

Business imitations: the dearth of creativity and/or innovation? A case study of the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article which is from a larger study originally conducted to investigate why businesses in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe tended to imitate one another, sought to find out whether business imitations were an indication of the dearth of creativity and/or innovation.

Using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, 30 micro and small business entrepreneurs in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province were selected to participate in the study. The study employed a qualitative approach which used face to face in-depth interviews for data collection. Thematic coding was employed for data analysis where similarities and patterns from the data around the phenomenon of business imitations were identified.

Results revealed that by imitating one another's business ideas, micro and small entrepreneurs showed that they lacked creativity skills which entail coming up with original ideas. However, they were able to add value to the existing business ideas, an indication of innovation.

The study recommended that the government should create a conducive environment with adequate infrastructure; formulate appropriate policies on educational and skills development and provide requisite resources for the development of creativity and harnessing of innovation skills, to enable micro and small entrepreneurs to survive the global competition.

Key phrases

conducive, creativity, dearth, innovation

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of shrinking formal job opportunities seems to have gripped most economies resulting in closures and restructuring of companies and high levels of unemployment. In Zimbabwe, this phenomenon has led to an increase in the number of necessity entrepreneurs as the country goes through prolonged economic challenges. Between 2000 and 2008, Zimbabwe was hit by an economic meltdown that saw the real

gross domestic product (GDP) shrink by more than 54% (Kwaramba & Makochekeanwa 2009:8; Thornycroft 2006:1). These economic woes are not yet over as the trend of company closures still persists (Musonza 2015:1). The country is experiencing a severe liquidity crisis that has forced Zimbabwean banks to introduce stringent cash management systems including limiting maximum cash withdrawals and switching off some of their automated teller machines (ATMs) (Harare Bureau/Chronicle Reporter 2016:Internet). The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe has since introduced bond notes in an attempt to curb the cash crisis (Kazunga & Netsianda 2016:Internet).

2. BACKGROUND

Bulawayo, the focus of this study is Zimbabwe's second largest city and it has not been spared either. According to Ndlovu (2015:Internet), Bulawayo which was once hailed as Zimbabwe's industrial hub has been brought down to its knees by years of economic marginalisation with company closures becoming a phenomenon in the city. In a bid to survive, most of the affected people have turned to entrepreneurship to create self-employment (Maunganidze 2013:2), thereby fuelling cut-throat competition.

Okpara (2007:9) asserts that in a competitive business environment there is a need to seek out new opportunities and innovate. Without innovation an enterprise and what it provides quickly become obsolete. Baradello and Salazzaro (2012:58) contend that the easiest route becomes that of business imitation as there is less risk of failure in imitation. The question that immediately comes to mind is, "What is business imitation?" According to Pianna (2004:1), imitation is the conscious or unconscious behaviour of copying others and is an effective way of saving time and attention in decision-making and can arise from risk aversion. Schlag (2011:1) asserts that imitation is the most common way of learning. The product or service being imitated will already have been tested in the market and issues of customer adoption will already have been dealt with (Okpara 2007:9). Levitt (1966:1) acknowledges that imitation is a more prevalent road to business growth and profits. Brondoni (2012:12) affirms that in these years, global imitation is fairly common and many big companies in the global world have imitated and succeeded.

Lieberman and Asaba (2004:3) posit that imitation is prevalent and it is a common form of behaviour in business domains and in environments characterised by uncertainty or ambiguity. The proliferation of business imitations in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, has resulted in fierce competition which has brought about the need for creativity and innovation for these businesses to remain afloat.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Creativity and innovation are at the heart of the spirit of the enterprise (Babu, Krishna & Swathi 2013:113). In the face of global competition, coupled with the harsh economic environment in which businesses in Zimbabwe operate, there is need for creative and innovative micro and small entrepreneurs who will be able to meet the ever-changing customers' tastes and preferences. Okpara (2007:5) opines that businesses that survive in a competitive environment are those that are innovative.

However, at the rate at which micro and small entrepreneurs in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province are imitating one another's business ideas, one wonders whether there is any creativity and innovation to talk about. Bearing in mind the importance of creativity and innovation to business success, it is crucial to investigate whether the prevalence of this phenomenon in the poultry, hair salon, events management and hospitality, transport, motor mechanics and car wash businesses is an indication of lack of creativity and/or innovation.

