

# Issues of Sustainability and Management of Micro Enterprises: The Qualitative Analysis

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## Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to identify the various internal factors associated with the proprietor for the failure of the micro enterprises and the external factors that have caused the failure of the same. It also identifies the factors from the market that has lead to the non-acceptance of the enterprise's product. This study is based on a qualitative research. For the study, two districts of Assam- Kokrajhar and Chirang which are located in lower Assam area were considered. Snowball sampling method was used. Primary data were collected through personal interview and analyzed by critical discourse analysis in order to bring out the factors that have been responsible for their failures. These data were obtained from entrepreneurs who have suffered loss and failure from their enterprises. Data obtained were manually coded by inductive method. The processing of data and their analysis has been made using NVivo10 software. The results identify various internal factors, external factors and factors of non acceptance of the enterprise's product. The study has implications on the performance of the entrepreneurs, will guide the managers of those enterprises for managing valuable resources and will also give an insight of dealing with both internal and external stakeholders of the enterprise. It will help in self sustainability of the enterprise.

**Keywords-** Micro enterprise, internal and external factors of failure, success factors, sustainability

## Introduction

The word enterprise means a project or undertaking, especially bold or complex one (enterprise, n.d.). An entrepreneur starts a business enterprise for myriad number of reasons. When a business enterprise is started, entrepreneurs start up with very high expectation of proving themselves in their endeavor. But many a times, these endeavors get stuck in between or fail to live up to their dreams in their own ways. The absence of adequate knowledge in this arena has led to grab such research questions: What could be the reasons for failure of such enterprise? What are the internal and external factors that have lead to the failure of those enterprises? Was there any shortage on the part of their product/services offered by these enterprises? Why have the market not accepted their offerings? This paper aims to answer these questions through inductive analysis with respect to micro enterprises in a location where masses are mostly after government jobs, agricultural and daily wage earners or unemployed to a large extend.

This study attempts to highlight internal and external factors of micro enterprise failures. By failure we mean lack of success, becoming insolvent or bankrupt with respect to business (failure, n.d.). The studies on these aspects are important because it is necessary to understand the real factors that have led to entrepreneurial failure. Studies have shown that such failures not only leave the enterprises dead but also the entrepreneurs devastated in their social and economic life (Shepherd, 2003). In another study, it was also observed that failed entrepreneurs have more difficulties in coping with economic life than the social, psychological and physiological aspects of life (Singh, Corner, & Pavlovich, 2007). In order to overcome such failures of small enterprises, many agencies like academia, government, private and non-government bodies have come forward to find concrete solutions for it. The solutions for these dilemma will eventually help future start ups and small entrepreneurs how not to proceed their business and the areas where one has to be careful about (Thornhill & Amit, 2003).

The research works on enterprise and entrepreneurs have been ignored in the past during the days of industrial revolution in an around the world (entrepreneurship, n.d.). In recent years, the academic works on these aspects got paced which had mostly focused on success of the entrepreneurs and their associated enterprises. While there are many entrepreneurs and their enterprises that have failed which got lesser attention literally in the field of academics works until lately. Despite that, works on understanding the factors for the failure of entrepreneurs and their enterprises have been going on in a large scale these days. Works on success of entrepreneurs & enterprises, their traits, characteristics and factors responsible have often been highly studied. As for instance, attribution of psychological factors (Baron, 2000); traits like achievement orientation and locus of control (Sebora, Lee & Sukasame, 2009); cognitive factors of entrepreneurs (Gatewood, Shaver & Gartner, 1995) are worth mentioning a few.

Yet in another study, it was suggested that studies on small business failure in a single region are more useful than the one done in a national level (Cochran, 1981). Keeping in alignment with the suggestions, the study has been undertaken in two districts (Kokrajhar and Chirang) of lower Assam, India. The area of Kokrajhar district is one of the most backward districts receiving funds from Backward Regions Grant Fund Program (BRGFP) (Kokrajhar, n.d.). Chirang district is a neighbouring district to Kokrajhar. The population constitutes mostly Bengali Muslims, Bodos, Nepalis and others.

