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SME's Strategies for Organizational Success Towards Business Continuity Plan and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategies employed by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in achieving organizational success through the integration of Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and sustainability practices. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research examined the lived experiences of SME owners and employees in Makati to understand how the four components of BCP—People, Processes, Premises, and Providers—shape resilience during disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings revealed that effective communication, continuous training, and responsive feedback mechanisms enhance organizational adaptability, while risk assessment, technological integration, and efficient resource management strengthen business operations. The study further identified workplace adaptability, environmental considerations, and strong supplier partnerships as crucial factors influencing continuity and long-term sustainability. Based on these insights, a strategic framework was proposed to guide SMEs in developing resilient, sustainable, and competitive business continuity strategies.

Keywords: *Business Continuity Plan, SMEs, Sustainability, Organizational Success, Resilience*

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) exhibit structural vulnerability to market volatility and experience higher failure rates than larger firms (Menina, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these weaknesses, as supply chain disruptions, declining demand, and mobility restrictions significantly constrained SME operations across developing economies (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2025). Setiawati and Mastarida (2023) similarly observed that prolonged uncertainty forced many SMEs to scale down or cease operations. In the Philippines, limited digital infrastructure further hindered the transition to remote and digital business models (ADB, 2025). These conditions highlight a fundamental structural gap: many SMEs lack formalized resilience systems and integrated continuity strategies necessary to withstand systemic disruptions.

Despite these challenges, SMEs remain essential to economic growth, employment generation, and inclusive development. Their continued contribution, however, depends on strengthening long-term sustainability. Increasing environmental pressures, regulatory requirements, and stakeholder expectations necessitate the integration of sustainable practices into core business operations. As noted by Setiawati and Mastarida (2023), sustainability has become a strategic determinant of competitiveness, influencing firms' access to markets, supply chains, and critical resources.

In addition, digital transformation and innovation have emerged as key determinants of organizational survival and resilience. Mishrif and Khan (2023) emphasize that technological adoption enhances operational efficiency and competitiveness, while Priyono et al. (2024) identify digital transformation as a driver of organizational agility during crises. However, access to digital infrastructure, financial capital, and technological expertise remains uneven, particularly among SMEs in developing economies. Consequently, SME responses to disruption are often reactive and fragmented rather than guided by structured continuity frameworks (Setiawati & Mastarida, 2023).

The pandemic underscored the importance of embedding resilience and sustainability within a coherent strategic framework. Business Continuity Planning (BCP) has been identified as a critical mechanism for anticipating risks, maintaining operational stability, and preserving stakeholder confidence during disruptions (Syahribulan et al., 2025). Nevertheless, empirical research examining structured business continuity components in developing-country contexts remains limited. In the Philippines, infrastructural and institutional constraints continue to impede the adoption of formal continuity systems among SMEs.

Accordingly, this study contextualizes the Business Continuity Framework within Philippine SMEs and examines how its core dimensions—People, Processes, Premises, and Providers—collectively influence organizational resilience and sustainability. By integrating continuity and sustainability perspectives, this research contributes to theoretical development and provides evidence-based insights to support SME resilience and long-term sustainability in emerging economies. This study is anchored in the Business Continuity Framework (BCF) and Contingency Theory, which collectively explain how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) develop resilience and sustain operations under conditions of uncertainty. These complementary perspectives provide structural and contextual foundations for understanding organizational continuity and long-term sustainability.

Business Continuity Framework

The Business Continuity Framework conceptualizes organizational preparedness as a systematic and proactive approach to maintaining essential operations during and following disruptive events. Beyond recovery, it emphasizes anticipation, mitigation, and adaptive capacity. Herbane (2022) and Linnenluecke (2022) argue that resilience reflects an organization's capacity to absorb disruptions while preserving core functions and strategic direction. In this context, Business Continuity Management (BCM) institutionalizes preparedness by integrating risk awareness and response mechanisms into routine organizational processes.

Empirical evidence underscores the strategic importance of structured BCM practices. Arosio et al. (2023) demonstrate that formalized continuity systems enhance SME preparedness through integrated risk assessment and response planning. Battisti et al. (2023) further note that systematic identification of vulnerabilities and contingency measures strengthens financial stability and customer retention. In resource-constrained environments, structured continuity frameworks provide essential guidance for minimizing operational and reputational risks (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings position business continuity as a critical capability for sustaining organizational performance under volatile conditions.

This study operationalizes the Business Continuity Framework through four interrelated dimensions: People, Processes, Premises, and Providers.

People refer to leadership competence, employee capability, and stakeholder engagement, which collectively influence adaptive decision-making and recovery effectiveness. Leadership preparedness is particularly critical in SMEs, where decision-making authority is often centralized (Pettit et al., 2024).

Processes encompass formalized workflows, risk management systems, and documented recovery procedures that enhance coordination and response efficiency. Integrated operational and risk management practices contribute significantly to organizational resilience (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2023).

Premises include physical infrastructure and digital systems that support operational continuity. Technological readiness, such as digital platforms and remote work capabilities, enhances organizational flexibility during disruptions.

Providers refer to external partners, suppliers, and value-chain actors whose reliability influences organizational vulnerability. Diversified and collaborative supplier networks reduce supply chain disruptions and support sustained operational performance (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2023).