Findings of such a study would inform policymakers in formulating appropriate educational and skills development policies in order to equip micro and small entrepreneurs with relevant creativity and innovation skills. Possession of the afore-said skills would help in the resuscitation of the ailing business industry in Zimbabwe generally and Bulawayo in particular. Mbizi, Hove, Thondlana and Kakava (2013:370) assert that many SMEs in Zimbabwe fail due to entrepreneurs' lack of among other challenges, innovation.

4. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to determine whether business imitations by micro and small entrepreneurs were a sign of the dearth of creativity and/or innovation so as to proffer

recommendations for the development of policies to foster creativity and innovation skills in micro and small entrepreneurs. Such policies would not only benefit the entrepreneurs themselves but the Zimbabwean economy as well.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to find out whether business imitations by micro and small entrepreneurs in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, were an indication of the dearth of creativity and/or innovation.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity and innovation are significant to enterprises as they trigger and propel them in new directions dictated by market conditions and customer preferences. The value of creativity and innovation is to actively search for opportunities to do new things and to do existing things in extra ordinary ways (Babu *et al.* 2013:113). Entrepreneurship is the vehicle that drives creativity and innovation (Babu *et al.* 2013:113; O'Sullivan 2008:5). The afore-said therefore imply that for businesses to create competitive advantages to meet the ever-changing customers' tastes and preferences requires creativity and innovation skills. A creative economy is the latest developmental stage in global economic restructuring and numerous countries have emphasised competitive advantage by creativity and innovation (Yung Feng 2013:679). At this juncture it thus becomes imperative to explain the terms "creativity", "innovation" and to further explore the concept of "imitation" in order to contextualise the study.

6.1 Creativity

According to Antonites (2014:62) there is no conclusive definition of the term *creativity*. Okpara (2007:2-3) defines creativity as coming up with new ideas, bringing into existence a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form that was not previously available in its present state. Babu *et al.* (2013:113) agree that creativity is the ability to create something through imaginative skills and to invent into a new form,

something new. O'Sullivan (2008:5) concurs that creativity entails a level of originality and novelty that is essential for innovation.

Although there is no single definition of creativity, the underlying fact is that creativity is the ability to make or bring into existence something that never existed before. It is in this context that perhaps business imitations are viewed as an indication of the dearth of creativity because of the failure to come up with original ideas.

6.2 Innovation

In contrast, O'Sullivan (2008:5) explains *innovation* as the process of making changes, large and small, radical and incremental, to products, processes and services that results in the introduction of something new for the organisation and contributes to the knowledge of the organisation. O'Sullivan (2008:5) further contends that innovation is adding value to customers and the assumption is that naturally customers who experience added value will continue to use the product, process or service.

Okpara (2007:2) defines innovation as adding something new to an existing product or process. The product or process will have already been created from scratch and has worked reasonably well. When it is changed so that it performs in a better way or fulfils a different need, there is innovation on what already exists. The same author further asserts that innovation is the basis of all competitive advantages and addition of value to customers.

Drucker (1985:107) sees innovation as the specific tool of entrepreneurship and regards innovation as a process by which entrepreneurs successfully exploit business ideas into marketable opportunities. To Poole (2006:v) innovation simply means novelty, new things being done, or old things being done in new ways.

A study by Mbizi *et al.* (2013:370) on the role played by innovation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs)' sustainability in the manufacturing sector in Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, found innovation to be one of the major attributes which aids SMEs to remain competitive.

The implication is that to sustain their businesses, entrepreneurs should continuously innovate and replace existing products, processes and services with more effective ones. Conclusively, there is no innovation without creativity. Innovation creates new demand and

entrepreneurs bring the innovation into the market. It is the presence of innovation that distinguishes the entrepreneur from the others (Babu *et al.* 2013).

6.3 Business imitation

Milan, Iryna, and Karl (2014:105), like Pianna (2004:1) and Schlag (2011:1), explain imitation as the search for new ideas and a permanent copy that enriches innovation and makes it acceptable. Imitators' work is based on the market reaction to the initial innovation and the process of copying is often accompanied by functional improvement of original ideas.

Levitt (1966:1) argues that the world increasingly worships innovation, yet the road to success could also lie in imitation. Levitt (1966:1) further asserted that a simple look around shows that imitation is not only more abundant than innovation but actually a much more prevalent road to business growth and profits. Shenkar (2010:2) concurs and further posits that even giant economies like China owe their dramatic growth to their consummate talent as imitators. Brondoni (2012:13) contends that imitation has been driven by competition, increased technological advances and accelerating cycles of customer preferences.

