

Sustainable Entrepreneurship through Indigenous Apprenticeship System: A Critical Analysis of a Stakeholder's Account of Odyssey from Fear and Uncertainty to Success and Influence

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Abstract

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sustainability has been on the decline. Current statistics show that 75-80 percent of MSMEs start-ups tend to fail within the first three years. Meanwhile, different modern business models recommended to stem this rate of failure appear to be ineffective. On the other hand, research has shown that traditional methods of entrepreneurship, which are based on an apprenticeship system, record relatively higher success rates. Specifically, the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) (Igba Bonyi/Boi/Odibo) is an effective business model in producing successful entrepreneurs and developing sustainable MSMEs. Ndi Igbo (Igbo People) are an indigenous ethnic nation in Southeast Nigeria. The IAS is stakeholder capitalism and a business incubation model whereby an experienced and enterprising business person, called Master/Madam or Oga trains an apprentice for an agreed period of time. While learning the master/madam's business, the apprentice lives in their house, is 'settled' when they fully understand the business, and can, thereafter, start their own business. Using a qualitative case study method and thematic analysis, the researcher conducted an In-depth/ Key Informant/Stakeholder Interview with Sir Francis Ani Eze- a doyen of the system with almost four decades of experience as a businessman. He has also produced three generations of Umu Bonyi (plural of Bonyi). His engaging story embeds cognitive and experiential learning frameworks and other key factors that make for business sustainability. It is found that there is a positive relationship between effective indigenous entrepreneurship and MSMEs sustainability. We recommend that the existing model of IAS should be formalized, to provide for actionable terms and conditions regulating the programme, which will provide against Oga's tyranny and arbitrariness and Umu Bonyi's infidelity and dishonesty.

Keywords: Igbo Apprenticeship System, Igba Bonyi, Igbo Entrepreneurship Metaphors, MSMEs Sustainability, Indigenous Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have been acknowledged as pivots on which job creation, economic growth, industrial development and poverty reduction can be built in a free market economy (Terungwa, 2012). Ironically, whereas MSMEs contribute significantly to economic development, their rate of failure equally contributes to serious job loss (ILO, 2015). Current statistics show that 75-80 percent of MSMEs start-ups tend to fail within the first three years of operation, and modern business models impeded to forestall this slide appear to be ineffective (Ownuegbuzie, 2017; Fatoki, 2014).

Prior to colonization, unemployment in Africa was an anathema. The indigenous peoples were fully employed either as master or servant craftsmen, business men or farmers. Nobody was idle (Ownuegbuzie, 2017; Uma, Onwusogbolu & Obidike, 2015). However, formal education followed the need for white collar staff to work in government establishments and industries. Over time, the jobs available were no longer enough to absorb those

who had been formally trained. Unemployment then set in as a consequence of interference in the traditional employment system. So far, due to structural rigidity and corruption, government policies and programmes put in place to either create more jobs or sustain existing ones have not been very effective. Abdullahi, et al., (2015), noted that political instability and security challenges in the country have undermined most of the solutions, and even government policies put in place in the past have not been managed efficiently. How then can MSMEs' sustainability be enhanced?

Extant studies have shown that traditional methods of entrepreneurship, which are based on apprenticeship system, record significantly higher success rates (Iwara, 2020; Chinweuba and Chukwudi, 2017; Ownuegbuzie, 2017; Obunike, 2016; Onwuka, 2015; Maliga, 2013).

Ndi Igbo (Igbo people) are an indigenous ethnic group predominantly found in Southeastern part of Nigeria. The entrepreneurial spirit of Ndi Igbo is driven by and embedded in cultural ethos and entrepreneurship philosophies which hinge on existential metaphors like *Igba mbo* (hard work), *Igwe bu ike* (there is strength in unity), *Onye aghana nwanne ya* (help your brother), *Onye ruo, orie* (there is no food for the lazy man), *Aka aja-aja, n'ebute onu mmanu-mmanu* (a labourer is worthy of his wage), *Onye ndidi, n'eri azu ukpo* (patience pays), *Onye fee Eze, Eze eruya aka* (there is reward in diligent service, or if you diligently serve others, your turn to be served will come), *Onye ajuru, anaghi aju onweya* (one that is despised or rejected by others does not reject oneself or must hustle to survive), among others. These metaphors motivate Ndi Igbo to strive to be entrepreneurial and acquire wealth while 'hustling' individually and collectively (helping one another).