Contingency Theory and Contextual Adaptation

While the Business Continuity Framework identifies essential structural components, Contingency Theory explains variations in their effectiveness. The theory posits that organizational performance depends on the alignment between internal structures and external environmental conditions (Meyer et al., 2023). There is no universally optimal continuity model; effectiveness is contingent upon situational factors, including firm size, resource availability, technological capability, and market dynamics. For SMEs, continuity strategies must therefore be context-specific rather than standardized. Adaptive alignment between organizational structures and environmental conditions is essential for achieving resilience.

Integrated Theoretical Perspective

The integration of the Business Continuity Framework and Contingency Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of SME resilience. The Business Continuity Framework defines the structural foundations of continuity—People, Processes, Premises, and Providers—while Contingency Theory emphasizes the importance of contextual alignment in determining their effectiveness. Structural preparedness establishes the basis for resilience, whereas contextual adaptation determines its sustainability.

Accordingly, this study posits that SME sustainability depends not only on the presence of continuity mechanisms but on their strategic alignment with organizational and environmental conditions. This integrated framework guides the empirical examination of how SMEs develop and implement contextually appropriate continuity strategies to enhance resilience and ensure long-term sustainability.

Review of Related Literature

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), exposing structural vulnerabilities related to workforce availability, supply chain continuity, and financial stability. SMEs account for more than 90% of businesses worldwide and contribute substantially to employment and economic activity; however, their limited financial reserves, technological capacity, and operational flexibility make them more susceptible to external shocks compared to larger organizations (Kraus et al., 2022). The pandemic revealed systemic weaknesses in SME preparedness, particularly in maintaining operational continuity during prolonged disruptions. Herbane (2022) argues that such crises exposed deficiencies in continuity structures, highlighting the necessity for proactive risk management and continuity planning. Although Kraus et al. (2022) emphasize SMEs' vulnerability during disruptions, Arosio et al. (2023) demonstrate that organizations with structured business continuity planning (BCP) mechanisms experienced faster recovery and operational stabilization, suggesting that resilience is strongly influenced by preparedness and strategic continuity frameworks.

Business continuity planning serves as a strategic framework that enables organizations to maintain essential functions during crises while supporting long-term organizational viability. According to Arosio et al. (2023), BCP aligns immediate response actions with long-term operational objectives, ensuring continuity of service delivery and facilitating systematic recovery. Furthermore, recent research highlights that effective BCP extends beyond risk mitigation and incorporates technological innovation, stakeholder coordination, and sustainability-oriented practices to strengthen organizational adaptability (Battisti et al., 2023; Sullivan-Taylor & Wilson, 2025). Similarly, Sullivan-Taylor and Wilson (2025) emphasize that continuity planning enhances adaptive capacity by enabling organizations to anticipate risks, respond effectively, and reorganize operations under uncertain conditions. These findings collectively suggest that BCP is not merely a reactive measure but a strategic capability that supports organizational resilience, operational stability, and long-term sustainability.

Central to effective BCP implementation are the four interrelated components: People, Processes, Premises, and Providers. The People component refers to the workforce's skills, preparedness, and adaptability, which are essential for maintaining operational continuity during disruptions. Employee competence, crisis awareness, and leadership support enhance organizational responsiveness and recovery capacity. The Processes component encompasses operational procedures, contingency protocols, and communication systems that ensure continuity of critical functions. Clearly defined and adaptable processes enable organizations to respond efficiently and minimize operational interruptions. The Premises component refers to the physical and technological infrastructure required for operations, including facilities, equipment, and digital systems, which support continuity through redundancy, remote work capabilities, and infrastructure resilience. Finally, the Providers component includes external stakeholders such as suppliers, contractors, and service

partners, whose reliability directly affects supply chain stability and operational continuity. Studies by Chowdhury et al. (2022) and Ivanov and Dolgui (2023) emphasize that supplier coordination, diversified sourcing, and collaborative partnerships significantly enhance supply chain resilience and reduce disruption risks. Collectively, these four components function as an integrated system that strengthens organizational preparedness, enabling SMEs to sustain operations, recover more efficiently, and maintain long-term performance.

The integration of business continuity planning with sustainability represents an emerging strategic paradigm in organizational management. Sustainability-oriented BCP enables SMEs not only to survive disruptions but also to enhance adaptive capacity, improve resource efficiency, and maintain long-term competitiveness. Sullivan-Taylor and Wilson (2025) argue that continuity planning contributes to sustainable organizational development by promoting proactive risk management, stakeholder engagement, and strategic adaptability. Consequently, BCP supports both immediate operational recovery and long-term organizational success, reinforcing the link between continuity preparedness, resilience, and sustainability outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature on SMEs, pandemic disruptions, and business continuity planning, significant gaps remain. Existing studies primarily focus on general resilience strategies or examine BCP in large organizations and developed economies, limiting the applicability of findings to SMEs in developing countries. Furthermore, many studies adopt qualitative or descriptive approaches, which provide limited empirical evidence on the measurable effects of specific BCP components. In particular, there is insufficient quantitative research examining the combined and individual contributions of the four core BCP components—People, Processes, Premises, and Providers—to organizational success and sustainability. This gap is especially evident in the Philippine context, where SMEs operate under distinct economic, structural, and environmental conditions. Addressing this gap is critical to understanding how continuity planning components influence SME resilience and sustainability, thereby providing empirical evidence to support strategic continuity planning and long-term organizational success.

