

The Guidelines for Decreasing the Impact on Small and Medium Enterprise from the Epidemic Crisis in Thailand

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Abstract

Due to the ongoing spreading of a new virus or COVID-19 in every region and its impact on social and economic systems worldwide, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in Thailand are also affected. This research aims to study the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME from the epidemic crisis in Thailand. The study was carried out by dividing into 2 business groups; the small and the medium businesses, studying from 400 SME entrepreneurs in Thailand whose turnover are progressively profitable since 2018, 2019, and 2020, and collecting data by sending questionnaires and receiving them via post and using electronic media via internet network channels. The research was started in January 2021 and required 10 months. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used by determining statistical significance at 0.05. Research results showed that the 3 top guidelines for decreasing the impact used by the entrepreneurs and continue making profits for the businesses even the spreading of COVID-19 exists are 1. Leadership; a role model for wearing masks, social distancing, hand washing, regular communication to have every sector quickly and comprehensively understand the crisis, suitable work priority, 2. Marketing; communication with sympathy and adjustment of sale conditions in accordance with customer's demand, providing advice and assistance for customers, using digital technology instead of face-to-face meeting with customers, and 3. Management; transparency and integrity-based administration, strict screening of outsiders, focusing on teamwork more than the individual. Difference comparison of the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME from the epidemic crisis in Thailand classified by business groups found that leadership factor has no difference at 0.05 of statistical significance while marketing and management factors have differences at 0.05 of statistical significance. Small enterprises pay attention more to marketing and management than the medium ones. What entrepreneurs request from the government's support is tax reduction or privileges, easy-to-access capital with low interest, moratorium, distribution of vaccines and necessary preventive equipment, the government's direct communication with obviousness and scope of time, and promotion of the domestic product.

Keywords: Decrease Impact, Small and Medium Enterprise, Epidemic Crisis, Covid-19, SME

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1. Introduction

Due to the ongoing and wide spreading of a new virus or COVID-19 in every region and its damage on social and economic systems worldwide, every nation has tried to find solutions for their people. Thailand is considered the 2nd country in the world where COVID-19 was found and has been fighting it since 13 January 2020 (WHO Thailand, 2020). The epidemic-based impact will cause a severe crisis in the economic system as it quite highly relies on exportation and tourism. Moreover, government measures and policies are so strict that several businesses have closed down because of lack of cash flow to continuously and sufficiently hire their employees and businesses, poor capital accessibility, and government assistance [1]. Thailand's economy in 2020, therefore, tends to be slow and affects business operations and a great amount of employment in private sectors, especially in tourism [2]. Employment will be lower, especially in vulnerable sectors like tourism and service. Production laborers will lose their income because of business shutdown or sickness from the disease. They have to stop working which surely affects their family. This will also lead to price increasing or the lack of essential consumer goods including food [3]. There is a great chance of the second wave of COVID-19 during the second half of 2020 in Thailand. We might not be able to always keep zero infection [4]. According to Fig.1, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the prediction for Thai economy in 2020 will annually contract at -8.5% (expected range is -9.0% to -8.0%) from the

previous year which expanded at 2.4% a year. It was so widely expansive that the number of foreign tourists and partner nations' economies contracted. Export value will contract at -11.0% (expected range is -11.5% to -10.5%) while the number of tourists coming in, consumption and investment of private sectors will contract at -82.9%, -2.6% (expected range is -3.1% to -2.1%) and -12.6% (expected range is -13.1% to -12.1%), respectively. This is in accordance with the economic depression situation (Fiscal Policy Office, 2020). The effect of the epidemic is on all businesses including SME who definitely are not able to avoid it.

Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) plays a vital role in the nation's economic system in both value and employment aspects. In 2019, the value was 5,963,156 million Baht which was 35.3% of the total GDP. There were 3,105,096 entrepreneurs and 12,060,369 people were employed [5]. In addition, SME has diversified the nation's economic system as it leads to different businesses and distributes economic civilization to other regions nationwide. The government also focuses on SME by increasing SME's GDP on the nation to be not less than 50% within 2021 [6]. It can be seen that effect on SME is widely distributed and there are a number of people who are affected like entrepreneurs, employees, relating supply chains. Studying strategies or how to manage and keep organizations alive during COVID-19 is therefore greatly important for entrepreneur's development.