## Review of Literature

The failure of enterprise has been defined by many academicians with respect to various concepts such as bankruptcy (Altman, 1968); (Boardman, Bartley & Ratliff, 1981) market share (Thornhill & Amit, 2003), management practices (Gaskill, Van & Manning, 1993), technology (Henderson, & Venkatraman, 1993), etc. This also leads to a conclusion that a concrete definition of enterprise failure has not been established yet. However, in general business failure has been referred to as those companies that have stopped operating due to its inability to make profits or generate revenues to meet its expenses (business failure, n.d.). The same can be attributed for the enterprise failures for the purpose and establishment of samples for the study. Also discontinuing business activities owing to several reasons such as legal disputes between partners, or death of partners have also been found as the causes of enterprise failure (Bruno, McQuarrie & Torgimson, 1992). In another definition, business failure meant deviation from the expected and the desired outcomes (Cannon & Edmondson, 2001). Yet failure for an enterprise can be broader than defined above.

In an analytical study of the perceived cause of small business failures, it was observed that lack of product pricing strategies, managerial experiences, skills and training, failure to generate long term business plan, faulty use of outsiders' advice, lack of knowledge of current business, personnel mismanagement are some of the primary causes for the failure of small firms (Gaskill, Van & Manning, 1993). It was also observed that lack of cordial relationships with vendors, inability to make proper inventory management and lack of adequate financial recordings and accounting are some other reasons for the failure of small enterprises.

The above studies have highlighted several factors for the failure of small enterprises that were mostly internal in nature. While there are external factors as well that lead to the failure of the enterprises. Lack of innovation of the firms offerings also leads to the failure of enterprises in the long run as goes the famous saying 'innovate or die' (John & Snelson, 1987). The enterprise has to invent and innovate new ways of improving their offerings as it plays a crucial role in sustenance of development of enterprise (Wright & Nancarrow, 2001). Businesses where there are high entries of new firms in the same segment were more likely to fail due to 'bubble effect' (Honjo, Y. (2000). High interest rates of borrowed funds (bankruptcy), prevention from further loss and discontinuance of ownership owing to better employment of the proprietor has also been found as the causes of small enterprises (Everett, & Watson, 1998).

Lack of knowledge on working capital management and lack of control on expenses result in the failure of the small firms (Haswell & Holmes, 1989). This has been further enhanced by an empirical study conducted in Canada. It shows that internal factors such as cash flow problems, bad judgment, lack of entrepreneurial values and fear of taking risks. Among the external factors, there are high interest rates and economic conditions that lead to the failure of micro enterprises (Ibrahim & Ellis 1987).

### Previous Empirical Findings

The studies conducted by other academicians in the similar area found some of the causes of the failure of small enterprises. In the first case we have a case of Tunisia where they have explored the causes of failures of small enterprise based on the life cycle of the enterprises (Hamrouni, & Akkari, 2012). They have used qualitative interview methodology and analysed data using NVivo7 software. Their findings suggested that the main cause of failure of start up entrepreneurs were lack of experience and management skills. They have also attributed the shortage of financial resources to be the other primary cause of failure. The findings from similar study also suggest the same cause (Thornhill & Amit, 2003). While for the older enterprises, they found that improper financial management to be the primary cause of failure.

In another study conducted in Montreal and Toronto, where eighty five small enterprises were taken in which item of fifty five questions were considered for the study (Ibrahim & Ellis 1987). In this study, they observed that a huge majority (84%) of the respondent that managerial incompetence to be the main reason for the failure of small enterprises. By managerial incompetence, they mean factors or variables such as problems with cash flow, accounting and record keeping errors, inexperience, inadequate marketing skills, and lack of well defined strategy. The respondents also highlighted that their bad judgements on business decisions and fear of taking risk also led them to fail. Also they identified uncontrollable external factors such as high interest rates and bad economic conditions to be the causes of failure of small enterprises.