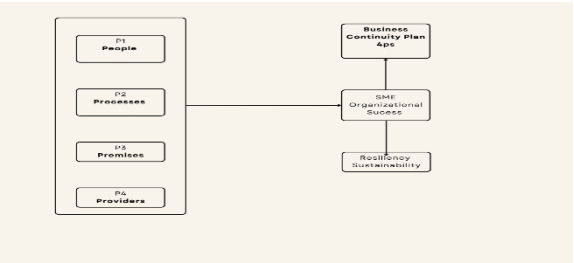

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a conceptual framework that explains how the core components of Business Continuity Planning (BCP)—People, Processes, Premises, and Providers—influence the organizational success and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These components represent critical operational domains that shape an organization's preparedness, response capability, and recovery during disruptions. Herbane (2022) asserts that effective continuity planning enhances organizational resilience by integrating human, operational, infrastructural, and external resource capacities.

The **People** component encompasses workforce competencies, leadership capability, communication effectiveness, and employee preparedness, all of which are essential for coordinated decision-making and effective crisis response . Linnenluecke (2022) and Battisti et al. (2023) emphasize that employee training, leadership effectiveness, and organizational learning significantly strengthen adaptive capacity and organizational resilience.

The Processes component refers to operational workflows, risk assessment procedures, contingency protocols, and internal control systems that ensure continuity of essential business functions. Arosio et al. (2023) found that structured continuity procedures and risk management systems contribute to faster recovery and improved operational stability during disruptions.

The Premises component includes the physical and digital infrastructure required to sustain business operations, such as facilities, equipment, and technological systems. Sullivan-Taylor and Wilson (2025) highlight that technological readiness and resilient infrastructure enable organizations to maintain operational continuity and support long-term sustainability.

The Providers component involves external stakeholders, including suppliers, contractors, and service providers, whose reliability directly affects supply chain continuity and operational performance. Ivanov and Dolgui (2023) and Chowdhury et al. (2022) emphasize that supplier diversification and collaborative partnerships enhance supply chain resilience and organizational stability.

Collectively, these components form an integrated framework that strengthens organizational preparedness, enhances resilience, and supports long-term sustainability. Herbane (2022) notes that organizations with comprehensive continuity planning are better positioned to withstand disruptions and maintain performance. This framework guides the present study in examining how the core components of BCP influence SMEs' ability to sustain operations, recover from disruptions, and achieve long-term organizational success in dynamic and uncertain environments.

METHOD

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method commonly used in phenomenological research to identify and interpret patterns within qualitative data. This approach was appropriate as it enabled systematic examination of participants' lived experiences and the identification of themes related to SME resilience and business continuity during crises.

Participants were selected through maximum variation purposive sampling to capture diverse experiences across industries and organizational contexts. The inclusion criteria required at least five years of experience working in or managing SMEs within the National Capital Region. A sample size of eight to ten participants was targeted to ensure depth and richness of experiential data, consistent with phenomenological research standards.

The analysis followed a structured and iterative process. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to ensure familiarity with the data. Significant statements and relevant descriptions were identified and coded. These codes were then grouped into categories based on similarities and refined into broader themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences. The themes were reviewed, interpreted, and aligned with the research objectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of SME resilience strategies.

Ethical standards were strictly observed. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of

pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information. All data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to explore the experiences, strategies, and perspectives of SME owners and managers regarding business continuity and sustainability. The interview guide was developed based on the study's research objectives, conceptual framework, and relevant literature on business continuity planning and organizational resilience.

To ensure content validity and clarity, the interview guide underwent expert review by two field specialists with expertise in business management and research methodology. Their feedback focused on the relevance, clarity, and alignment of the questions with the study objectives. Minor revisions were made to improve question wording, sequence, and comprehensiveness. In addition, pilot testing was conducted with two SME representatives who were not included in the final sample. The pilot test helped identify ambiguous questions and improve the logical flow of the interview. Necessary refinements were made based on their feedback to enhance the reliability and effectiveness of the instrument.

The interview guide included open-ended questions that allowed participants to freely share their experiences. Sample interview questions included: (1) Can you describe how your business responded when disruptions occurred? (2) What strategies did you implement to ensure the continuity of your operations? (3) What challenges did you encounter, and how did you address them? (4) How did your employees, suppliers, or partners contribute to sustaining your business? (5) What lessons did you learn that helped strengthen your business continuity and sustainability?

Interviews were conducted through an online platform to ensure accessibility and convenience. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate and complete data capture. The researcher also took detailed field notes during and after each session to document observations, contextual details, and initial reflections.

To ensure confidentiality and data security, all recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher. Participants were informed of the purpose of the recording and their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Additionally, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data collection process to document methodological decisions, personal reflections, and emerging insights, thereby enhancing the credibility, transparency, and trustworthiness of the study.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher assumes that the participants provide truthful and accurate accounts of the challenges they experienced and the strategies they implemented during periods of disruption. It is further assumed that participants are able to clearly recall their operational experiences and articulate their responses, which is essential in a phenomenological inquiry. The study also assumes that the selected small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have implemented some form of continuity strategy, whether formal or informal, in response to operational challenges. Additionally, it is assumed that the disruptions encountered had measurable effects on business operations, influencing decision-making processes and overall performance. These assumptions establish the necessary research conditions for gathering reliable and meaningful data.

Data Analysis

The analysis began with epoche (bracketing), during which the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling to set aside prior assumptions. Horizontalization followed, wherein all significant statements relevant to the phenomenon were identified from interview transcripts and journal notes and treated with equal value. Redundant statements were removed to establish invariant constituents.

These constituents were clustered into meaning units, forming thematic representations grounded in participants' narratives. Textural descriptions were developed to capture what participants experienced, while structural descriptions explained how the experiences occurred within specific contexts. The integration of these descriptions resulted in a composite statement reflecting the essence of the phenomenon.