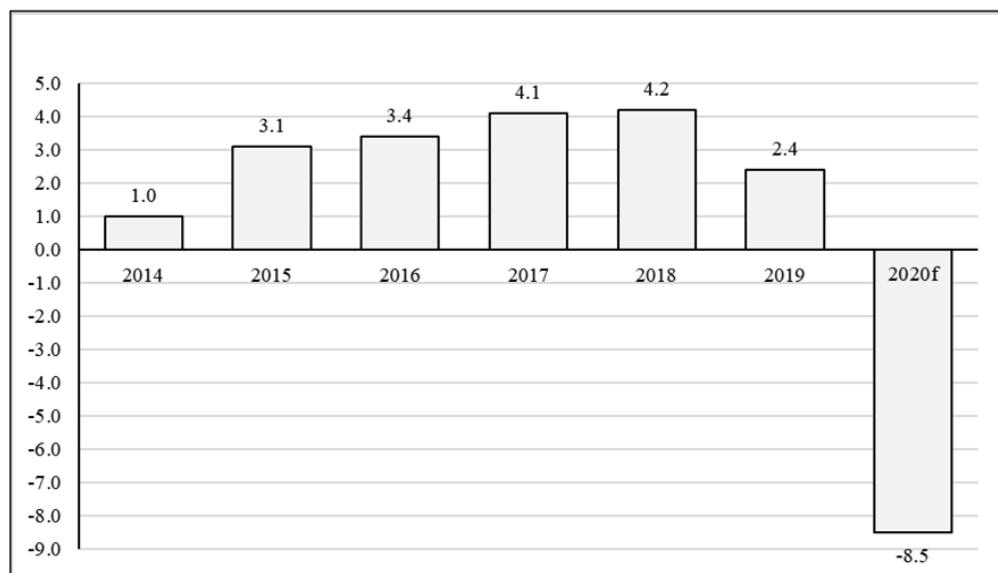


Figure 1: Thailand Gross Domestic Product CVM (%YOY) Forecast in Year 2020
Source: Fiscal Policy Office (2020).

2. Literature Review

The effects of the epidemic cause the wide outbreak crisis. Every business organization is unavoidably affected. Leading the organization to survive over such a crisis is significant. An organizational leader must understand problems, be able to directly and quickly solve problems, be the leader of changes, correctly improve work procedures or business models under current situations, be able to clearly, efficiently, and sufficiently communicate with relating teams, encourage employee's participation, understanding, and sympathy, build positive and energetic organizational culture, and make everyone be a part of the team and the organization. It is obvious that this epidemic crisis is frightening for employees and leaders. Everyone is concerned with their health, family, friends, and colleagues' safety, insecurity about their future, jobs, and income. Regular efficient communication helps relieve these fears and ensure employees' confidence, and understanding of the leader's decisions

and reasons [7]. The decision-making on unexpected crises, the leader applies crisis management strategy and social media marketing to survive the business [8], the ability to perceive possible crises by planning crisis management at the beginning of the epidemic; organizational impact assessment, determination of the best practices to drive the organization, response to external and internal changes, and sudden communication depending on the financial status and leadership of each organization [9]. The crisis spreads all around since the connection of global business networks and open marketing allow every organization a chance to be impacted, no matter how small or big the organization is. Significant crisis management consists of planning, strategic planning, team development, training, monitoring and assessment, awareness and preparation, responsive approach during the crisis [10]. Strategic management during a crisis depends on the leader of the organization and stable cash flow that



keeps the operations smooth. It comes from a good relationship with the customers and leads to continuous business operations. This allows cash flow turnover, which is an important part to follow required financial obligations to guarantee the company's survival [11]. Crises can test leaders' abilities and organizational flexibility well. However, they are not as same as other incidents as the leader are greatly essential in solving crisis situations. A top leader must therefore apply his efficient perception skills, have leadership for changes, be able to efficiently transfer knowledge and communicate at different organizational levels, and can quickly and deeply understand problems for not only organizational survival but also its development while business competition is high [12]. Running businesses with transparency, comprehensive communication, good relationship with communities, and creativity is the development of an effective survival strategy during a crisis (Wilson, 2016). It can be seen that when the epidemic is widely spread, every nation in this world is unavoidably affected. The leader of the organization must do all he can in order to make his organization survive such an incident. The author is therefore interested in studying the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SMEs from the epidemic crisis in Thailand which have been used by organizational leaders in their businesses and help them survive. The study was carried out by analyzing problematic conditions of SME from COVID-19 in Thailand and the 3

guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME; 1. Leadership, 2. Marketing, and 3. Management in order to realize problems of such crisis and get the guidelines used for preventing and reducing the impact on business in the future.