To sum up, they (Thornhill & Amit, 2003; Ibrahim & Ellis 1987) have brought out the factors responsible for the failure of small enterprises. The present study attempts to find the answer for the micro enterprises in two districts of Assam; Kokrajhar and Chirang. As per the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006, micro enterprise is defined as an enterprise where investment in plant and machinery does not exceed Rs 25 Laks. In terms of enterprise engaged in

providing or rendering of services, micro enterprise is defined as an enterprise where the investment in equipment does not exceed Rs 10 lakhs. Here the attempt has been made to find out delicate internal and external factors for the failure of micro enterprises in two districts of Assam. Secondly, it attempts to identify the factors from the market why the vendors and customers did not accept their products if any.

### Research questions

The following research questions were framed after going through the literatures and the empirical findings

1. What are the various internal and external factors that lead to the failure of micro enterprises?
2. What are the various factors that lead to of non-acceptance of the enterprise's product by the stakeholders?

In the above, by stakeholders, we mean the vendors and the end users/buyers of the firms' product/services.

### Research Method

The study has been conducted in two districts of Assam-Kokrajhar and Chirang. These districts are located in lower Assam area. The primary reason for choosing these areas is the non-existence of the enterprises that sprouted in good numbers in previous years. The economic activity of these districts includes all the sectors-primary, secondary and tertiary. This study is based on a qualitative research which has been popular for studying smaller enterprises (Perren & Ram, 2004).

Sampling has been done through snowball sampling in order to approach and reach the subjects easily and effectively. For identifying the internal and external factors for failure of micro enterprise, a total of 15 micro enterprise founders (8 from Kokrajhar district and 7 from Chirang district) who agreed for the interview process were considered for the study. For exploring the factors that lead to of non-acceptance of the enterprise's product by the stakeholders, the respondents were also identified through snowball sampling whose information was obtained from the respondents of first objectives. One sample from each of the previous enterprise founder was chosen. The respondents include stakeholders like general grocers, butchers, cloth stores and vegetable vendors.

The data was collected by face to face interview method with semi-structured questionnaire from respondents concerning on the causes of failure of enterprises and the reasons for non acceptance of enterprises' products or services by stakeholders. The respondents whose enterprises failed were provided with sufficient time and could describe their factors of failure as long as they

wanted to carry on. Cues were provided on instances in order to bring them on the themes of discussions. Some verifiable responses were cross checked wherever possible from their vendors and customers.

The data obtained were later manually coded and analyzed by inductive method in order to bring out the factors that have been responsible for their failures. Themes were identified with respect to the framed research questions of the study. The processing of data and their analysis has been made using NVivo10 software. The software serves as database management system for the responses recorded which helps in contextualization of the data.

### Results and Discussions

The results have been arranged as per the research questions and will be discussed sequentially. After having

gone through the interview process and analysis, a brief profile of the respondents has been given below in table 1. As per the data, respondents belonged from Kokrajhar and Chirang Districts of Assam, India. The age of respondents ranged from 29 to 63 years. There were both male and female respondents in both the districts. The education level of the respondents ranged from under metric to post graduate. Their business activities ranged from dying fabrics, piggery/ poultry farm, packaged drinking water, agriculture, tea garden, rubber plantation, weaving, welding and fabrications of steel, bars/ liquor store, hotels and restaurants, cloth store, stationeries, repairing workshop and garage and banana plantation. Their business duration ranged from as short as lesser than 1 year and as long as 3 years.

Table 1: Description of the respondents included in the study

Respondent	Location	Age (Years)	Sex	Education Level		Enterprise Duration
1	Kokrajhar	29	M	Post Graduate	Dying Fabrics	2-3 Years
2	Kokrajhar	33	F	Graduate	Piggery/ Poultry Farm	1-2 Years
3	Kokrajhar	37	M	Graduate	Packaged Drinking Water	1-2 Year
4	Kokrajhar	30	M	Post Graduate	Agriculture	1-2 Year
5	Kokrajhar	45	M	Graduate	Tea and Rubber	4-5 Years
6	Kokrajhar	63	M	Metric	Welding & Fabrications	1-2 Years
7	Kokrajhar	49	F	Under metric	Weaving	2-3 Years
8	Kokrajhar	62	M	Under Graduate	Hotel & Restaurant	2-3 Years
9	Chirang	35	M	Graduate	Clothing store	1-2 Years
10	Chirang	39	F	Graduate	Bike Garage	0-1 Years
11	Chirang	63	F	Under Graduate	Banana Plantation	0-1 Years
12	Chirang	50	M	Under Graduate	Bar & Liquor Store	2-3 Years
13	Chirang	29	M	Post Graduate	Stationary Shop	1-2 Years
14	Chirang	30	M	Graduate	Restaurant	0-1 Years
15	Chirang	61	M	Under Graduate	Agriculture	2-3 Years