The general perceptions of anecdotal evidence are that imitations by micro and small entrepreneurs are a sign of dearth of creativity and/ or innovation because entrepreneurs' ideas are not original. In Zimbabwe, the economic meltdown which intensified between 2007 and 2009 before dollarisation saw many people imitate one another's business ideas and that has subjected micro and small entrepreneurs to an environment of survival of the fittest.

Nieman, Hough and Nieuwenhuizen (2008:47) assert that when a business is created, it competes with one or the other corporate giant's products or services. One of the ways individuals cope and overcome both foreseen and unforeseen obstacles is through creative behaviour. Creative behaviour and thinking lead to innovative actions and processes. It is the researcher's view that in order for micro and small businesses in Zimbabwe to survive the fierce competition, they have to create competitive advantages by being creative and innovative. Perhaps by engaging in business ideas similar to each other, micro and small businesses show signs of a lack of creativity and/or innovation, skills which are fundamental to entrepreneurship.

6.4 General barriers to creativity

While creativity and innovation are crucial for business success, there are barriers that entrepreneurs face. This is confirmed by Lieberman and Asaba (2004:3) who postulate that uncertain and ambiguous environments have a negative impact on the development of creativity and innovation skills.

Antonites (2014:66-7) alludes to the afore-said and mentions that the various barriers to creativity are namely, environmental, cultural and perceptual. Environmental barriers include the social, economic and physical environments. These may promote or inhibit creative thinking. Despite the various barriers to creativity, this study specifically focused on the economic barriers. The reason for this focus was largely influenced by the depressed economic growth in Zimbabwe as highlighted earlier.

Antonites (2014:66) further postulates that the economic environment may create barriers where: (1) the economy in general is not conducive to the development of new ideas and products; (2) there are no growth prospects in the economy; (3) no financial support is available for the development of new products; (4) risk-taking is seen as a negative element of the economy; and (5), there are no rewards for new and feasible ideas. These are the reasons why the literature review in this study focused on the economic environment as having a negative impact on the development of creativity and innovation skills.

6.5 Barriers to innovation

Bobera (nd:Internet) asserts that barriers to innovation have a negative influence on the process of starting a new project, its implementation and development. This is why it is important to identify and analyse those barriers which negatively influence new product development or modification in order to create valid business strategies to minimise their negative influence. According to Bobera (nd:Internet), a study by Demirbas on barriers to innovation in Turkey revealed that lack of government and Research and Development technological policy, high cost of innovation, lack of appropriate finance, lack of qualified personnel and market conditions are some of the barriers.

6.6 An overview of the situation in Zimbabwe

The economic environment in Zimbabwe, has the potential of discouraging creativity due to the following reasons:

Firstly, there are no incentives for creating new products and services because of the possibility of failing to get customers. This is because there is a serious liquidity crisis that has limited consumers' spending power (Harare Bureau/ Chronicle Reporter 2016:Internet).

Secondly, products from China and South Africa are cheaper compared to those produced in Zimbabwe; therefore people are bound to compare prices and decide to buy from where their money would get them more (Tshandu & Ndlovu 2016:Internet).

There have been attempts to provide funds to the tune of \$40 million to resuscitate depressed companies in Zimbabwe, by the Government of Zimbabwe in partnership with Old Mutual through what is popularly known as the Distressed Industries and Marginalised Areas Fund (DiMAF). However, the funds have been far too little to bring about any meaningful impact (Matshazi 2014:Internet). Taking cognisance of the economic environment that has been exposed, risk- taking would certainly be seen as a negative element of the economy.

Therefore, the Zimbabwean environment fits in well with the topic under study as it is unstable economically; an environment Lieberman and Asaba (2004:3) opine to be conducive to business imitations. This again is the environment which Antonites (2014:89-90) says inhibits creativity and innovation skills. It was in the context of an unstable economic environment that business imitations and issues of creativity and innovation by micro and small entrepreneurs were studied.

7. METHODOLOGY

This article was based on empirical data collected from a field study in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe. Bulawayo was the selected case study because it was once known as the industrial hub of Zimbabwe but is now home to micro and small imitated businesses.