3. Methodology

This is survey research to study the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME from the epidemic crisis in Thailand. The study was carried out by using quantitative research by determining scopes and methodology as follows:

3.1 Population and sample group: There were 3,105,096 SMEs from the Office of Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion (OSMEP) [13]. The sample group was determined by using Taro Yamane's table which gave 400 SMEs [14] consisting of 200 medium enterprises and 200 small enterprises. Multi-stage sampling was used to collect names, addresses, and contacts by sending questionnaires and receiving them via post and using electronic media via internet network channels. It was started in January 2021 by verifying the questionnaire, transforming the data into code, and recording codes into computers for statistical data analysis via computers, accordingly. The research period was approximately 10 months.

3.2 Research variables consist of independent variables which are SMEs and the dependent variable was the levels of significance of the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SMEs which are divided into 3 aspects; leadership, marketing, and management.

3.3 Data analysis and interpretation were carried out by using descriptive and inferential statistics via IBM SPSS Statistics (Statistical Package for the Social Science for Windows) software, check-list questionnaire finding a frequency and concluding in percentage form for Rating Scale, mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S.D.). For the difference test when classified by business size, t-test was used for mean difference analysis. Chi-square (χ^2) was used for correlation analysis via Pearson's method. Statistical significance was determined to be 0.05.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Collecting data from 400 SMEs of the sample group showed that SME entrepreneurs whose turnover has been continuously profitable from 2018, 2019, and 2020 still gain profits. Most of them are retail or wholesale (45.75%), followed by production (29.00%), and service providers (25.25%). Types of business establishment were mostly company limited (68.00%), followed by the partnership (23.25%), and sole proprietorship (8.75%). Periods of business operations were mostly more than 10 years (73.25%), followed by less than 5 years (19.50%), and between 5 – 10 years (7.25%).

4.2 Study results of characteristics of general business operations during COVID-19 crisis by analyzing percentages were found that decreased purchase orders (48.75%) most affected businesses. What discouraged employees the most was salary decrease (39.75%). The most significant obstacle of the organizational business plan

when facing the epidemic situation was customer service plans (42.00%). Changed organizational environment with more restrictions following to New Normal practice (58.50%) most effected on changes of organizational culture. Digital technology most used for building competitiveness was innovation creation by using modern digital technology in accordance with business conditions (33.25%). Crisis management most went to decreased sale orders or services (51.50%). Reduction of business cost was mostly reducing hidden cost on office equipment (40.25%). The most-used method to confront problems was proactive preventive campaign to gain employees' understanding and cooperation (69.50%). The most focus on stakeholder management was to use of information systems to quickly and conveniently communicate with partners (40.25%). The most active social responsibility was not to take business advantages or exploit partners (57.75%). Most employee's potential development was focusing on coaching, transferring knowledge and internal skills (41.00%). The most important issue was jammed transportation due to the official announcement from the government (35.00%).

4.3 Research results on the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME from the epidemic by using mean and S.D. analysis showed that the level of significance of the guidelines for decreasing the impact on the entrepreneurs was high and can be sorted following elements on each aspect as shown in Table1.



4.4 Comparison results of difference of the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME from the epidemic classified by business groups showed that leadership factor has no difference at 0.05 of statistical significance while marketing and management factors have differences at 0.05 of statistical significance. Small

enterprises pay attention more to marketing and management than the medium ones.

4.5 Results of correlation analysis between the guidelines for decreasing the impact on SME from the epidemic in Thailand found that the guidelines depend on the business size at 0.05 of statistical significance.

Table 1 Guidelines for Decreasing the Impact on SMEs from the Epidemic in Thailand Guidelines
(Level of Significance: High)

Guidelines for Decreasing the Impact on SMEs from the Epidemic	Mean	S.D.
Leadership	4.36	0.625
1. Be a role model by wearing masks, keeping social distancing, frequently washing hands.	4.87	0.381
2. Quickly and comprehensively communicate for every sector's understanding on such crisis.	4.54	0.696
3. Prioritize works suitably.	4.53	0.636
4. Encourage everybody to hope that the organization will cope with this crisis and become successful again.	4.53	0.704
5. Closely and specially follow news and information.	4.50	0.664
6. Understand and never be panic. Prepare for expected effects based on factual information.	4.49	0.672
7. Be devoted, determined and responsible.	4.49	0.672
8. Be fair to personnel.	4.49	0.756
9. Listen to other's opinions for work improvement.	4.48	0.652
10. Have good connection for business operations.	4.47	0.732
11. Encourage employee's consciousness to realize business effects on the organization.	4.45	0.748
12. Hasten the use of technology for new communication model with every sector.	4.37	0.919
13. Have public mind and be considerate for public good.	4.36	0.700
14. Provide channels for every level of employees to directly communicate with the executives.	4.32	0.842
15. Compromise and be able to solve ongoing conflicts smoothly.	4.31	0.788
16. Have techniques to coach and mentor personnel.	4.30	0.732
17. Use this opportunity to change the organization and do what employees used to refuse cooperating.	4.02	1.033
18. Trust employees and assign what they can work from home.	3.76	1.315
19. Find strategic opportunities, create innovation, launch new product or service during this time.	3.76	1.332