Source: Primary Data

Table 2: Enterprises' profile

Enterprise	Location	No. of staff	Initial Capital (Rs)	Annual Turnover (Rs)
1	Kokrajhar	16	2,15,000	4,23,000
2	Kokrajhar	24	2,05,000	4,36,000
3	Kokrajhar	20	3,20,000	5,23,000
4	Kokrajhar	22	2,40,000	4,51,000
5	Kokrajhar	24	3,60,000	5,76,000
6	Kokrajhar	19	2,70,000	4,96,000
7	Kokrajhar	28	2,60,000	4,87,000
8	Kokrajhar	17	2,30,000	4,32,000
9	Chirang	16	2,75,000	5,04,000
10	Chirang	12	2,52,000	5,13,000
11	Chirang	15	1,70,000	3,12,000
12	Chirang	22	1,95,000	4,23,000
13	Chirang	16	2,00,000	4,37,000
14	Chirang	21	2,10,000	4,21,000
15	Chirang	25	2,60,000	4,23,000

Source: Primary Data

For the first research question respondents were asked with simple and straight questions to describe the nature of their business and the causes of failure of their business enterprises.

The response obtained has been thematically arranged separately as internal and external factors. The responses were not segregated as per the locations of their business; rather they were clubbed together in spite of differences in type of business and locations of operations. The responses of similar themes and opinions will be quoted as per the most commonly obtained response or which shows some very distinctively different factors. The response will not be highlighted for the responses obtained as many of them quoted similar factors for their enterprises failure.

For the first research questions, it has been found that internal factors were caused by lack of entrepreneurial attitude and drive, risk taking propensity and interpersonal networking as some of the primary causes of failure. These

findings have similar conclusions as found Brockhaus (1980).

#### Internal Factors

The negative cash flow was found to be one of the major factors of failure. The daily expenses were outnumbering the weekly incomes more often. This finding has similar conclusions as many of the previous works done in similar field. Previous works by Peterson, Kozmetsky & Ridgway (1983) also concluded on the similar note. They also suggested that education on management would reduce the risk of failure of micro enterprises significantly. It is observed that high negative cash flows were a great contributor of enterprise failure if they occur for a longer period of time.

The maintenance of adequate stocks is also of prime importance for uninterrupted supply to the buyers of the firms' products. A few of the enterprises were incapable of



supplying their produce if there were power failure even for a day. As has been the case with water packaging plant who could not supply filtered bottled water if there were no electricity even for a day. Rajeev (2008) has also highlighted the importance of inventory management in small enterprises for its efficiency in performance. Progress of an organization is critical when the employees within are dishonest and unethical. It leads to degradation of reputation, mismatch of values, higher absenteeism, increased turnover and increased cost (Cialdini, Petrova & Goldstein, 2004). Tampering facts and figures for personal gain over the interest of the organization is just contrary to the one principles of management as well.

Envy and jealousy, discord within employees, family and enterprises, stock holders, etc hampers the progress of the firm to a great extend. It not only destroys the organization from within but from outside breaks the firms' integrity apart (de Vries, 1993). Public relations, communication management, maintenance of proper liaison with the outside firm is paramount for bringing business to the enterprise and keeping its presence felt in the market (Grunig, 2006). The issues with management are one of the major causes for the failure of the enterprise. Management related practices with respect to decision making, human resource planning, training, leading, controlling, marketing, financial management, etc. are core areas where enterprise has to be very careful if they have to survive in the market (Pfeffer, 2014).