Further impetus to the entrepreneurial spirit of Ndi Igbo (Igbo People) came as a result of their harrowing experience during and after the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War (1967-1970), (Adekola, 2013; Agbionu, Emejulu, & Egolum, 2015; Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017). One instance was the Economic Leveling Policy (ELP) of the Federal Government of Nigeria meted out to Ndi Igbo, after the war wherein Twenty Pounds (£20) only was paid to every Igbo bank deposit account holder, irrespective of the credit balance hitherto in their bank accounts. Rather than this policy demoralizing and weakening their resolve, it fired up their entrepreneurial spirit, causing them to forge ahead. Thereafter, they relied on entrepreneurial metaphors like *Onye ajuru, anaghi aju onweya* (one despised by others, does not despise oneself); *Mberede nyiri Dike, kama obu mberede k'iji ama Dike* (Surprise beats the brave, but therein a real man is manifested); *Ike keta orie-e* (hustle and succeed) and *Ike otu onye* (man alone-individualism).

Behind the entrepreneurial success of Ndi Igbo is the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) (Ekekwe, 2021; Kanu, 2019, Obudike, 2016). Nevertheless, some people get involved in IAS, not by choice, but by compulsion and necessity (Interview with Eze, April, 2021).

Evidently, IAS has produced, and is still producing, prominent men and women in Igbo land with known businesses such as Ekene Dilichukwu Motors, The Young Shall Grow Motors, Coscharis Group, to mention a few (Ekekwe, 2021). But it would appear that the IAS model that produced these icons is being threatened, if not completely eroded. The characteristics of diligence, perseverance, long term perspective, self-contentment, respect for elders, spirit of collectivism, respect for cultural values, delayed gratification, etc, are fast becoming extinct in IAS. What is mostly prevalent now is the culture of greed, the quest for materialism, inordinate ambition, dishonesty, impatience, individualism, and get rich quick syndrome [*Ego mbutu* and *Igbuozu* (I must make it big here and now)]. The adoption of the maxim "the end justifies the means," is atypical of the Igbo culture and has always produced sub-optimal and short term results. Of course, there is criminal entrepreneurship (Gottschalk and Smith, 2011). Hence, it is no news that many of our brothers are either languishing or serving various jail terms in foreign prisons for various economic crimes. Many of them came, were seen as financial juggernauts, but were quickly displaced. They epitomized the worst of greed and get-rich-

quick persona, which they always, expectedly, paid for. This cohort is the shame of Igbo entrepreneurship. The need to follow the “old path” cannot be over-emphasized.

Most empirical studies on Igba Bonyi have essentially emphasized the outcomes of IAS, without interrogating the processes leading to such results (Iwara, 2020; Chinweuba and Chukwudi, 2017; Ownuegbuzie (2017; Obunike, 2016; Onwuka, 2015). Therefore, not much has been done to thoroughly investigate the ingredients needed to continuously produce and sustain the desired IAS, which leads to business sustainability. That is the research objective of this study. The variables of interest which are thematically analyzed include the IAS business model, apprentice motivation and intention, entrepreneurial behaviour, mentorship, innovation, networking/stakeholder engagement, challenges/risk mitigation, people/community development and guaranteed start-up funding.

Conceptual Review

Apprenticeship system is an age-long practice in Africa and the world over (Ekekwe, 2021; Agbionu, Emejulu, & Egolum, 2015; Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017). In the western world, apprenticeship is practised through articleship whereby individuals are contracted to learn a given vocation under a specialist for a period of time. It is the equivalent of learning a trade (Imu Ahia) in Igbo where the apprentice does not live with the master or Oga, and the period of apprenticeship is relatively shorter (Onwuegbuzie, 2017; Obunike). Mukhtar (2011) gives the Northern Nigeria's variant where one serves his “master” for as long as he lives with him, without any plan put in place to make the “servant” independent. The Southwest variant (Adekola, 2013) follows the articleship concept. After a two to three-year period, the apprentice is freed, certificated and sent forth.