Table 1 (Continue)

Guidelines for Decreasing the Impact on SMEs from the Epidemic	Mean	S.D.
Marketing	4.24	0.804
20. Communicate with sympathy and adjust sale conditions in accordance with customer's demand.	4.57	0.589
21. Consult and provide assistance for customers.	4.52	0.960
22. Communicate via digital technology instead of face-to-face meeting with customers.	4.51	0.746
23. Strictly stick to promises and conditions given to customers.	4.51	0.942
24. Develop product for customer's confidence in hygienic standard production and delivery procedures.	4.50	0.779
25. Listen and observe customers. Follow purchase orders and closely talk to the customers.	4.48	0.788
26. Immediately accept customer's complaints and quickly respond.	4.45	0.803
27. Focus on customer's information and changing behaviors in order to respond in time.	4.36	0.870
28. Equally take care and focus on every customer.	4.34	0.957
29. Expect customer's demand and suggest it before it is requested.	4.31	0.851
30. Increase sale team's potential to respond to online customer's demand from anywhere.	4.26	0.936
31. Differentiate advantages for the product.	4.25	1.002
32. Find ways to add value for the product.	4.20	0.947
33. Increase services or special qualities to the product without boosting price.	4.14	1.082
34. Focus on proactive market opening from pre-crisis area as it tends to firstly recover.	4.03	1.085
35. Present the product to competitor's customers to make them know us more and provide better conditions.	4.02	1.074
36. Suggest new products or services for customer's alternatives.	3.97	1.13
37. Increase online more than offline sales	3.78	1.230
38. Provide special discount for pre-order purchase.	3.57	1.139
Management	4.11	0.630
39. Administrate with transparency and verifiability	4.66	0.570
40. Arrange strict screening of outsiders.	4.60	0.723
41. Focus on teamwork more than individuals.	4.39	0.731
42. Avoid spending all unnecessary budget to control cash flow.	4.39	0.848
43. Design flexible and adjustable work flow depending on customer's demand.	4.36	0.733
44. Apply organizational financial transaction via electronic system.	4.34	0.795
45. Determine standards and KPI of each work as explicit practical guidelines.	4.33	0.850
46. Use this opportunity to encourage love and engagement to fight COVID-19 crisis together.	4.29	0.849
47. Use electronic commercial system as product distribution channels.	4.24	0.841



Table 1 (Continue)

Guidelines for Decreasing the Impact on SMEs from the Epidemic	Mean	S.D.
50. Apply liable tax privileges from the government to request for indulgence due to the epidemic.	4.23	0.904
51. Reduce and change face-to-face to online communication with outsiders.	4.22	0.927
52. Reduce formality and create casual atmosphere during online meeting.	4.15	0.973
53. Establish database system for quick and correct convenience and accessibility.	4.07	1.093
54. Allow employees who currently have no works to attend required training to develop their knowledge and abilities.	4.05	0.981
55. Create new innovation focusing on using technology instead of labor.	3.91	0.966
56. Provide renewable materials and hasten to find additional distributors.	3.86	1.042
57. Allow employees to work in place of others in case of emergency with no effects on business.	3.58	1.276
58. Store little inventory to maintain cash flow.	3.57	1.057

5. Conclusion

5.1 In the overall image, characteristics of general business operations during COVID 19 found that due to decreased purchase orders, product or service sales are decreased. This leads to lack of income and higher costs because of labor wages. Employees are discouraged and insecure in their future. The organizational environment has changed with more restrictions following to New Normal practice. Transportation of raw materials and product is jammed according to the official announcement from the government. The number of logistics providers is less by virtue of self-quarantine. This is in accordance with the study of Sanit (2021) [15] stating that market demand is slowed down causing lower profits and income. Meanwhile, manufacturers will confront labor and

production resource shortages. Personnel will be stressed and have mental health problems.

5.2 This research found that there are 3 guidelines for decreasing the impact on SMEs used by entrepreneurs in order to reduce the impact on their businesses.