7.1 Research design

The study undertook a qualitative approach influenced by the nature of the topic where the researcher wanted to gain insights into participants' perceptions, feelings, experiences, motivations and attitudes about the phenomena under study (Cooper and Schindler 2008:162). Qualitative research is concerned with collecting in-depth information by asking the 'why' questions (Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima & Haider 2011:2082). Further to that, Cresswell (2003:22) contends that if a concept or phenomena needs to be understood because little research has been done on it, then it merits a qualitative approach. It is upon the afore-said basis that this approach was selected because the researcher did not come across any such studies in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

7.2 Population and sample

The true number of micro and small entrepreneurs who have imitated one another's business ideas in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province is unknown as no proper research has been conducted to determine the actual number. This gap raises the need for further research to determine the true number of micro and small businesses that are imitating one another. Such research would serve as a sampling framework for future research on businesses that are imitating one another. Based on anecdotal information, there should be approximately 100 micro and small entrepreneurs in the areas of focus in this study namely; poultry breeding, hair salons, events management and hospitality, transport, motor mechanics and car wash micro and small businesses. These particular businesses were chosen on the basis of the prevalence of imitations.

Therefore, the number of 30 micro and small entrepreneurs who participated in this study were deemed adequate by the researcher to provide an in-depth and qualitative understanding of the topic as statistical representativeness was not the main concern but rather the generation of in-depth knowledge. Furthermore, Cooper and Schindler (2008:169) and Joubish *et al.* (2011:2082) assert that sample sizes for qualitative research vary by technique but are generally small because the idea is to gather data which provides depth and detail of events, situations and interactions between people.

The 30 micro and small entrepreneurs who participated in this study were compiled by the researcher using the snowball sampling technique. According to Cooper and Schindler (2008:170), snowball sampling is where participants refer researchers to others who have characteristics, experiences, or attitudes similar to or different from their own. With the snowball sampling approach, the researcher makes initial contact with people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses those to establish contacts with others. In this particular study, the identification of one imitating micro and small entrepreneur led to the other. Purposive sampling technique was also utilised where specific sectors were targeted and respondents would refer the researcher to their colleagues (Bryman 2012:202, 418).

7.3 Data collection

An interview guide with open ended questions was used for data collection. According to Creswell (2003:9), qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that participants can express their views. The data collecting instrument was developed by the researcher who also conducted the interviews. The 30 micro and small entrepreneurs in this study were coded as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Type of businesses and number of respondents

Type of business	Number of respondents
Poultry Breeding (PB)	5
Hair Salon (HS)	5
Events Management and Hospitality (EMH)	5
Transport (T)	5
Motor Mechanics (MM)	5
Car Wash (CW)	5
Total	30

Source: Primary data obtained from the empirical study

The researcher had five respondents in each type of business for control purposes and because after the fifth respondent for each type of business, no new data emerged (Cooper & Schindler 2008:169). Data were analysed according to themes. Similarities and patterns from the data around the phenomenon of business imitations, creativity and innovation were identified.

7.4 Ethical considerations

Before the empirical study was conducted, ethical clearance had to be sought from the University of South Africa, where the researcher is affiliated. The face-to-face in-depth interviews were initiated by explaining to the 30 micro and small entrepreneurs the purpose of the study and how the study would be conducted. The participants were further informed that the data collection was scheduled to take an hour since it was in-depth. It was made clear to the participants that taking part in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study without penalty. The participants were also assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of the research study. After showing willingness to participate, the entrepreneurs signed voluntary consent forms. In-depth interviews were held with all of them and there were no withdrawals (Bryman 2012:135-143).

7.5 Data analysis

The thematic coding approach was used for the analysis of the collected qualitative data. According to Robson (2011:467), thematic coding approach is a generic approach whereby all or parts of the data are coded and labelled. Codes with the same labels are grouped together as themes. Thematic coding analysis in this particular study was done in order to discern the similarities and patterns around the phenomenon of business imitations.

8. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main objective of the study was to find out whether business imitations by micro and small entrepreneurs in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe were an indication of the dearth of creativity and/or innovation.

8.1 The creativity aspect

The researcher started off by investigating the sources of the participants' business ideas in order to determine how creative the participants were; whether they had come up with original business ideas or not. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

Results in Table 2 show that 29 out of 30 participants did not generate the business ideas themselves. Based on the definitions by Babu *et al.* (2013:113); Okpara (2007:2-3); O'Sullivan (2008:5) that creativity entails originality, novelty and making or bringing into existence something that never existed before, business imitations by micro and small entrepreneurs in this study were indicative of the dearth of creativity.