Though apprenticeship is not new in Africa, its impact is mostly felt among the Igbo ethnic group in Southeastern Nigeria. Ekekwe (2021) noted that for centuries, the Southeastern region of Nigeria has practiced what is known today as Stakeholder Capitalism- a construct that ensures businesses elevate the interests of communities, employees, consumers, and the environment, alongside those of other shareholders. This is a new lexicon in apprenticeship conceptualization. Ekekwe (2021) further conceptualized the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS), as a Communal Enterprising Framework (CEF) where successful businesses develop others and, over time, provide capital and give away [arguably] their customers to the new businesses. According to him, the uniqueness of this model is that few businesses grow to become very dominant, since they keep relinquishing market share, and in doing so, they accomplish one thing: a largely equal community where everyone has opportunities, no matter how small. It is presupposed that the IAS is modeled to achieve more inclusive, just, and equitable economic systems that work for all, not just a few. It would appear that Ekekwe's thesis about the “goodness in every Oga” is overtly generalized. Whereas, many may be humane, yet, there are others who do not allow their graduated Umu Bonyi to carry out their business in the same market with them. There are also others who refuse to settle their graduated Umu Bonyi, even when they are in a good financial standing to do that.

Abnitio, the inclination of Ndi Igbo to business (Obunike, 2016), venture capitalism (Agbionu, Emejulu, & Egolum, 2015; Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017) and business incubation (Neuwirth, 2017) has continued to elicit divergent connotations. Agbionu, Emejulu & Egolum (2015) perceived the Igbo entrepreneurship as a system of mentorship where the master is the mentor and the apprentice is the mentee. Another variant is master-servant relationship-apprenticeship (Obunike, 2016; Neuwirth, 2017; Onwuka, 2019). Both systems involve the training or tutoring of individuals by successful masters and professionals in a given skill or profession. Essentially, the major difference is in residency (Uma, Onwusogbolu & Obidike, 2015). Unlike in apprenticeship, the mentor may not live with the mentee. A mentor may just be any professional admired by a mentee, whose knowledge

and expertise the mentee needs. But, the master-servant relationship in apprenticeship requires the apprentice to live with the master as they learn from him.

In Igbo land, the apprenticeship system comes with nomenclature like *Okpu-uzu na Nwa-uzu* (this means “black smith and servant”) where craftsmanship is involved; *Oga na Nwa-bonyi* (this means “master and servant”), where apprenticeship is involved. These names refer to the relationship between a master and apprentice, depending on the trade or type of business.

Thus, the Igba-Bonyi system has a simple process which involves successful business owners taking in younger boys/girls to their homes to work as apprentices in their business. At the pre-agreed time, the apprentice graduates and is settled—given money, and business connections, possibly, to start their own business. The tangible and intangible assets the settled apprentice would ordinarily go with include in-depth knowledge of the business, connections and a network with suppliers, customers, fellow Umu-Bonyi, a relationship with other Ogas, one or more shops, and some good amount of money. Usually, the money is a grant which graduated Umu Bonyi use to start their own business (Obunike, 2016; Adekola, 2013; Lerman, 2014; Agbionu, Emejulu and Egolom, 2015, Udu, 2015, Neuwirth, 2017, Kanu, 2019).

The apprenticeship system is not restricted to the informal sector in Nigeria. Successive Federal Governments of Nigeria (FGN) had unsuccessfully created lots of polices and agencies either to kick-start or promote the growth of MSMEs. Some of such vehicles included the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Open Apprenticeship Programme (OAP), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), CBN’s Anchor Borrower’s Loan, among others (Poopola, 2016).

Most of these government policies were designed to either finance the small businesses or to avail the owners with start-up capital, while others were meant to train the individuals or provide them with the infrastructure needed for development (Adegbuyi, Fadeyi, Kehinde, & Adegbuyi, 2016). However, while the Nigerian government has put up these policies in the past to encourage more of these small businesses to start and enhance their growth; the situation still remains that only about 5% of these small businesses financed by the government survive beyond a year (Poopola, 2016). The lack of in-depth knowledge of the business of choice, of the beneficiaries of these schemes, among others, has been implicated.

Comparatively, the apprenticeship system is unlike the government entrepreneurship programmes that take in graduates to train and give them loans they can use in starting up businesses. The Igba Bonyi apprenticeship system of Ndi Igbo follows a different trajectory. Obunike (2016) submits that the government schemes select graduates of universities (adults with already established personalities), while the Igba-boi apprenticeship system goes for any young person from the villages (mostly adolescents with poor background), who may have economic needs, are willing to learn and their parents are also willing to consent to give them out. The government schemes take people in their numbers to be trained by one master at the same time, while the Igba-Bonyi apprenticeship system involves a master taking one or few apprentices, depending on the capacity they can effectively handle at a time.

