Scenario Planning for a Post-Pandemic Era in Small Businesses: A Dynamic Capability Perspective

Planeamento por cenários para pequenos negócios para uma era pós-pandémica: Uma perspetiva dinâmica

10.29073/e3.v9i1.671
Receção: 11/09/2022 Aprovação: 31/10/2022 Publicação: 30/06/2023

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis has fundamentally transformed the way we live our lives and how organizations work. The business sector needed to understand what is the better approach to continue their activity, this leads to formulating and forecasting different scenarios associated with the impact of the pandemic on its suppliers, customers, and employees. This paper aims to investigate possible scenarios in small businesses in a post-pandemic era and how small businesses are preparing for the return of their activity maintenance. In addition, a theoretical contribution throughout dynamic capabilities perspective. An exploratory study with in-depth inquiries based on a quantitative methodology with small business owners as a sample identifying possible scenarios and what is the future direction of small businesses. Also, a bibliometric analysis was applied and focused on scenario planning, strategy, post-pandemic, and dynamic capabilities. Indexed journals were used to validate the study and VOSviewer software to perform a keyword analysis on co-occurrence and counting. A scenario planning framework for small businesses gives an understanding of what could be the possible outlines for the organization and acquire a better comprehension of what strategies can be used as a supplement to surpass the recent crisis. For last, the conceptualization of the theme relates to dynamic capabilities, scenarios, and the behaviour of small businesses
Keywords: Scenario; COVID-19; Dynamic Capabilities; Post-Pandemic; Strategy; Scenario Planning.

Resumo

A crise pandémica da COVID-19 transformou profundamente a forma como vivemos as nossas vidas e o modo como as organizações trabalham. O sector empresarial precisou de compreender qual seria a melhor abordagem para continuar a sua atividade, pelo que necessitou de reformular e prever diferentes cenários associados aos impactos que a pandemia poderia vir a ter nos seus fornecedores, clientes e colaboradores. Nesse sentido, este estudo tem o intuito de investigar os possíveis cenários utilizados pelas pequenas empresas numa era pós-pandémica e compreender de que modo estas empresas se estão a preparar para o seu retorno e manutenção da sua atividade. Adicionalmente, este trabalho de investigação também fornece uma contribuição teórica relacionada com as capacidades dinâmicas. Este é um estudo exploratório, desenvolvido através de inquéritos, e baseado numa metodologia quantitativa que teve como amostra os empresários de pequenas empresas, que identificaram os possíveis cenários e a direção futura para os seus negócios. Simultaneamente, foi aplicada uma análise bibliométrica focada no planeamento de cenários, na estratégia, no pós-pandemia e na teoria das capacidades dinâmicas. Foram utilizados jornais indexados, pela Scopus, para validar o estudo e foi utilizado o *software* VosViewer para realizar uma análise de palavras-chave sobre a co-ocorrência e a contagem. O planeamento de cenários da área de atuação para os pequenos negócios fornece uma compreensão do que poderiam ser os possíveis contornos para a organização e adquire uma melhor compreensão das estratégias que podem ser utilizadas como um suplemento para ultrapassar a recente crise. Por último, a conceptualização do tema está relacionada com as capacidades dinâmicas, com os cenários e com o comportamento dos pequenos negócios.
Palavras-chave: Cenário; COVID-19; Capacidades Dinâmicas; Pós-Pandemia; Estratégia; Planeamento por Cenários.

1. Introduction

Throughout last year several researchers like Pandey (2021), Belitski (2021), Cullen (2021) identified priorities as a critical aim for adapting and developing strategies to discover new trends and priorities, challenging small, and even big corporations to rethink the type of research needed to survive these pandemic times (Mele, 2020).

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has spread remarkably, translating into the most severe economic upset since the second world war (Brown, 2020) contributing to a recession throughout the entire world with consequences to every business area as a whole and the increase of temporary layoffs and furloughs.

This scenario resulted in a new format of working with other tools altering office-based into the home office to ensure social distancing and transforming the job profiles to cover critical functions and help the economic systems (Cepel, 2020). However, due to the continuous global changes the burdens of small businesses, not all disclosed, turn out to be higher due to the formal loans from financial institutions, the constant reduction of prices compared with big companies, the household responsibilities being a burden for female employees, and the inability to create an impact on the market due to overwhelming pressure of big business (Alekseev, 2021).