The only exception was one participant from the Events Management and Hospitality who indicated that the business idea was a hobby. These findings are further confirmed by the reasons that the participants gave for failing to come up with their own business ideas.

- "I am not good at coming up with business ideas," Poultry Breeding (3)
- "I am not gifted in coming up with new ideas," Hair Salon (4)
- "It is not in me," Transport (4)
- "I am not gifted in coming up with ideas," Motor Mechanics (1)
- "It was just not in me," Motor Mechanics (5)
- "I am not good with ideas," Car Wash (2)

Based on their responses, one would assume that the participants do not perceive themselves to be endowed with the ability to come up with new business ideas which is what creativity entails. Worse still, in a harsh economic environment like that of Zimbabwe, micro and small entrepreneurs would not be keen to experiment with new business ideas because of the fear of losing their capital.

These results are in tandem with the assertion by Antonites (2014:66) that the economic environment creates barriers to creativity if risk taking is seen as a negative element of the economy and where the economy in general is not conducive to the development of new ideas.

TABLE 2: Sources of participants' business ideas

Type of business	Source of business idea
Poultry Breeding (PB)	My sister-in-law (1)
	My daughter-in-law (2)
	From my friends (3)
	My neighbours (4)
	The market (5)
Hair Salon (HS)	Sister-in-law (1)
	Friends (2)
	Training (3)
	My friend (4)
	Childhood experiences (5)
Events Management and Hospitality (EMH)	Hobby (1)
	My mother (2)
	My former employer (3)
	The need in the market (4)
	My friends (5)
Transport (T)	The market (1)
	The market (2)
	My brother (3)
	Friends (4)
	My former employer (5)

Motor Mechanics (MM)	The market	(1)
	The market	(2)
	My neighbour	(3)
	College	(4)
	Friends	(5)
Car Wash (CW)	The market	(1)
	Media	(2)
	Training	(3)
	Neighbouring country	(4)
	Children	(5)

Source: Primary data obtained from the empirical study

Furthermore, a closer analysis of the results also shows that perhaps due to the economic environment prevailing in Zimbabwe, micro and small entrepreneurs were preoccupied with survival issues rather than perhaps, worrying about creativity. The observation is based on the statements that follow.

- “I wanted an idea that had been tested before,” Poultry Breeding (2)
- “The idea was already there in the market,” Poultry Breeding (5)
- “I needed a quick source of income,” Hair Salon (2)
- “I had seen that the idea works,” Events and Management Hospitality(3)
- “I thought people were making money,” Motor Mechanics (2)

Perhaps findings of another study in a more conducive environment than that in Zimbabwe would yield different results.

Results further revealed that the micro and small entrepreneurs had identified another avenue for survival; that of business imitation (Levitt 1966:1 & Shenkar 2010:1). Baradello

and Salazzaro (2012:58) assert that imitation is the easiest route into the business world if there is stiff competition.

8.2 The innovation aspect

Participants were asked the following 3 questions to determine whether they possessed any innovation skills or not:

- (a) Did you make any changes to the business ideas that you imitated?
- (b) How different was the way you did business compared to the entrepreneurs that you imitated?
- (c) What were the reasons for the changes that you made?

These questions whose discussions were dealt with sequentially, were meant to find out the innovativeness or lack of, amongst the participants. The results in Tables 3 and 4 are responses to the above mentioned questions.

8.2.1 Did you make any changes to the business ideas that you imitated?

The response to Question 1 on whether participants had made any changes to the imitated business ideas was confirmation by 29 participants out of 30 that they had made changes. The 29 responses were a positive “Yes” (Please refer to Table 3.)

8.2.2 How different was the way you did business compared to those that you imitated?

The responses to Question 2 on the differences in the way participants did business are shown in Table 3.

Results in Table 3 show that 29 out of 30 respondents affirmed that they had made changes to the imitated ideas; a sign that these entrepreneurs were aware that duplicative imitation was not going to work for them. Only one respondent from the Motor Mechanics indicated that he had not made any changes due to lack of technical know-how.