In line with this, Ndi Igbo adopt the apprenticeship system which advocates that trainees first understand the rudiments of business by starting small and growing over time. Next, they learn about business processes; in this case, the young person learns the business under a master and serves them in various capacities, from the simple roles of doing house chores, to other tasking jobs. Over time, the apprentice makes mistakes and learns from them, thereby taking responsibility for their decisions and knowing how to go about business ventures (Obunike, 2016). Only then do they come out as successful apprentices who can start their own businesses in a small scope, often, under their master’s guidance, mentorship and goodwill. Kanu (2019) found that most young

adults who go into the apprenticeship system come out successful and start their own businesses. The consequence is that the Igba-Bonyi apprenticeship system turns out more successful outcomes, up to 80% of the graduate apprentices scale up their businesses from small to medium, and some achieve big business status, over time (Obunike, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (1984) forms the theoretical framework for this study. It provides a framework to explain the effectiveness of apprenticeship in the entrepreneurial process. According to Kolb (1984), experience plays a central role in the learning process. ELT highlights that when learning is viewed as a process, it focuses on how it impacts individuals when molding their experiences into knowledge (Corbett, 2005). The ELT is dynamic and differs from other idealist traditional approaches to education as it is based on the assumption that ideas are not just static and unchanging, they are also "formed and reformed through experience" Kolb (1984: 26).

The learning cycle model published in 1984 basically analyzed four progressive stages namely: concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Kolb argues that effective learning is seen as the learner goes through the cycle, and that they can enter into the cycle at any time. The relevance of Kolb's (1984) theory to this study is the recognition of apprenticeship as an effective learning process, and that ideas are dynamic, as they are formed and reformed through experience.

Empirical Review

To the knowledge of this researcher, few empirical studies have been carried out on the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) process. Onwuegbuzie (2017) and Obunike (2016) are reviewed.

Onwuegbuzie (2017) applied a qualitative case study to explore how entrepreneurial learning through apprenticeship can lead to more successful entrepreneurial outcomes than conventional approaches. She further hypothesized that a combination of theory and hands-on learning, via apprenticeship, will lead to a higher rate of successful entrepreneurial ventures. This study which was carried out in Nigeria adopted a survey approach with one-on-one interviews with the entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurs were of different age groups and operated in two different sectors-informal and formal. The entrepreneur in the first case study was 70 years old, an herbal healer with no formal education and they operated in a rural area. The second entrepreneur was in his forties, highly educated and engaged in hydroponic farming in the agricultural sector. He grew tomatoes in a suburban area and supplied large volume to buyers. The third case was an entrepreneur wood-carver in his fifties, who also operated in a rural setting and had no formal education but was rich in experience, like the first entrepreneur. The selection was made to illustrate how apprenticeship plays out in different contexts: in industries, backgrounds and age groups. The study validated positive apprenticeship outcomes through extended learning processed and successful replication of learning (knowledge transfer and adaptation), leading to the sustainability of ventures over time. Its contribution to knowledge is in the area of the use of indigenous practice of apprenticeship as a means of effectively transmitting entrepreneurship skills. This study adopted same research method-Oral Interview, but differs in contexts and emphasis-entrepreneurial process that leads to business sustainability.

Obunike (2016), studied the induction strategy of Igbo Entrepreneurs and Micro Business Success at Household Equipment Line, Main Market Onitsha, Nigeria. This study attempted to validate the "Igba-odibo" (Traditional Business School) concept, as a business strategy for achieving success in business. The survey method was adopted, which included questionnaires and interviews. The research design was descriptive and employed

unstructured interviews with some entrepreneurs and elders of the Igbo community. The result showed that there is a strong positive relationship between apprenticeship system and business success. Business success reportedly came through business/opportunity utilization, customer relationship/business networking and capital acquisition. One outcome of the study included the use of kinship induction system as a market penetration and dominance strategy.