5.2.1 Leadership: It was at a high level of significance ($\bar{X} = 4.36$). The entrepreneurs make themselves a good role model, i.e., be determined and behave well so that employees are confident in their leaders and believe that the organization will cope with everything, encourage everyone to hope that they will survive and become successful again if they cooperate, be a role model by wearing masks, keep social distancing, and frequently washing hands according to the government's suggestions so that the employees will notice

from the leader's action and follow, closely and especially follow news and information, quickly, comprehensively and regularly communicate facts for every sector's understanding, never let employees misunderstand or fall for fake news, and prioritize works as all tasks cannot be completed at the same time. This is in accordance with the study of Supot and Sakrappee (2020) [16] stating that a leader is obliged to determine organizational strategies, obviousness, and goals, clearly communicate, be a role model, inspire his employees, have their dream, and expect to encourage themselves and their teams to be enthusiastic and focus on the same goal.

5.2.2 Marketing: It was in high level of significance ($\bar{X} = 4.24$). As the entrepreneurs realized the effects of such a crisis on decreased sales, they focus on marketing strategies by adjusting sale conditions in accordance with customer's demands, closely communicating, consulting and providing assistance, strictly sticking to promises and conditions given to customers, applying digital technology instead of a face-to-face meeting with customers, and develop products so that customers are confident in hygienic standard production and delivery procedures. This is in accordance with the study of Lakkhongka (2021) [17] that marketing strategies of retail business in the COVID-19 era are turning crisis into an opportunity for serious self-adjustment during the transitional period to the digital era, using all channels of marketing strategies, always finding new markets, using both online and offline channels to variedly meet customer's

demand on point and communicating with the right targets.

5.2.3 Management: It was in high level of significance ($\bar{X} = 4.11$). The entrepreneurs understand the situation, focus on work guidelines that must be stuck to according to the official announcement from the government such as screening outsiders, issue organizational rules and regulations in accordance with such announcement, and pay attention to teamwork more than individuals so that employees can work in place of others in case of self-quarantine or sickness, avoid spending unnecessary budget to control cash flow, and administrate with transparency and verifiability. This is in accordance with the study of Thammasane (2021) [18] stating that an entrepreneur should prepare enough reserved capital for expected expenses on-site improvement according to the government policies, listen to customer's opinions and meet their maximum satisfaction, prove product and service safety to customers, provide the opportunity to every employee to participate and give their opinions on organizational development. This is in accordance with the Office of Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion report (2020) [19] that business operations during COVID-19 epidemic must be changed; social-distancing service area, site, and product cleanliness building customer confidence following to customer's behavior. The entrepreneurs must adjust themselves by designing new products to meet customers' demand, increase sale channels by focusing on the online sale, flexibly and quickly



administrate, reduce costs, and find early-recovering new markets.

5.3 What SME entrepreneurs would like to be supported from the government or other independent agencies are tax privilege or reduction, support of easy-to-access capital sources with low interest, moratorium, distribution of vaccines and necessary preventive equipment, government's direct communication with obviousness and scope of time, and promotion for domestic product.

5.4 Suggestions for utilizing research results when COVID-19 epidemic, the unknown emerging disease, is found on treatment procedures or disease control, the government applied the maximum intensive policies at the beginning of the epidemic which made everything disrupted. Most entrepreneurs had not expected that the effects would come fast. As they slowly solved problems that were found, they could not strategically manage in advance. According to the research, it can be seen that the entrepreneurs who continuously maintain their profits follow the guidelines for decreasing the impact by closely following news and information, assessing effects in advance, making plans beforehand, and clearly communicating to all sectors. When disease control measures were officially announced by the government, these entrepreneurs were ready to strictly follow, and focused on hygienic behavior; cleaning, washing hands, social distancing, adjusted work procedures, and relating regulations in accordance with the government's, reducing the unnecessary cost to maintain cash flow,

closely communicated with customers more than usual, talked about the situation and expected outcomes, kept trade agreement by not taking advantage to boost the price which made customers feel their sincerity and be relieved, delivered products on time, took this opportunity to quicker adjust the organization into the digital era, expanded both online and offline marketing channels, made product and service cleanliness be a selling point for the organization, flexibly and quickly manage the organization following to the situation, ready for changes, dare to do the new experiment, closely follow up the outcomes, and improve their mistakes. Importantly, they must help themselves in every quickest way and not only wait for the delayed and inconsistent assistance from the government. Therefore, the effects of this epidemic can be lessened.

5.5 Suggestions for future studies: As types of products or services are not thoroughly described in this research, researchers are able to focus on the details to continue studying the consistency between types of products and services and the guidelines for decreasing the impacts.

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