TABLE 3: Changes to imitated ideas and differences in doing business

Type of business	Any changes to the original idea?	Differences in doing business
Poultry Breeders (PB)	Yes (1)	I sold half portions to cater for customers with little income (1)
	Yes (2)	I reduced the rearing period (2)
	Yes (3)	I thoroughly cleaned my chickens (3)
	Yes (4)	I specialised in runner chickens (rural breed) (4)
	Yes (5)	I sold chicken pieces (5)
Hair Salon (HS)	Yes (1)	I would ask customers to come up with own styles (1)
	Yes (2)	I followed my customers where they stayed (2)
	Yes (3)	I combined different styles (3)
	Yes (4)	Agreed on payment plans (4)
	Yes (5)	Provided excellent customer service (5)
Events Management and Hospitality (EMH)	Yes (1)	Got the clients to decide what they wanted (1)
	Yes (2)	I would google on latest weddings (2)
	Yes (3)	I partnered with my daughter who had done a catering course (3)
	Yes (4)	I improved on customer service (4)
	Yes (5)	I asked my customers to bring photos of what they wanted (5)
Transport (T)	Yes (1)	I used smaller cars that filled up faster (1)
	Yes (2)	Installed a tracking system (2)

	Yes (3)	We teamed up and formed a consortium	(3)
	Yes (4)	Improved customer relations	(4)
	Yes (5)	Hired people to develop my staff team	(5)
Motor Mechanics (MM)	Yes (1)	Specialised in fixing a particular type of cars	(1)
	Yes (2)	Improved customer service	(2)
	No (3)	Made no changes	(3)
	Yes (4)	Teamed up with skilled workers	(4)
	Yes (5)	I went to fix customers' cars in their residences if they wanted me to	(5)
Car Wash (CW)	Yes (1)	Washed seat covers	(1)
	Yes (2)	Introduced braai facilities	(2)
	Yes (3)	Had to team up with someone with current machinery	(3)
	Yes (4)	Took the business to a low density mall	(4)
	Yes (5)	Offered discounts to regular customers	(5)

Source: Primary data obtained from the empirical study

What was interesting about the results is that whether it was by design or default, micro and small entrepreneurs realised that for them to survive the competition, they had to do business differently. They exploited the already existing business ideas but improved upon the ideas. The verbatim statements in Table 3 attest to that. In addition, findings in all the categories show that the focus was on satisfying individual customer needs.

At face value, these businesses are imitations because of the similarities in the ideas but it is through interviews with the entrepreneurs that one gets to realise that they do business differently. In addition, survival strategies used by the micro and small entrepreneurs

revealed awareness by the participants that they could not remain in their comfort zones; they needed to constantly come up with new ways of doing business. These results are also supported by Drucker (1985:107) who contends that exploiting business ideas into marketable opportunities is innovation.

These findings also corroborate the views by Okpara (2007:2) that when an existing product is changed so that it performs in a better way or fulfils a different need, then there is innovation on what already exists. Similarly, the views by Poole (2006: v) that innovation occurs when old things are done in new ways were revealed in these results where the already existing business ideas were implemented differently.

Further to that, although it is widely acknowledged that a favourable business environment and progressive government support are fundamental to innovation and entrepreneurial growth, results in this study were contrary to expectations (Alberti *et al.* 2008 & Lynskey and Yonekura 2002 cited by Bobera n.d). Micro and small entrepreneurs in the harsh economic environment of Zimbabwe have risen above board. They have been motivated to innovate upon realisation that if they do not add value to customers, they will not survive.

These findings tally with Okpara (2007:9)'s views that in a competitive business environment there is a need to seek out new opportunities and innovate. Without innovation an enterprise and what it provides quickly become obsolete, which is what these micro and small entrepreneurs have attempted to do through these changes.

8.2.3 Reasons for the changes

Respondents had to answer the following question in order for the researcher to further ascertain participants' innovation skills. "What were the reasons for the changes that you made?" These reasons are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4 highlights the main reasons given for the changes. In all the cases, the underlying tone was fighting competition and satisfying the customers as evidenced by the verbatim statements in Table 4. In these times of stiff competition where customers' tastes and preferences are continuously changing one cannot afford to be stuck on duplicative imitation, there is a need for innovation. These findings are consistent with Okpara (2007:9) who

asserts that in a competitive business environment there is a need to seek out new opportunities and innovate.

TABLE 4: Reasons for the changes

Type of business	Reason for the change
Poultry Breeding (PB) (2)	To beat competition
Hair Salon (HS) (3)	To please my customers
Events Management and Hospitality (EMH) (3)	To satisfy customers' tastes
Transport (T) (4)	To keep customers happy
Motor Mechanics (MM) (5)	Competition is stiff these days
Car Wash (CW) (1)	To do business differently

Source: Primary data obtained from the empirical study

It is obvious in these responses that customers are the driving force behind the changes and they are the ones creating this intense competition, thereby creating the need for innovation. Participants in this study rose to the demands of the market by imitating and innovating at the same time.