In her study, there was evidence that majority of the traders underwent the apprenticeship system and that 60 percent of the respondents either did not go to school at all, or dropped out at secondary school level. The age segment of all the people interviewed is very significant as it shows that these entrepreneurs started their businesses at a tender age, often below 30. This was evidenced by their dropping out of school or through family business succession. By way of recommendation, she advised other tribes to emulate this aspect of the Igbo culture in order to tackle unemployment, one of the greatest challenges Nigeria is facing. However, here, the focus of our study is different. We interviewed a key stakeholder in a different industry and market.

Methodology

A qualitative case study method is applied in this study. The purpose is to explore how entrepreneurial learning through apprenticeship can lead to successful entrepreneurial outcomes. This method is considered appropriate because the aim is to explore and illustrate the process of apprenticeship (Jack and Anderson, 2002). The researcher adopted the In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Key Informant/Stakeholder Interview (KII) in order to obtain information from a 'community member' who is very knowledgeable in the area of discourse (Carter & Beaulieu, 1992). The data from the interview were thematically analyzed. Thematic Analysis is a qualitative research tool which involves identifying descriptive themes from original data (interview) and developing overarching analytic themes that develop new concepts or explanations that apply across them (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Sir Francis Eze, a doyen of the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS), with about four decades of experience, fits the characterization of a 'Key Man' in this area.

The method adopted for the interview is detailed below:

1. Date of the interview: 5th April, 2021
2. Time started: 18:10.22: Time stopped: 20.49.22
3. Duration 2 Hours 39 Minutes
4. Venue of the interview. His Country Home: Ebem, Uhuobia, Amanator, Anioma Isu, Onicha LGA, Ebonyi State, Southeast, Nigeria.
5. Nature of the interview: unstructured (open ended questions).
6. Mode: Taped and later transcribed.
7. Language of Interview: Igbo, interspersed with English Language
8. Interviewer: Researcher (Dr. Livinus Okpara Onu)
9. The interview was transcribed in English Language, and only edited for grammar, and sequence of thought process.
10. Researcher intermittently calls the interviewee either to clarify or expatiate on some points made during the interview, or to seek further information.
11. For confidential and ethical considerations in social research, the transcribed interview was sent to the interviewee, who read and confirmed that it reflected the interview he granted.

Thematic Analysis of the Oral Interview

Interviewee's Bio Data

- a. Sex: Male
- b. Age: 55 Years
- c. Marital Status: Married

- d. Occupation: Business [Patent Medicine Dealer, Head Bridge Market, (Ogbo Ogwu-Drug Market), Onitsha]
- e. Business Location: Onitsha, Anambra State, Southeast, Nigeria
- f. Educational Qualification: First School Leaving Certificate.

Excerpts from the Oral Interview

The researcher summarized the oral interview under key themes, namely: the apprentice motivation, the Igba Bonyi business model, entrepreneurial behaviour, innovation, networking/stakeholder engagement, challenges/risk mitigation, people/community development, start-up funding and business sustainability nuggets.

NOTE: The transcribed interview may be made available on request.

The Beginning-The Motivation

Question: How did it all start, and why did you decide to engage in apprenticeship (Igba Bonyi)?

Response: *It was not my decision but that of the family to send me to Onitsha in 1987 for apprenticeship. I passed the Secondary School Common Entrance into Government College, Okposi, Ohaozara Local Government Area (LGA), Ebonyi State, but could not go due to lack of funds. Instead, my uncle who had lost an opportunity to go to secondary school before, for same financial reason, was sent. After this perceived injustice, my mother and I grieved over it. I decided to take my destiny in my hands, and I made up my mind to accept the apprenticeship (Igba Bonyi) option without knowing what the future held... One Abel Obiora- a Patent Medicine Dealer at Bridge Head, Onitsha was the Oga found for me... Late Oga John Chukwuma, a wealthy businessman from my town, who sourced him also took me to him, and I lived with him for seven years.*

Business Model (Igba Bonyi)

Question: What is Igba Bonyi?

Response: *Generally, Igba Bonyi, is practical business knowledge acquisition...you live with your Oga, and learn by doing; you make mistakes, accept corrections and correct yourself...get involved in both the family, social and cultural life of your Oga...interact with other Umu Bonyi, other Ogas and Oga's suppliers and customers... when the time agreed comes, you are settled, all things being equal...you start your own business.*

Entrepreneurial Behaviour/Stoop to Conquer

Question: How were you able to cope when you started?