COVID-19 was also a significant factor for businesses shifting from presential to digital and new entrepreneurs creating new business models to survive the pandemic in several sectors. This radically changed the way businesses are made, the demand patterns for products, services across national boundaries, and sectors exposing the fragility in the world supply chains of various industries (e.g., information, communication technology, and automotive supplies) and service networks (e.g., financial products) (Mele, 2020).

Considering this information, it is necessary to continuously search for new strategies to penetrate the market and structure practical scenarios to eliminate the pitfalls and developed alternative views analyzing key uncertainties that can seriously change the landscape (Schoemaker, 2016).

This paper focused on investigating possible scenarios for small businesses and what preparation will be for the activity return. The research will be made to understand the previous challenges that organizations face during pandemic times, contributing to the construction of our research agenda and supporting the discussion. The literature review has a bibliometric component helping to answer our research question by providing and evaluating certain indicators.

The remaining paper is structured as follows: A quantitative methodology was used to identify what were the variables and possible scenarios used by entrepreneurs to surpass these pandemic times. The bibliometric literature review identifies the research articles used in this study. The quantitative methodology will answer the central question "what are the scenarios that small businesses should use in a post-pandemic era?" and support the discussion and conclusions. Finally, it presents what were the limitations found in the paper and future research related to the subject.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Review on Strategies in Small Businesses during the Pandemic

Considered the driving force for economic growth, small businesses are viewed as the foundations of the economies of many nations. Due to their size and nature, small and medium-sized enterprises are flexible with the ability to adapt to change and adopt new strategies (Taneja, 2016). These same procedures tend to be used in an applied approach to chasing "success" in business and are usually attached as a reference to growth (Weber, 2015).

Although they overwhelmingly operate in a progressively competitive environment, small businesses have insufficient resources for competing with larger organizations and the inability to achieve competitiveness in global markets (Armstrong, 2013). However, the recent events in COVID-19 brought negative attention and influenced business operations degrading economic conditions for all stakeholders (Shafi, 2020).

This outbreak also represents a challenge to small businesses which had to be temporarily closed due to the effects on workers, the cost of keeping them, and health concerns. In the beginning, employees were horrified by the COVID epidemic as the chances of the infection passing from person to person were very high (Kalogiannidis, 2020). In this scenery, managers started to focus and dedicate their time to understanding business processes and making suitable adjustments to respond to the pandemic (Katare, 2021).

These unplanned changes in organizations led managers to rethink business models and include new strategies to create value, take advantage of the new opportunities, and decrease the negative impact of the pandemic. More specifically, the strategies in business models start to include changes in the supply chain, marketing strategies, and changes in the delivery of products to customers (Cucculelii, 2020).

To Marshal and Schrank (2020), one of the strategies to help small businesses throughout the pandemic was the use of financial intermingling and loans leading to both long-term and short-term recovery.

Although the loss of income and suffering damage had a tremendous impact on organizations, the household faced life events such as death, divorce, injury, and loss of a job. These events directly influenced on businesses due to the employees' lack of work-life balance. Considering this scenario, it became necessary to use the "family adjustment strategy" which represents a relocation of resources, in other words, an exchange of interpersonal transactions and resources between the household and organization (Marshal, 2020).

During our research, we discovered that this nonnormative disruption affected the government which had to create a fund to help restore small businesses lives to increase their longevity during the pandemic. This reveals the importance of small businesses globally and the mark they leave on the economy (Katare, 2021).

Table 1 – Small Business strategies

Author's	***Small Business Strategy***
Cucculelii (2020)	*(1) Supply chain* *(2) Marketing Strategy* *(3) Delivery products to costumers*
Schrank (2020)	*(1) Financial Loan* *(2) Long or short- term credit*
Marshal (2020)	*(1) Family Adjustment* *(2) Work-Life Balance* *(3) Remote work*
Katare (2021)	*(1) Government assistance* *(2) Subsidize small businesses*

2.2. Scenario planning for times of uncertainty

Due to the challenges that leaders face in today's context, it is necessary to have a tool that helps leaders make sense of the unknown future (Meyerowitz, 2018). According to Kahn and Andrew Wiener (1967), scenario planning is considered a hypothetical sequence of events that lead to a possible future situation. The utility of these scenarios will attract attention in planning and policy circles to create wiser courses and decisions for the future (Spanionl, 2018).

Although the pandemic brought several constraints to small businesses, the contribution of making scenarios will benefit organizations in the increased business agility. The mitigation of risks, creating business robustness, helping the buildup of future orientation, enhancing the participation of new insights in business strategy, and shifting leadership thinking (Meyerowitz, 2018). Later, it was added to the argument that participation in such exercises enhances implementation and commitment (Wright et al., 2019).