Business leads, customer base, market share, expansion of markets, product portfolio and all that is related for bringing in more and more business to the firm is very essential for the sustenance of the enterprise in the long run. One has to have enough customer base, profitability and market to stay in the business in the long run (Anderson, Fornell & Lehmann, 1994). It takes time for an enterprise to rise up the ladder of success and fortune. One has to be patient to be able to generate profits. Most of the enterprises are in a haste of making more and more profits without considering other factors necessary for it to happen (Comer & Sekerka, 2014).

From the analysis, it is revealed that main internal factors that lead to the failure of these enterprises are financial issues, ineffective operation management and marketing issues.

### External Factors

The failure of enterprises also occurs due to the external factors for which the entrepreneurs have very little or no control at all. In this section, the external factors for the causes of failure of enterprises have been analyzed and discussed. At the very onset, the firms require funds for

establishing some of very essential equipment and infrastructure necessary for their day to day functions. From the data it has been found that within a period of six months from incorporation of enterprises, their owners have taken a loan for purchasing assets. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that interests charged by money lenders were as high as 15 percent per month. They also opined that, loans from banks were difficult to obtain for some of them and they were comparatively of lower interest rates. These are consistent with the findings of Rosenberg, Gonzalez & Narain, (2009), Everett & Watson (1998), Carter & Wilton (2006) who also found that interest rates charged by money lenders were high.

This factor might not be as a serious factor worth mentioning for many of the enterprise located in other regions of the country. Respondents' reports were rather consistent to one another with regards to donations and charities to numerous bodies and clubs. All of them complained that on an average a person or two would come and ask for donations whether legit or not. This has also been found in a previous work by Prud'Homme (1992 in which he was trying to classify various types of local informal taxes.

Another factor that has been prominently described by the respondents was tough competitions from already established products from multinational companies and other enterprises. Many of the respondents have mentioned that they were lacking in various terms such as quantity, quality, economies of scale, marketing, market share, experienced manpower, etc. The similar kind of study in Kenya by Bowen, Morara, & Mureithi, (2009) have found out that competition from giants and competition amongst themselves to be one of the challenging factors for the survival of small and micro enterprises.

The other major external factor found from the analysis is the lack of adequate market acceptance from the sellers and buyers. Respondents opined that vendors refuse to stock their products owing to various reasons. To mentioned a few, those vendors required more margin, did not want to blur relationships with their earlier suppliers, etc. Abor & Quartey, (2010) have also found out similar reasons for failure of enterprises. They highlighted the factors such as access to market, technology, finance, etc. to be constraints for the growth of enterprises.

From the findings it was found that micro enterprises fail due to end number of factors. The severity of factors vary in degree with respect to experience and management skills, type of firm's business, financial strength, manpower and other favourable external factors. Results indicated also highlights the importance of being patient and professional

in business for surviving in the market. It also suggested that education or training in management of enterprises, marketing, and relationships management will reduce the failure rates of these micro enterprises. Maintenance of peaceful and cordial environment inside the enterprise is also necessary for taking the enterprise forward in challenging times. The entrepreneur should also have managerial skills in order to get the work done efficiently and effectively form their employees.

### **Reasons for non-acceptance of enterprise products and services**

The respondents were mostly shopkeepers. They were general groceries, butchers, cloth stores and vegetable grocers. The respondents were those who were referred by the entrepreneurs as a buyer, vendors, stockiest of firms' products. The reasons for the non-acceptance of the enterprises products were many.

The analysis of the data shows that lack of delivery of quality and consistency by micro enterprises to be one of the top factors for the non acceptance of the firms' product. These findings are consistent with the findings of similar studies conducted in various other countries and enterprises (Bowen, Morara, & Mureithi, 2009), (Kirmaniv& Rao, 2000), (Gaskill, Van Auken & Manning, 1993). A quality product of money's worth is very essential if a product has to survive and have market acceptance amongst the competitions (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990).