Response: *It was never easy. Initially, it was very lonely. I was the only person from Isu Community in Onicha LGA, Ebonyi State, in that market. The only other person was Frank Ngozi Nwoma, that is, whenever he comes to market from Nnewi. Then, who knew Ohaozara (their former Larger LGA), talk less Isu [his home town]? When you say you are from Isu, people mistake it for other big towns with similar names, in either Imo or Abia State. Towns like Isu Njaba-Imo; Isukwuato-Abia, etc.*

...I gave my all to my Oga... I was the one fetching water, cooking and doing all the house chores, as none of his brothers agreed to serve him. Additionally, his children were still very small.

However, I was lucky, my Oga was a good christian... I took solace in Christianity. I was attending Anglican Children's Ministry (AGCM), since my Oga was an Anglican... I fully identified with the AGCM, and it helped me to forsake worldly life. I avoided seducing social life, like going to Night Clubs, becoming a Casanova, and the likes. This resonated with my kind of life, and I therefore, fully concentrated on my apprenticeship business. My social life was equally affected by the place I came from...where conservatism is a virtue.

Mentorship

Question: What was the nature of the relationship between you and your Oga?

Response: *I was lucky to have served someone who was quite appreciative of my efforts... Being a good man, he still relates very well with my family. On yearly basis, he and his wife, will visit and pray for my family's progress. He encouraged me to start my first house in my village, after one of his visits. In recognition of the fatherly relationship, he was the special guest of honor during my daughter's wedding in 2020.*

As a matter of fact, it is not the quantum of money that I received from him that is helping me; his goodwill and name still open business doors for me...

Innovation

Question: How did your presence impact on your Oga's business?

Response: *I was the only person when I came. Oga's business was substantially retail. We were counting tablets, e.g. APC, Codein, etc. A typical customer would come and request say, 2or3 Asprin tablets or Panadol. In fact, in the market, we were nicknamed "teacher," because of the continuous use of calculator to multiply the quantity of tablets bought multiplied by the retail price. But when I became the manager of his business, I scaled up the business to wholesale. We began to sell drugs in packets and cartons... We later diversified into Hospital Equipment, begin to take supplier's credit, take bank overdraft, take business opportunities with loan and cash at bank. Oga was not doing all these before I came. From the business, we built two three-storey buildings-one at Onitsha and the other in his home town- Alor, Anambra State...*

Networking/Stakeholder Engagement

Question: How did you establish useful relationships with your Oga's customers, suppliers, other Ogas and Umu Bonyi?

Response: *It came from assisting assisting customers pack their goods. I tell them the truth, assist them buy genuine drugs and source the ones we don't have at competitive prices from other traders' shops. In summary, I don't cheat them. Over time, they know me, they like me and trust me. As Oga.s confidence and trust in me increased, he started sending me to buy and carry goods from our suppliers. I was was also allowed to negotiate with suppliers who brought their goods to our shop. That was how my relationship with them started. I respect other Ogas in the market. I run errands for them without grudging. Many of them liked my quiet nature and hard work... On daily basis, I interact with other Umu Bonyi, both in our shop and those serving others. Destiny had brought us together, and most of us ended up becoming very good friends. We help one another serve their customers and give information with respect to prices and where to source some goods.*

I could as well remember another very important relationship in my life today. In fact, in the order of priority, he ranks third; after my God, and my Oga. He is the present Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) -Chris Ezike. We lived in the same street. He was sending me and some others errands-to the market to make some purchases for him. Then, he was just a Divisional Police Officer (DPO). Unknown to us, he was monitoring us, checking our declared purchase prices against actual market prices. On one occasion, I brought back a sizable change, and he wondered if I actually paid for the items I bought. I confirmed that in the affirmative. I have since become an adopted member of his family. I get involved in everything he is doing, same applies to him in my own family. Indeed, he is one of the parts of God that I see. He was later to save me from a big challenge.

Challenges

Question: What are some of the challenges you encountered during your apprenticeship days?

Response: *There were three challenges. There were two apprenticeship contracts I mediated that put me into serious trouble. The Una Nweke's case [Una Nweke is one of his cousins]. I sure-ted him to someone. Midway, he decided to quit. He did not steal the man's money, but his Oga insisted he must pay in lieu of the food, accommodation, training and care received from him. He was demanding N600,000. The Oga made it a police*

case and threatened to jail the boy, while I had collateral damage to settle. The second bad case was that of Nwata Iyiorji (Iyiorji's son) [also from his community], who was duped, and his Oga demanded repayment from me, the guarantor. Were it not for the intervention of Commissioner of Police (CP), Chris Ezike, when he was the Personal Assistant to the Senate President (Late Dr. Chuba Okadigbo), the case would have probably ended my business career...