These actions will transform the scenario planning process into changes and how small business decision-makers see the world (Menzies & Middleton, 2020). Following Lyons's (2021) theory about the improvement of planning policymaking, the development of several scenarios can help small businesses in the (1) exploration of different areas of interest to develop in the future, (2) taking into consideration other key actors like citizens, other businesses, governments because the influence the environment, (3) determine what can be the best planning and policy requirements under different future scenarios, and (4) apply stress tests while using those same scenarios.

Some small business owners also proposed strategies to avoid the differentiation domain and low price focusing solely on offer. They suggested better customer service and product specialization or customization while defining appropriate strategic positions (Megicks, 2007).

Mahyari (2022) presented other approaches that focus on improvement and increased flexibility in the affected systems, interpreted as adaptability. The author draws attention to maintaining the path of sustainable development as a constant presence adapted to management approaches and the continuous support of a circular economy which can be introduced in the organization in the min-and long-term by three steps. The support of recycling by regulations and policies, significant investment in domestic infrastructure and final markets, and for last the extensive stakeholder participation (Ibid, 2022).

Many entrepreneurs concluded that it was impossible to maintain their workforce, forcing them to commit layoffs. After paying the expenses some businesses were shut down or on the verge of closing. The scenario that took some owners out of this cycle was the delegation of multiple roles to other employees helping to reduce the costs (Rashid, 2021).

The author also points out two important aspects regarding the scenarios in small businesses, the first being the creation of formal networks supporting entrepreneurial activity with an important role in connecting the customers with their desired service. The second is the volume of information generated during the pandemic, meaning that people are spend more time with technology accelerating the digitalization process and becoming the perfect place for business (Ibid, 2021).

Table 2 – Scenarios in place

Author's	***Possible scenarios in place***
Lyons (2021)	*(1) Explore other areas of interest* *(2) Work with other key actors* *(3) New requirements, planning, and policies* *(4) Apply stress tests*
Megicks (2007)	*(1) Focus on Offer* *(2) Better customer service* *(3) Better specialization*
Mayari (2022)	*(1) Sustainable development* *(2) Circular economy:* *(2.1) Recycling regulations and policies* *(2.2) Investment in domestic Infrastructure* *(2.3) Stakeholder participation*
Rashid, (2021)	*(1) Delegating multiple roles to other employees* *(2) Formal Networks supporting entrepreneurs* *(3) Digitalization to Increase sales volume*

2.3. Understanding Dynamic Capabilities During the Pandemic

During our research, it is well-asserted that dynamic capabilities positively impact firm performance (Ericksson, 2014; Lin, 2014; Chien, 2012). This model enables the organization to quickly respond to environmental changes, supporting the organizational evolution, entrepreneurial fitness, and focusing on doing the right thing (Helfat, 2007; Teece, 2007). Also, it can be referred to as the second-order of capabilities making an enormous contribution to shaping the organization through innovation and collaboration (Baskarada, 2018).

Tracing the roots and to better understand the dynamic capabilities framework, Teece's definition was used to give a better comprehension and understanding, the author states that the organization can have the ability to build, integrate, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address changing environments rapidly (Teece, 1997). To be in line with this definition, changes must be made and implicit with dynamic capabilities, acting upon the capabilities and resources (Wollersheim, 2016).

Adopting dynamic capabilities can serve as a resource of competitive advantage, fostering learning, improving resource deployment, and mitigating the risk of organizational failure (Teece, 2007). Nonetheless, Ambrosini (2009) and Hernández- Linares (2021) state that not all the model variables are equally relevant for performance.

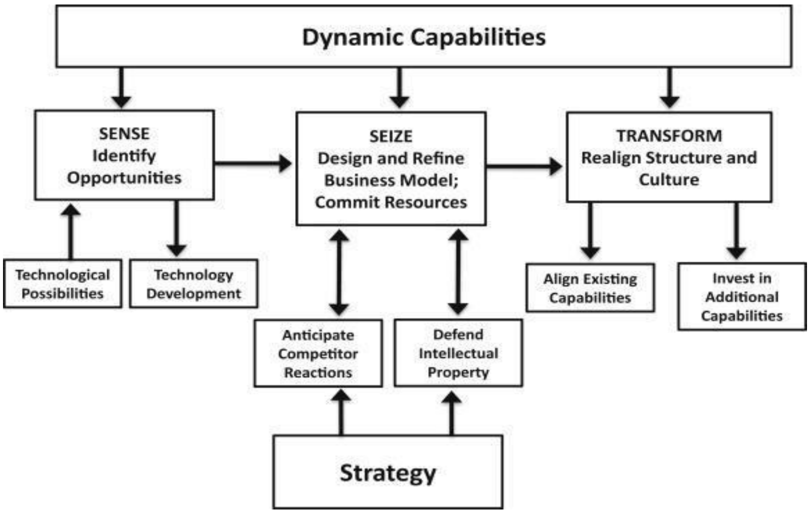
Also, some scholars like Laaksonen (2018), Schilke (2018), Wilden (2016), Peteraf (2013), and Barreto (2010) criticized this framework because variation in a theoretical level is reflected in the empirical studies, and the field is not yet consolidated.

