfaction level

On average, the employees are neither much satisfied nor dissatisfied with their job (Table 02).

Table 02. Employee’s job satisfaction level

	N	Mean
Employee satisfaction level	92	2.7500

Furthermore, the below portrayal identifies that there is a significant positive correlation of job satisfaction with the existence of BCP plan in organizations and the provision for health crises in these BCP Plans (Table 03).

Table 03. Employees job satisfaction, health risk and BCP

		Employee satisfaction level	Health risk coverage in BCP	Existence of BCP plan in organization
Employee satisfaction level	Pearson Correlation	1	.389**	.366**
Health risk coverage in BCP	Pearson Correlation	.389**	1	.330**
Existence of BCP plan in organization	Pearson Correlation	.366**	.330**	1
	N	92	92	92

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

IV. Conclusion

Improved business continuity management enhances employees' trust and the customers in organization that improves work performance and profitability. This continuity is required in all types of organizations, whether product-based or service-based businesses. This study's results portray a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction, the existence of a business continuity management system in organizations, and the inclusion of the provision for health crises in this system. Most of the organizations (mostly banks and educational institutions) in our study do have BCPs. However, it has been observed that there is substantial lack of required awareness and trainings of staff for the same. Moreover, these plans do not have the capacity to handle issues like COVID pandemic. This is the reason why it could not be possible to manage work from home by most of the employees in banks. Various problems concerning the technological deficiencies and required literacy for the use of available technology have been observed.

In view of the above findings, the following are being suggested related to BCP for organizations, specifically the financial institutions and the literacy sectors of Pakistan.

- Updating Business Continuity Plans in organizations and immediate inclusion of health crises and related pandemic in the business continuity plans as suggested by some researchers, for instance; [Nainwal and Awasthi, 2015](#).
- Enhanced trainings and awareness to employees related to business continuity. This training should also include the ways to use available technological resources.
- Finding new ways/technology to handle such a situation onwards is possible through learning from other countries who managed operations without employees' physical presence at workplaces, even in complete lockdowns.

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