Then, at the point of my graduation, when we were doing partnership business, I was duped. I made payment for goods which were not supplied. My Oga locked up my shop for some time. Luckily for me, we had taken stock, so he collected his own share of the period's profit. Friends intervened based on my pedigree, and Oga was convinced I was genuinely duped. I rebuilt the business almost from scratch.

People /Community Development

Question: In what ways have you positively affected your people and community?

Response: ... as soon as I got a foothold in my Oga's business, and the need for other apprentices arose, I used the opportunity to engage my people. ...as at when my Oga settled me, there were three other apprentices from our place-Goddy Ani, David Eze (my junior brother) and Robert Chukwu. Later, Goddy Ani was settled. ...when Oga diversified into the surgical line, he left the tablet business to David to manage, and took Robert to the new business line. ...In fact, as at now (April, 2021), the most successful trader in the surgical line, in that market, is one of us; one of the persons that served Robert.

The number of successful apprentices that served me directly or indirectly, has significantly increased, both numerically and in wealth. In Isuokoma community today, the presence of Ndi Ogbo Ogwu (businessmen from Head Bridge Patent Medicine Dealer's Market) will always be felt in any event. For example, I am just coming from a wedding ceremony at Uhueke (a hamlet in Amanator). The groom (Anayo Odi) served my younger brother who served me. If you go there, you will marvel at the affluence being displayed by those boys. Anywhere I go today, people address me as "Oga Ndi Oga" (foremost Master –master of other masters).

I have raised people in the market who, in turn, have become helpers, which bolstered my confidence. I am now certain that these boys will not allow my business to collapse. I remember an occasion where one of the very successful ones came and told me and my wife (his wife, at some point, was staying with him in the market) to be upbeat in the market; he noted that we have raised giants, and nobody will be allowed to molest us. This boy has become a force in the market; people fear and respect him due to his level of wealth. He has built mansions in many choice places. He has single-handedly built and donated church buildings.

I am proud to announce that I have produced millionaires, if not billionaires, not only in Amanator village (his own Village), but also in other villages such as Mgbalaukwu, Umuniko, Isuachara, among others. I have raised three generations of apprentices who have established thriving businesses. The first line in the pyramid are those that served me directly; the second are those that served those that served me directly; while the third are those that served those that served those that served me directly. I do not neglect my immediate family and contribute to community development initiatives.

Start-Up Funding

Question: How were you settled? Goods, Cash, Shop, Etc.?

Response: He gave me cash and a shop. What he did was to start a partnership business with me. I first generated the capital invested in the shop and paid that back to him. What was left was profit in stock and assets. We took stock every six months. The profit from the business was shared 50/50...Finally, in 1990, he left the shop for me, with the goods therein.

Business Sustainability Nuggets

Question: What are the qualities you believe helped you to succeed in your own business?

Response: *Though the knowledge I have today is greater than then; yet, certain basic principles are very fundamental to success. They include:*

- a) *Honesty. If suppliers sell goods to you on credit, truthfully sell the goods and return their money.*
- b) *Cut your coat according to your cloth. Mind the type of company you keep. Do not live like the Joneses. You should know your level. Some of my friends would carry girls to Sir White Hotel Owerri or to Enugu. Some do this without minding its implications for the success of their business. In fact, many businesses fail because of this type of short term enjoyment in life.*
- c) *There is need for restraint and adoption of the concept of delayed gratification. You must first build your business to a certain level before it can carry certain categories of expenses. An Igbo adage says that; “Okorobia etogi eto wara ogodo; ya daa, ogodo awuchieya anya” (pride goes before a fall); while another proverb says that; “nwata n’ata akara, n’ata ego ya” (extravagant persons squander their resources/future).*
- d) *Be conscious of your background. If you squander the little you have now, where will the next funding come from?*
- e) *Start with an austere life when you are newly settled, and build up your capital. Some of my friends branded me a recluse and anti-social. But, I can tell you, I’m better for it.*

Discussion of Findings

Igba Bonyi Business Model

Igba Bonyi Apprenticeship System (IAS) has been described as the largest business incubation system in the world (Ekekwe, 2021), and a perfect tool for business development (Neuwirth (2017).