From the analysis of data it has been found that inadequate margins are also a factor that the non acceptance of the micro enterprises products by the vendors. This factor has been a very conflicting cause of failure of micro enterprises. They cannot offer as much discounts and margins like those of giant firms and already established firms (Vinod, 2005). The shopkeepers often do not want customers walk out of their shops for the reasons of non-availability of stocks. This has been the factor for not stocking their products by shopkeepers after several incidence of such kind even for the bigger firms as well. This study is also consistent with the findings of similar studies where they found that supply chain management and sharing of information is important for proper stocks in stores (Cachon & Fisher, 2000).

Another factor for not stocking from the study has been found that the entrepreneurs often cannot supply their vendors in credit for a longer period of time or till the stocks are sold out. Reasons are obvious that entrepreneurs also require funds for daily expenses. While the established firms can give credits for longer duration as well as discounts. These findings are also coherent with the

findings of Tom, Balto& Averitt, (2000). The owners were constantly on the push of earning money and making profits day in and day out. There was an aggression on the part of lesser experienced entrepreneurs to conclude the sales terms and conditions without understanding the future consequences. A major threat for the micro enterprises is the similar kind of cheaper alternatives from the established giant firms. Majority of the respondents were having strong presence of competitors with similar products as for instance- tea, banana, crops and vegetables, synthetic fibres, hotels and restaurants, repair mechanics, etc. Lumpkin & Dess, (2001) also found similar opinions that entrepreneurs found themselves surrounded by 'me too' products and services.

Finally, we can come to the understanding that market acceptance of products and services are within the control of entrepreneurs to a great extend. As factors such as quality, inventory and stock management, shelf presence in shops, profit margin, credit facilities and aggressiveness are under the purview of the entrepreneur. They can adopt and make a little bit of compromise here and there for the survival of the enterprise.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that there are various factors that led to the failure of micro enterprises in Assam. The internal factors include negative cash flows, faulty inventory management, lack of coordination among employees, ineffective decision makings and marketing issues. Among the external factors, lack of adequate financial supports, competition from big giants and local informal taxes & donations are the prominent factors that contributed to the failure of enterprises. Moreover the products of the micro enterprises are not accepted by both customers and shopkeepers for various reasons. The main issues with the non acceptance of products of the enterprises by the customers are the lack of quality of products and the relative higher prices as compared with competitive products available in the local market. Last but not the least; the shopkeepers rejected the products of the micro enterprises because of inadequate profit margins, unavailability of credit facilities, ineffective supply of stocks and unprofessional management of owners & employees. The combination of the factors ultimately led to the issues of sustainability of the businesses of micro enterprises that compelled the enterprises to shut down within a short span of their establishment.

### **Implications of the research**

An understanding of the factors of failure of micro enterprises would help the policy makers and business advisors to serve these entrepreneurs by utilizing

knowledge gained from those failures (MgGrat, 1999). This will guide the present and future entrepreneurs not to commit the same kind of mistakes. The findings in a smaller area will better serve the purpose of small entrepreneurs and their enterprises than the one done at a national level (Cochran, 1981). Often literatures are generalized and mostly for giant firms so it gives a better insight into those delicate factors of failure of micro enterprises.

Entrepreneurs who are also the owners of the enterprises develop negative emotion that impairs them burdened with debts, shame and courage for another venture. In all of the literary findings it suggest that financial support is one of the prime necessity for the survival of the enterprises, therefore a policy for such support of micro enterprises is necessary (Honjo, 2000). Such support to entrepreneurs will also encourage more and more unemployed youth to earn for them and create job opportunities for others. It is necessary that further research work is necessary in order to bring out generalized factors from a large number of samples.

#### **Future Directions of research**

The study is exploratory in nature and has been based on very small samples. This has been conducted using snowball sampling and reports may vary depending upon the locations, type of business and several other external factors. Other limitations are the opinions of the respondents where they might not have revealed more delicate and controversial instances during the interview process owing to personal reasons.

Finally it can be concluded that further study is needed to confirm the results by adopting different methods of analysis and cross checking of the respondents' opinions. It is assumed this study will illuminate a few steps towards the understanding of the factors of failure of micro enterprise in small towns and villages.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

None

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