Data saturation was reached after 15 in-depth interviews, indicated by recurring themes and the absence of new experiential meanings.

Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, maintenance of an audit trail (transcripts, memos, and reflexive notes), peer debriefing, and triangulation of interview and field note data.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1. Thematic Findings

Key Statements	Codes	Minor Theme	Major Theme
"We use group chats and weekly meetings, but sometimes messages get lost."	group chats, weekly meetings, and miscommunication	Communication practices and barriers	Communication as a Driver of Efficiency and Challenges
"I attended a skills training last year which helped me manage new tools at the site."	upskilling programs, training impact	Training as capacity-building	Training as Organizational Adaptability
"Clients often give suggestions, and we adjust based on their feedback."	client feedback, adjustments, improvement	Constructive feedback utilization	Feedback as a Tool for Continuous Improvement
"We monitor our cash flow regularly and keep backup suppliers."	financial monitoring, backup suppliers	Proactive risk prevention	Risk Management Practices in SMEs
"Adopting new software helped us track projects faster."	digital tools, efficiency improvement	Benefits of technology adoption	Technology Integration for Competitiveness
"We struggle with limited manpower, so we often multitask."	manpower shortage, multitasking	Resource limitations and trade-offs	Resource Management and Sustainability
"We reorganized the workplace to comply with new safety protocols."	workplace adjustments, compliance	Flexible workplace practices	Workplace Adaptability
"Bad weather delayed the project, so we rescheduled tasks."	weather disruptions, rescheduling	Adaptive responses	Navigating Environmental Factors
"After every project, we document lessons learned for future use."	process documentation, lessons learned	Systematic improvement practices	Continuous Improvement for Competitiveness
"We prioritize funds for projects that give higher returns."	financial prioritization, project-based allocation	Effective allocation practices	Strategic Resource Allocation
"We keep an emergency fund in case of delays or shortages."	contingency fund, backup plan	Preparedness for disruptions	Contingency Planning and Resilience
"We rely on trusted suppliers who deliver on time."	reliable suppliers, partnership trust	Strengthening supply chain partnerships	Supply Chain Management

"I make sure that resources are properly allocated every day. We avoid wasting materials and ensure equipment is maintained so we don't spend extra. We also look for suppliers with sustainable products."	cost-efficiency, resource allocation, sustainable sourcing	Profitability and Sustainability Alignment	Strategic Leadership for Sustainable Organizational Success

The themes were generated following a phenomenological thematic analysis approach aimed at capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences. Interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to achieve data immersion and holistic understanding. Significant statements relevant to business continuity and operational experiences were identified and extracted as meaning units. These meaning units were then carefully coded and clustered into related categories based on shared meanings and experiential similarities. Through an iterative interpretative process, these categories were synthesized into broader themes that reflect the common structures of experience across participants. This process ensured that the resulting themes authentically represent the participants' perspectives while aligning with the study's focus on the core components of the Business Continuity Plan and organizational success.

People Components (Themes 1–3)

The People component captures themes related to workforce capability, communication effectiveness, training, and organizational learning. These themes reflect how human factors influence operational continuity and organizational resilience in construction SMEs. Participants consistently emphasized that employees are not only responsible for executing tasks but also play a critical role in maintaining coordination, adapting to changes, and improving operational processes. Communication, training, and feedback collectively shape workforce competence, responsiveness, and adaptability. These human-centered practices enable SMEs to sustain operations despite disruptions, resource constraints, and environmental uncertainties.

Theme 1: Communication as a Driver of Efficiency and Operational Challenges

Communication emerged as a central mechanism for coordinating construction activities. Participants consistently described it as foundational to task delegation, workflow alignment, and client engagement. Common platforms included group messaging applications, phone calls, written reports, and on-site meetings. As one participant explained, *"If communication is clear, the project moves smoothly. Everyone knows their role."* Another added, *"Most delays start when instructions are misunderstood."*

However, communication practices were largely informal. The absence of structured documentation systems, message tracking, or formal reporting hierarchies often led to duplicated work and rework. A manager noted, *"Sometimes we rely too much on verbal instructions, and that causes confusion later."* This duality reflects both agility and vulnerability. While informality enables speed, it also weakens accountability.

This finding aligns with prior research indicating that SMEs often privilege flexibility over formal documentation to maintain responsiveness (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2023). Yet, excessive reliance on informal exchanges may compromise operational control and continuity planning.

Theme 2: Training as Organizational Adaptability

Training was consistently framed as a strategic investment rather than an operational cost. Participants emphasized that continuous skill development—covering safety standards, digital tools, and updated construction techniques—enhances workforce readiness. One owner remarked, *"When workers are trained, they adjust faster to changes."* Another shared, *"Mistakes decrease when people know exactly what to do."*

Inadequate training, by contrast, resulted in delays, inefficiencies, and quality issues. These findings reinforce literature suggesting that human capital development strengthens adaptive capacity and long-term competitiveness in SMEs (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021). Training enhances not only technical proficiency but also organizational resilience by enabling rapid response to disruptions.

Theme 3: Feedback as a Tool for Continuous Improvement

Feedback mechanisms—though often informal—served as tools for operational refinement. Participants described post-project evaluations, supervisor comments, and client feedback as essential for preventing recurring errors. One participant stated, *"We review what went wrong so we don't repeat it next time."* Another emphasized, *"Client feedback helps us improve before small issues become big problems."*

This embedded learning culture fosters accountability and incremental improvement. The findings support continuous improvement theory, which emphasizes feedback loops as drivers of organizational learning and performance enhancement (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2019).