The economic entrepreneurial theory of “push” is canvassed as one way of engaging in entrepreneurship. Some parents have no money to send their children to school, while some have more children than they can feed, therefore, the one viable option is to send those children out to serve others, in a way that is similar to consented slavery. Exigencies of life compelled Francis to seek greener pastures outside home; however, it was a means of self-efficacy as well as for economic emancipation (Biko and Ike (2007).

Entrepreneurial Mindset

Francis actually stooped to conquer! Let us briefly mention some of his unique feats/ characters: He was doing house chores for Oga’s family, joined a church group to stay away from “temptation”, practiced fidelity by reporting theft of his Oga’s money by a fellow Bonyi, accompanied Oga to his village severally, practiced sincerity in business transactions with customers and neighbours, refused to save suspected stolen money for fellow Bonyi, was moderate/conservative in social life, visited his village for the first time, after 4 years in apprenticeship, did not abuse position of trust by stealing Oga’s money, fully understood the business, and maintained a cordial relationship with his Oga and family.

Communal Enterprising Framework/Kinship Induction System

Francis has had three generations of Umu Bonyi. When he was with his Oga, he brought three kin-brothers. When the four of them graduated, each begins to article other Umu Bonyi. The multiplier effect is amazing. He boasts that he has created millionaires, if not billionaires. The families of these people have been elevated economically, and their communities benefited from contributions to community development projects (Ekekwe, 2021; Obuike, 2016). Aigbionu, Emejulu and Egolun (2015) agree that positive mentorship produces more successful entrepreneurs.

Business Sustainability

It is 31 years (1990-2021) since Francis graduated from the apprenticeship system. His business-Fenny Triumph Nigeria Limited-is still up and running. He has raised other businessmen who are assuring him of their willingness to support his family, any time. Has he not paid his dues in perseverance, integrity, business mastery, and stakeholder capitalism? Kanu (2019) finds that most of the young boys that go into apprenticeship come out successful and start their own businesses, with a scale-up rate of up to 80 percent. Poopola (2016) is worried that only about 5 percent of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) survive beyond the first year of operations. It would appear that this statistics is referring to traditional start-ups. Instructively, Kotler (2000) notes that the necessary ingredients needed to run a business successfully go beyond just the traditional 4 Ps of marketing (getting a good location, advertisements, the products or service to be offered, and its price). These factors, in his view, surely ensure a business start-up, but when business sustainability is the focus, then it becomes obvious there is more to it. Again, Poopola (2016) provides the missing link when he says that lack of solid business skills, knowledge and experience are the reasons why most MSMEs do not survive beyond their first year in business.

The ingredients required to achieve business sustainability have been highlighted. Onwuegbuzie (2017) and Obuikwe (2016) have empirically found support for the IAS' sustainability outcomes.

Conclusion, Recommendations and Contributions to Knowledge

From the foregoing, we can draw the following conclusions:

Conclusion

- a. Most Apprenticeship contracts arise out of economic necessity and are not formalized
- b. The ingredients for successful apprenticeship programmes include cool-headedness, diligence, determination, conscientiousness, fidelity, hard work, self-effacement, innovativeness, and risk taking propensity, among others.
- c. Often, there are some challenges in managing the apprenticeship programme
- d. A well-behaved Nwabonyi will be settled by their Oga
- e. IAS is a means of reducing unemployment and wealth creation for self and the community.
- f. IAS engenders business sustainability and community development.

Recommendations

- a. The existing model of IAS should be further formalized to provide for actionable terms and conditions regulating the programme, which will provide against Oga's tyranny and arbitrariness and Umubonyi's infidelity and dishonesty.
- b. There is need to integrate the IAS into the formal educational system to give the Oga's and Umubonyi the opportunity to enhance their educational know-how.
- c. Further research is needed to interview more individual business men and achieve wider market reach.
- d. To make extant youth empowerment policies more effective, governments at all levels need to review them in line with the IAS option.

Originality/Contribution to Knowledge

This original study develops our understanding of IAS and indigenous entrepreneurship by extending our knowledge of the modus operandi, modus vivendi and modus essendi of the general entrepreneurial processes that lead to sustainable outcomes.

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