The change in businesses and revenue structure caused by the impact of COVID-19 has shaped several market opportunities, forcing operators to encounter new businesses (Battisti, 2017). The addition of dynamic capabilities in organizations enables small businesses to enter new markets, search for new opportunities, create competitive competition, and deploy their resources to answer market necessities that cannot be imitated (Sabi, 2018).

Flexibility will allow organizations to be more durable by devising alternative strategies in an unstable and uncertain environment. This framework composition is related to the operator's knowledge of the environment (Maldonado, 2019) and can contribute to the integration of managers in their internal technologies, business strategies, and business in complex environments (Verbeke, 2020).

Dynamic capabilities can recover, and adapt from disruption (Zastempowski, 2021). This help in the development of a preventive capacity to face unexpected disruptions and also take the necessary actions to recover and respond, ensuring business continuity described as organizational resilience (Hilmann, 2021).

Figure 1 – Dynamic Capabilities



Source: Teece et al., 1997

3. Methodology

3.1. Literature Review

To comprehend this study's trajectory of scenario planning, a literature review was conducted through a bibliometric analysis to understand the steps made in our study and help gather the data which will determine the relevance of the study and answer our research question: "What are the scenarios that small businesses should use in a post-pandemic era?".

We use a quantitative method to validate and identify what were the applied variables and possible strategies used by small business managers to surpass these pandemic times.

3.2. Research Design

To investigate small businesses, a research design questionnaire with two distinct sections was used (see Appendix 1). The first section contained demographic questions, such as age, gender, education, and nationality, to characterize the sample. In contrast, the second section had more business and strategy-oriented questions.

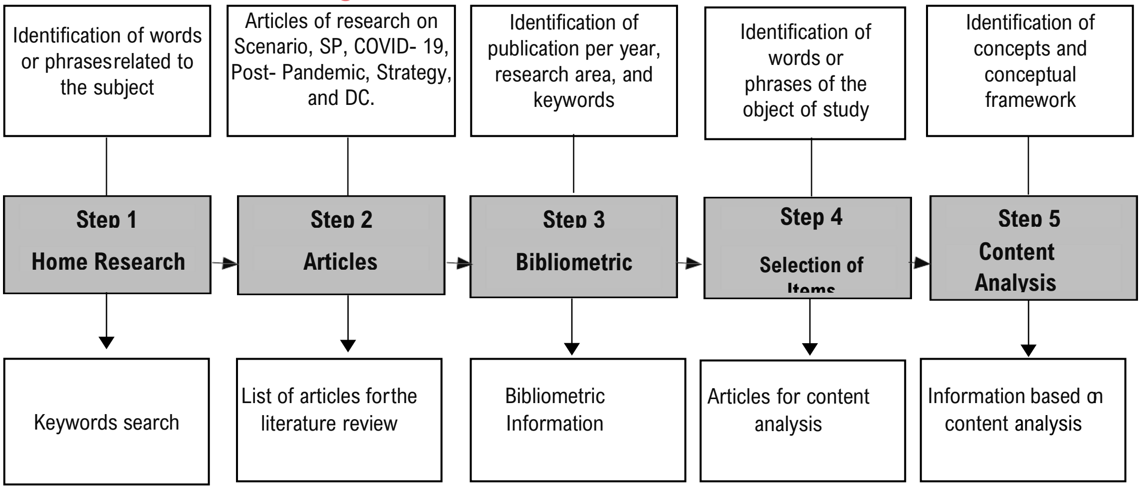
The questionnaires were distributed online, and as this is considered a niche market, their dissemination was mainly through groups that aimed to share businesses and companies. Simultaneously, to reach a larger number of respondents, the questionnaire was presented in two languages - Portuguese and English - which allowed us to have responses from 59 small business managers.