Collectively, communication, training, and feedback reinforce one another as human-centered pillars of continuity. Communication enables coordination, training strengthens capability, and feedback sustains learning. Together, these themes reflect a resilience-oriented culture grounded in adaptability and shared responsibility. Within the Business Continuity Framework, the People component functions as the primary enabler of operational stability during both routine and disruptive conditions.

Process Components (Themes 4–6)

The Process component focuses on operational systems and managerial practices that support continuity and efficiency. These themes capture how SMEs manage risks, integrate technology, and allocate resources to sustain operations. Participants described processes as structured yet adaptive mechanisms that enable organizations to anticipate disruptions, coordinate activities, and maintain workflow stability. Risk management, technology integration, and resource management emerged as critical operational capabilities that enhance efficiency, reduce vulnerability, and strengthen organizational resilience. These process-oriented practices enable SMEs to maintain continuity despite operational uncertainties and external disruptions.

Theme 4: Risk Management Practices in SMEs

Risk management practices were primarily experience-based rather than formally codified. Participants identified supplier delays, weather disruptions, labor shortages, and financial constraints as recurring threats. One contractor shared, *"You learn from experience. When something happens once, you prepare for it next time."*

Mitigation strategies included contingency planning, expense monitoring, preventive safety measures, and maintaining backup suppliers. Early risk anticipation was frequently cited as essential for cost control and schedule protection. These findings reflect research indicating that SMEs often adopt informal yet proactive risk management approaches rooted in managerial experience (Verbano & Venturini, 2013).

Theme 5: Technology Integration for Competitiveness

Technology adoption significantly influenced operational coordination. SMEs utilizing project monitoring software and digital reporting systems reported improved transparency and faster decision-making. As one participant stated, *"With digital tracking, we see problems*

immediately."

Conversely, limited technological capability led to inefficiencies and delayed reporting. The findings corroborate literature suggesting that digital transformation enhances SME competitiveness and crisis responsiveness (Bouwman et al., 2019). Technology thus serves as a structural support mechanism for process continuity.

Theme 6: Resource Management and Sustainability
Effective resource management, encompassing manpower, materials, time, and finances, was identified as a core determinant of project success. Participants described deliberate efforts to forecast material needs, optimize labor allocation, control costs, and minimize waste. Given the limited budgets of many SMEs, resource inefficiency was equated with direct financial loss.

Sustainability, within this context, is achieved through strategic resource use rather than large-scale environmental initiatives.

Resource management emerged as a determinant of financial sustainability. Participants emphasized forecasting material needs, optimizing labor deployment, and minimizing waste. One manager noted, *"Every wasted material is lost profit."*

Sustainability, in this context, was operational rather than environmental—focused on efficiency and cost discipline. These findings align with resource-based theory, which posits that strategic resource utilization underpins sustained competitive advantage (Ramley, 2026).

The process-related themes collectively demonstrate how operational discipline supports resilience. Experiential risk management reduces uncertainty, technology enhances coordination, and strategic resource allocation preserves financial stability. Together, they operationalize continuity principles through proactive planning and efficiency-driven execution.

Premises Components (Themes 7–9)
The Premises component captures themes related to the physical and environmental conditions influencing operational continuity. Participants emphasized that construction SMEs operate in dynamic and often unpredictable environments that require constant physical and operational adaptation. Workplace adaptability, environmental responsiveness, and continuous improvement emerged as essential capabilities that allow organizations to maintain productivity despite external disruptions. These themes highlight the importance of environmental awareness, operational flexibility, and organizational learning in sustaining continuity within physically demanding and environmentally sensitive work settings.

Theme 7: Workplace Adaptability
Construction environments require constant physical and operational adjustments. Participants explained that site layouts, workflows, and safety protocols are frequently modified based on project scope, space limitations, and external conditions. During periods of health disruption, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, SMEs adopted additional safety measures and adjusted work arrangements to maintain operations (Awais, 2023).

Construction environments require constant adjustment. Participants described modifying site layouts, workflows, and safety measures in response to project demands and health regulations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional protocols were implemented to maintain productivity. As one respondent stated, *"We had to reorganize the site to keep everyone safe and still meet deadlines."*
Adaptability of physical space and procedures enabled operational continuity despite disruption.

Theme 8: Navigating Environmental Factors
Environmental forces—such as extreme weather, traffic congestion, and regulatory constraints—were recognized as external vulnerabilities. One participant explained, *"Weather is beyond our control, but we adjust our schedule to minimize delays."*

SMEs mitigated these risks through proactive scheduling and flexible planning. This finding supports resilience theory, which emphasizes anticipatory adaptation in response to environmental uncertainty (Duchek, 2020).

Theme 9: Continuous Improvement for Competitiveness
Continuous improvement emerged as a deeply embedded organizational practice. Participants described documenting lessons learned, reviewing completed projects, and refining operational strategies to enhance future performance. Consultants emphasized that this ongoing evaluation allows SMEs to remain competitive, reduce recurring errors, and improve efficiency.

Participants described documenting lessons learned and refining procedures after project completion. A consultant shared, *"Each project teaches us something that improves the next one."* Continuous evaluation strengthened efficiency and reduced recurring errors.

This practice reinforces dynamic capability theory, which highlights learning and reconfiguration as mechanisms for sustained competitiveness (Teece, 2018).