These findings have crucial implications for policymakers in terms of interventions aimed at equipping micro and small entrepreneurs with creativity and innovation skills vital for the resuscitation of the ailing business industry in Bulawayo specifically and Zimbabwe in general.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the study was to determine whether business imitations amongst micro and small entrepreneurs were the dearth of creativity and/ or innovation in order to proffer appropriate recommendations to policy makers.

Results of the study indicated that micro and small entrepreneurs lacked creativity skills partly because of the harsh economic environment in Zimbabwe. Since a favourable business environment and progressive government support are crucial to innovation and entrepreneurial growth (Alberti *et al.* 2008; Lynskey & Yonekura 2002) in Bobera (n.d), the following suggestions are made.

9.1 Creation of a conducive environment

The government should create a conducive business environment which will provide the necessary requirements for businesses to prosper, for example, suitable infrastructure, education and training facilities and adequate start-up finance. Entrepreneurs can come up with brilliant ideas but as long as the development of these ideas is not backed up by adequate resources, these business ideas will die.

Policies that are attractive to investment should also be formulated. Consultations with industry, institutions of higher learning, workshop facilitators and micro and small entrepreneurs themselves would be ideal for the development of these relevant policies pertinent to business development and growth. As big businesses which have been providers of employment are closing down and people have turned towards micro and small businesses for survival, there is a need to identify how these entrepreneurs can be assisted for business success and sustainability.

9.2 Equipping micro and small entrepreneurs with creative and innovative skills

The findings revealed that the major weakness amongst micro and small entrepreneurs was a lack of creativity skills. It is therefore crucial that interventions should be aimed at equipping micro and small entrepreneurs with creativity skills to enable them to execute the creativity process and increase confidence in their ability to start businesses.

The following is suggested for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMEs) to be able to acquire creative and innovative skills for the growth and sustenance of their businesses.

There is a need for the development of incubation centres where business ideas can be generated and incubated under conducive environmental conditions.

Seminars and workshops for the practising entrepreneurs should be conducted so that their creativity and innovation skills are constantly upgraded for sustainable businesses.

9.3 Harnessing of imitation skills

Based on the imitation and innovative strategies utilised by participants in this study, one can see that there is potential in micro and small entrepreneurs which needs to be tapped into. There is need for the imitation skills by micro and small entrepreneurs to be harnessed so as to help entrepreneurs to build and grow their businesses. Even if there are economic challenges, there is a need to do business differently to lure customers in order to generate revenue to enable the growth of these businesses. The success of these micro and small businesses is crucial for the economic growth and development of the country.

9.4 Areas for further studies

Two areas for further studies have emerged. Firstly, in this particular study, the lack of creativity by micro and small entrepreneurs was attributed to the harsh economic environment prevailing in Zimbabwe. It is recommended that another study be conducted in an environment conducive to business operations to find out whether a user-friendly economic environment would yield similar results or not. Secondly, the population for micro and small entrepreneurs that have imitated other people's business ideas could not be established. Therefore, there is need for an empirical research study to determine the true number of micro and small businesses that are imitating one another. Findings of such a study would provide a sampling framework for future research on business imitations.

10. CONCLUSION

The fact that micro and small entrepreneurs did not bring into existence original business ideas, which is what creativity entails, signifies a dearth of creativity. However, by doing business differently and adding more value to customers' expectations and experiences,

shows innovation skills. In overall terms, it can be concluded that business imitations in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province might be the dearth of creativity but not necessarily that of innovation. Although the environment was prohibitive, micro and small entrepreneurs in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province were innovative in their own way. Their innovative skills, insignificant as they might appear to be, have helped them survive the competition. The study was a success because it enabled the researcher to establish that the increase in the phenomenon of business imitations in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province clearly pointed to a lack of creativity exacerbated by the harsh economic environment. Therefore, this particular study contributes to an increase in the knowledge around creativity, innovation and business imitation because despite the prevalence of business imitations in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, there was no evidence of such studies. These findings might make policymakers realise another avenue for the growth and success of businesses through innovative imitations, especially in Zimbabwe where most businesses have closed down.

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