The premises-related themes highlight spatial, environmental, and evaluative adaptability. Workplace flexibility, environmental responsiveness, and systematic learning collectively enhance organizational resilience. These factors demonstrate that continuity extends beyond internal systems to include physical and contextual adaptability.

Provider Components (Themes 10–12)
The Provider component focuses on external and managerial support systems that sustain organizational continuity. These themes reflect how SMEs allocate resources strategically, prepare for disruptions, and manage supply chain relationships. Participants emphasized that effective resource allocation, contingency planning, and supplier reliability are essential for maintaining operational stability. These external and managerial support mechanisms enable SMEs to reduce vulnerability, maintain workflow continuity, and sustain project completion despite resource constraints and supply chain uncertainties.

Theme 10: Strategic Resource Allocation
Strategic allocation of limited resources was identified as a critical managerial function. Participants emphasized prioritizing high-impact tasks, assigning workers based on skill levels, and minimizing material waste. These decisions directly influence project timelines, cost control, and overall profitability.
Participants emphasized prioritizing high-impact tasks and aligning labor assignments with skill levels. One owner stated, *"We assign people where they are strongest to avoid delays."* Effective allocation ensured productivity despite resource constraints (Traboulsy, 2023).

Theme 11: Contingency Planning and Resilience
SMEs rely heavily on contingency measures to withstand unexpected disruptions. Participants described maintaining emergency funds, securing alternative suppliers, preparing safety stock, and establishing backup workflows. These measures enable SMEs to respond quickly to unforeseen expenses, supply shortages, and operational interruptions.
Emergency funds, backup suppliers, and safety stock were common resilience strategies. As one participant explained, *"You must always*

have Plan B." These measures reflect preparedness and redundancy—core principles of business continuity planning.

Theme 12: Supply Chain Management

Supply chain reliability was consistently identified as critical to project continuity. Participants stressed the importance of trustworthy suppliers who deliver materials on time and maintain open communication. Long-term relationships built on transparency and mutual trust help minimize delays and reduce operational risk (Okeke, 2024)

Reliable supplier relationships were critical for preventing disruptions. Participants stressed trust, transparency, and long-term partnerships. One manager noted, *"If your supplier is dependable, half your worries are reduced."*

Supply chain challenges, such as price fluctuations, transport delays, and material shortages, were recognized as major threats, reinforcing the need for diversified and dependable supplier networks.

Organizational Success Component (Theme 13)

The Organizational Success component represents the integrative outcome of effective people management, operational processes, environmental adaptability, and external resource coordination. Participants consistently identified leadership as the central force guiding organizational direction, decision-making, and sustainability. Strategic leadership enables organizations to align short-term operational priorities with long-term sustainability goals, ensuring continuity, resilience, and organizational growth.

Theme 13: Strategic Leadership for Sustainable Organizational Success

Strategic leadership emerged as the unifying force behind organizational success, sustainability, and resilience. Owners and managers described the need to balance immediate project demands with long-term organizational goals. Decision-making was guided by considerations of financial stability, operational efficiency, environmental responsibility, and workforce well-being.

Leaders support sustainability by implementing resource-efficient systems, encouraging open communication, fostering team involvement, selecting reliable and sustainable suppliers, and cultivating a culture of continuous improvement. Reliable supplier relationships were critical for preventing disruptions. Participants stressed trust, transparency, and long-term partnerships. One manager noted, *"If your supplier is dependable, half your worries are reduced."* Supply chain diversification mitigated risks associated with price volatility and shortages.

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that organizational success among construction SMEs emerges from a dynamic and interdependent system of People, Processes, Premises, Providers, and Performance outcomes. Rather than functioning as isolated components, these elements operate in a continuous feedback loop. Human capability (People) drives the execution and refinement of operational routines (Processes); these processes shape how physical and environmental conditions are managed (Premises); adaptive workplace strategies influence coordination with external partners (Providers); and supplier reliability, in turn, reinforces operational stability and performance outcomes. Performance results then inform leadership decisions, workforce learning, and process improvements, creating an ongoing cycle of adjustment and resilience.

Leadership serves as the anchoring force that aligns and integrates all components. Strategic leaders facilitate communication, guide technology adoption, strengthen supplier partnerships, and cultivate adaptive organizational cultures. Their experience-based decision-making ensures that resources are coordinated effectively across internal and external domains, sustaining both operational continuity and long-term competitiveness.

These findings reinforce the core principles of the Business Continuity Framework by demonstrating that continuity is not merely a documented plan but an integrated organizational capability embedded across people, systems, infrastructure, and partnerships. Moreover, the results align with Contingency Theory, which posits that organizational effectiveness depends on the alignment between internal structures and external environmental conditions. The construction SMEs in this study demonstrate contingency-based adaptability, adjusting leadership approaches, operational processes, and supplier relationships in response to contextual demands.

Collectively, the findings suggest that SME resilience is grounded not in formalized continuity documentation alone but in embedded adaptive practices, relational coordination, and strategic responsiveness. Continuity is achieved through everyday decision-making, collaborative leadership, and iterative learning—validating the contingency-driven nature of SME management in dynamic environments.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the strategies employed by construction small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to achieve organizational success through business continuity planning (BCP) and sustainability. The findings indicate that SME resilience is primarily driven by adaptive, experience-based practices embedded in daily operations rather than formally documented continuity plans. These findings answer Research Question 1 by demonstrating that SMEs operationalize business continuity through informal yet structured practices involving people, processes, premises, and providers. This reflects the Business Continuity Management (BCM) perspective that continuity capability can emerge through operational integration, even in the absence of formal documentation, particularly in resource-constrained organizations.

People-Centered Strategies as the Foundation of Continuity

The findings show that communication, training, and feedback serve as critical human-centered strategies that sustain continuity. These findings answer Research Question 2 by illustrating how workforce-related practices enable SMEs to maintain operational stability during disruptions. Consistent with resilience theory, effective communication strengthens coordination and supports rapid response to operational challenges. However, the reliance on informal communication channels presents risks related to accountability and information consistency. While Kraus et al. (2022) found that structured communication systems enhance scalability and organizational efficiency, the present study suggests that Philippine construction SMEs rely more heavily on interpersonal trust and direct communication due to organizational size and cultural emphasis on relational coordination.

Training emerged as a key resilience mechanism, reinforcing workforce adaptability and operational flexibility. This finding supports BCM principles emphasizing capability development as essential to continuity preparedness. However, unlike large organizations that implement formal training programs, SMEs rely on experiential and on-the-job learning. This contrasts with studies in highly industrialized contexts where formal training systems dominate continuity preparedness, highlighting how SMEs in developing economies adapt continuity strategies based on resource availability and operational realities.

Feedback mechanisms further support continuity by enabling continuous improvement and operational learning. This aligns with resilience theory, which emphasizes adaptive learning as a core capability for long-term organizational survival.

Adaptive Processes and Experience-Based Risk Management

The findings demonstrate that SMEs manage operational risks primarily through experiential knowledge and adaptive decision-making rather than formal risk management frameworks. These findings answer Research Question 3 by showing how SMEs develop continuity capability through accumulated experience and situational awareness. This supports contingency theory, which posits that organizational effectiveness depends on aligning strategies with environmental conditions rather than adopting standardized approaches.

Technology integration emerged as a key enabler of operational continuity. SMEs utilizing digital tools demonstrated improved coordination, project monitoring, and communication efficiency, consistent with literature emphasizing digitalization as a critical resilience factor (Menina, 2023). However, unlike findings from developed economies where digital transformation is systematic and institutionalized, technology adoption among Philippine SMEs remains incremental and constrained by financial and technical limitations. This highlights a contextual gap between global continuity models and SME operational realities in emerging markets.

Resource management practices also contribute to sustainability and continuity. SMEs emphasized efficient material use, cost control, and waste reduction as practical sustainability strategies. While global sustainability literature often emphasizes formal environmental policies, this study shows that sustainability in SMEs is primarily operational and efficiency-driven. This finding reinforces BCM and resilience theory, which recognize resource efficiency as a key determinant of organizational survival during disruptions.

Premises Adaptability and Environmental Responsiveness

The findings reveal that workplace adaptability and environmental responsiveness are essential continuity strategies in construction SMEs. These findings answer Research Question 4 by demonstrating how SMEs adjust operational environments to maintain productivity despite external disruptions. This aligns with resilience theory, which emphasizes adaptability and flexibility as fundamental organizational capabilities in uncertain environments.

Environmental factors such as weather variability, regulatory requirements, and site accessibility present ongoing operational risks. SMEs mitigate these risks through flexible scheduling, proactive planning, and adaptive project management. While formal BCM frameworks emphasize structured risk assessment procedures, SMEs rely on experiential environmental scanning and practical foresight. This reflects contingency theory, as SMEs tailor their responses based on situational demands rather than standardized protocols.

Continuous improvement practices further strengthen continuity capability. SMEs institutionalize experiential learning by applying lessons from previous disruptions, reinforcing adaptive resilience. This finding supports prior research suggesting that learning-oriented organizations demonstrate greater continuity capability and long-term sustainability (Kraus et al., 2022).

Provider Relationships and External Resilience

External relationships emerged as critical enablers of continuity and operational stability. These findings answer Research Question 5 by illustrating how supplier relationships, contingency resource allocation, and external partnerships support SME continuity. Consistent with BCM principles, SMEs strengthen continuity by maintaining backup suppliers, safety stocks, and financial reserves.

Supply chain relationships based on trust and long-term collaboration reduce operational uncertainty and disruption risk. This aligns with supply chain resilience literature emphasizing relational stability as a key resilience factor (Menina, 2023). However, unlike large firms that formalize supplier continuity agreements, SMEs rely more heavily on relational trust and informal agreements. This reflects the relational business culture prevalent in Philippine SMEs, where interpersonal trust serves as a critical operational stabilizer.

These findings reinforce resilience theory, which emphasizes external network strength as a key determinant of organizational survival during disruptions.

Strategic Leadership as the Integrating Force

Strategic leadership emerged as the central integrating mechanism connecting people, processes, premises, and providers. These findings answer Research Question 6 by demonstrating how leadership shapes continuity capability and sustainability integration. SME leaders play a critical role in balancing operational efficiency, workforce stability, and long-term sustainability.

This finding strongly supports BCM theory, which identifies leadership commitment as essential for effective continuity implementation. However, unlike formal BCM structures in large organizations, continuity leadership in SMEs is highly centralized and experience-driven. This aligns with contingency theory, as leadership strategies evolve in response to organizational size, structure, and environmental conditions.

Leadership-driven practices—including workforce support, adaptive decision-making, supplier relationship management, and operational innovation—create an integrated continuity system. These practices strengthen organizational resilience by ensuring alignment between operational activities and strategic objectives.

Implications for Business Continuity and Sustainability

Overall, the findings demonstrate that construction SMEs achieve continuity through adaptive, experience-driven, and relationship-centered strategies. These findings collectively answer the central research question by showing that SME organizational success emerges from the interaction of human capability, adaptive processes, environmental responsiveness, external partnerships, and strategic leadership.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce Business Continuity Management theory by demonstrating that continuity capability can be embedded operationally even without formal documentation. The findings also support resilience theory by highlighting adaptability, learning, and relational strength as core resilience drivers. Furthermore, the results validate contingency theory by demonstrating that SME continuity strategies are shaped by by contextual constraints, organizational size, and environmental uncertainty.

From a contextual perspective, the findings contribute to the literature by illustrating how Philippine construction SMEs operationalize continuity differently from larger organizations and SMEs in developed economies. Rather than relying on formalized continuity frameworks, SMEs depend on adaptive leadership, workforce capability, relational trust, and experiential knowledge.

These findings suggest that continuity interventions for SMEs should focus on strengthening existing adaptive practices through simplified, flexible, and context-appropriate continuity frameworks rather than imposing rigid formal systems. Such an approach aligns with SME operational realities and enhances both continuity capability and long-

term sustainability.

Recommendations

The findings indicate that many SMEs operate without formalized continuity structures and rely heavily on reactive responses during disruptions. SMEs should therefore develop a context-specific Business Continuity Plan (BCP) aligned with their operational scale and sectoral risks. The plan should prioritize critical functions, workforce preparedness, infrastructure contingencies, and supplier risk management. To ensure feasibility, implementation may follow a phased approach beginning with basic risk identification and essential process mapping before advancing to formal documentation and recovery targets. The use of standardized templates and publicly available toolkits can reduce cost barriers.

The study further reveals a reliance on informal communication, which contributed to coordination inefficiencies during crises. SMEs should establish structured communication protocols, including defined reporting lines and multi-channel communication systems. Affordable digital platforms provide practical and scalable solutions, allowing gradual integration without substantial financial burden.

Dependence on key personnel emerged as a significant vulnerability. SMEs should institutionalize cross-training and document core procedures to reduce single-point-of-failure risks. Incremental knowledge-sharing sessions and role rotation represent realistic, low-cost implementation pathways suited to resource-constrained firms.

Limited digital adoption was also identified as a constraint affecting operational continuity. SMEs are encouraged to prioritize digitization of high-impact processes such as financial management, documentation, and workflow monitoring. Scalable, subscription-based digital tools offer cost-effective entry points, particularly when adoption is phased according to operational priority.

Supplier concentration further increased disruption exposure. SMEs should diversify critical suppliers and establish alternative sourcing arrangements where feasible. A gradual approach—such as identifying secondary vendors for essential inputs—balances resilience objectives with financial and capacity limitations. Regular internal simulations or scenario discussions are also recommended to ensure that continuity measures remain operational rather than theoretical.

The findings suggest that resilience weaknesses often originate during early business formation. Aspiring entrepreneurs should integrate continuity planning into the startup phase by conducting basic risk assessments, adopting scalable digital systems, and establishing diversified supplier relationships from inception. Even within small founding teams, clear role allocation and documented procedures can prevent operational bottlenecks as the business grows. Prioritizing affordable digital infrastructure and maintaining at least one alternative supplier for critical inputs provide realistic and financially manageable safeguards.

Given that SMEs frequently lack technical expertise and financial capacity to implement comprehensive continuity strategies, policymakers should provide targeted BCP training, simplified resilience toolkits, and advisory support tailored to SME contexts. Financial incentives or subsidized digital adoption programs can mitigate cost constraints identified in the findings. Accessible emergency funding mechanisms and streamlined crisis-response coordination frameworks are also essential to enhance SME recovery capacity while minimizing administrative complexity.

Future research should quantitatively test the proposed continuity framework across sectors and regions to strengthen generalizability. Further investigation into the cost-effectiveness of digital adoption and the integration of sustainability considerations within SME continuity planning would deepen theoretical and practical understanding of long-term resilience.

CONCLUSION

This study provided a comprehensive thematic analysis of how construction SMEs in the This study examined how construction SMEs in the Philippines sustain operations and pursue long-term growth within the framework of Business Continuity Planning (BCP). Drawing on the lived experiences of owners, managers, workers, and consultants, the findings reveal that business continuity is enacted through a coordinated yet largely informal system shaped by human capability, adaptive processes, environmental responsiveness, external partnerships, and strategic leadership.

Thirteen interrelated themes were organized into four operational components—People, Process, Premises, and Provider. The People component highlights communication, training, and feedback as foundations of resilience. The Process component reflects experience-based risk management, pragmatic technology adoption, and resource optimization. The Premises component underscores workplace adaptability and environmental awareness, while the Provider component emphasizes contingency planning and reliable supply chain relationships. Across these dimensions, strategic leadership integrates daily operations with long-term sustainability goals, reinforcing the interdependence of profitability and resilience.

This study contributes to BCP by demonstrating that, within SMEs, continuity functions less as a formalized document and more as an embedded organizational capability enacted through adaptive practice. The findings extend existing theory by supporting contingency perspectives, showing how SME structures and strategies evolve in response to contextual constraints such as uncertainty, limited resources, and relational dependencies. By articulating an integrated four-component framework aligned through leadership, the study offers a grounded conceptual model of SME resilience in the construction sector. Methodologically, the phenomenological approach provides insight into lived experiences and tacit practices that quantitative designs often overlook, thereby enriching the understanding of how continuity is operationalized in practice.

Ultimately, business continuity for construction SMEs emerges not merely as a compliance requirement but as a sustained organizational capacity grounded in adaptability, collaboration, and informed leadership.

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