3.3. Data Analysis process

The review screening was performed throughout the reading of the extant with the keywords related to the study, removing the non-articles in the process. The use of keywords words helps the authors choose the most relevant publications associated with the paper title. This research was conducted by searching through the database Web of Science (WoS).

To work in the literature, the authors follow Creswell's (1994) approach which states that the purpose of a review is to condense the accumulated knowledge base about the topic of interest and highlight issues yet to resolve (Karanatsiou, 2017).

Figure 2 – Process of bibliometric literature



Source: Own elaboration

To begin our research protocol (Table 4), the keywords introduced in WoS to work on the literature are “Strategy” AND “Scenario” AND “Scenario Planning” AND “Dynamic Capabilities” AND “Post- Pandemic” OR “COVID-19” giving 320,440 results. With the refinement of the data by categories, namely, business, and management the number of articles reduces to 5,915 results. The articles used were all written in English giving 5,761 results and the document types are all articles refined to 4,915 results. In the field publication titles, the criteria used to select the journals were according to the theme of our study which after being, refined gave us a total of 778 results.

Table 3 – Journals and Number of articles

Journals	No of articles
Journal of Business Research	100
International Journal of Logistics Management	50
Operations Management Research	56
Pacific Business Review	44
International Journal of Organizational Analysis	33
R D Management	31
Small Business Economics	29
Global Business Review	32
Public Management Review	26
Human Systems Management	21
Business Horizons	21
Journal of Knowledge Management	20
Journal of Service Management	18
Knowledge and Process Management	19
Management Decision	25
Personnel Review	18
Business and Society Review	16
Employee Relations	19
Journal of Environmental Economics and Management	11
Business Strategy and the Environment	16
FIB Business Review	13
Journal of Management Organization	11
Leadership	09
Journal of International Business Studies	10

Management Research Review	09
Journal of Change Management	08
Journal of Business Economics and Management	08
TQM Journal	13
European Journal of Operational Research	09
International Journal of Human Resource	11
Polish Journal of Management Studies	27
European Management Review	07
Journal of Innovation Knowledge	09
Journal of Strategy and Management	15
Irish Journal of Management	09
BRQ Business Research Quarterly	09
36 Journals	778 results

Although the last refine gives a set of journals to work with, it still is necessary to exclude some subjects that aren't related to this research. In that sense, we discovered topics like pensions, hybrid modelling, university studies, and blockchain. With the elimination of the non-related articles to scenario planning or post-pandemic, we have reached a total of 108 results.

Table 4 – Research Protocol

Search Term (Title, Abstract or Keywords)	**"Strategy" AND "Scenario" AND "Scenario Planning" AND "Dynamic Capabilities" AND "Post- Pandemic" OR "COVID-19".**
Search Strategy	"AND"; "OR"
Database	Web of Science (WoS)
Publication Type	Reviewed Papers and Research Papers
Language	English and Portuguese
Publication Titles	108 results/36 Journals
Search Period	Not Specific

3.4. Inclusion Criteria

In this research, peer-reviewed journals were considered as a thrust source of knowledge keeping out blogs, thesis, editorial notes, white papers, and book chapters out from this study. To maintain the publications and work of the study it was included an inclusion criterion corresponding to scenario planning, post-pandemic, and COVID- 19.

3.5. Exclusion Criteria

In consideration of the exclusion criteria, we rejected several articles that did not present any practical application of theoretical information that contributed to our research or to answer our central question, in that sense, we have ruled out:

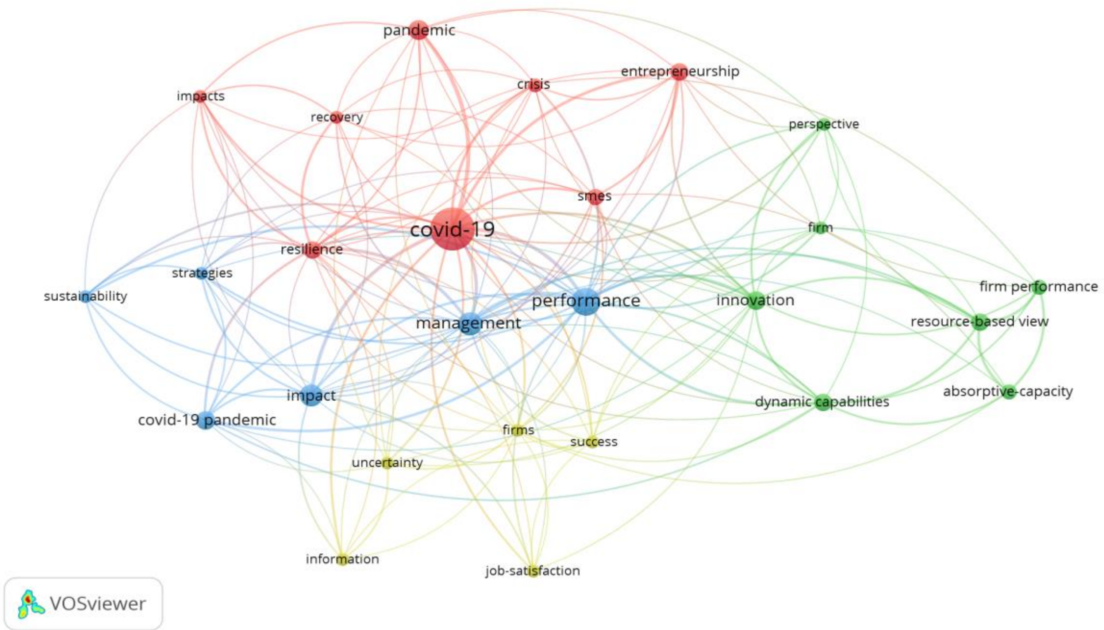
- *Ex1* Articles focused on medical or psychology articles;
- Ex2 Articles with specific relation to technology;
- *Ex3* Articles focus on supply chain;
- *Ex4* Articles with specific relation to a particular industry.

3.6. Keyword Analysis

In figure 2, a keyword analysis was conducted to conceive the dynamics in bibliometric studies in scenario planning. To make a significant analysis, all the data was inserted in VOSviewer through an RSI file taking into consideration the following parameters: A (1) co-occurrence, (2) full counting, and (3) keywords as a unit analysis to create the network.

Filtered a minimum of the threshold of five occurrences, 689 keywords which only 8 meet the threshold providing the following occurrence result. Considering the network results, the clusters highlighted in blue indicates that COVID-19 has influenced the remain variables and by creating scenarios to deal with the pandemic the level of options increase and managers are able to have more tools to define their strategy.

Figure 3 – Keywords analysis

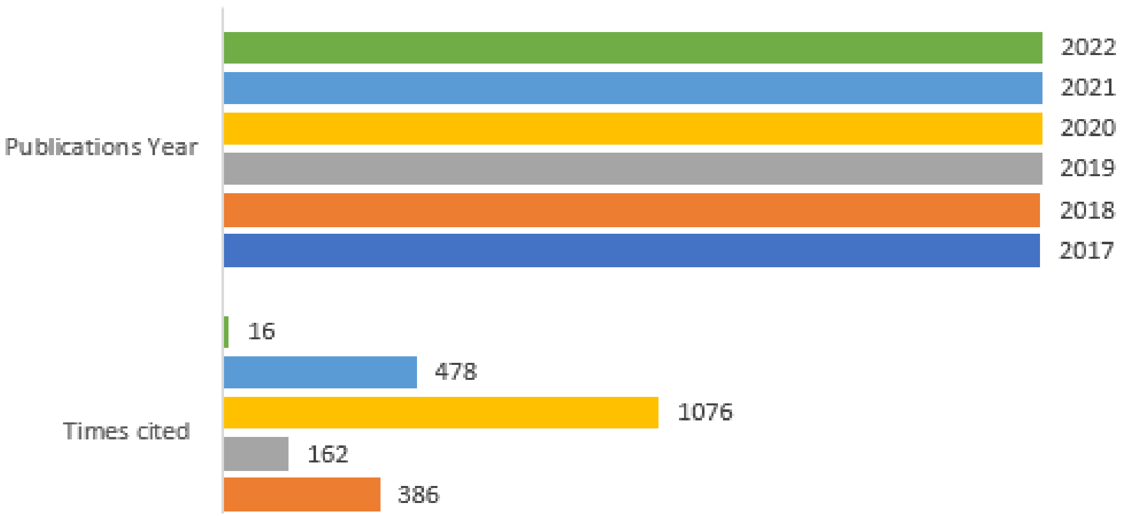


Source: VosViewer software 1.6.17

3.7. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE CITATIONS UNDERSTUDY

In figure 4, it is possible to observe the evolution of publications from 2017 to 2022. This indicator reveals that in the year 2020 was registered 1076 citations, meaning a significant growth and relevance to the discussed subject. Through the evolution of the pandemic context, more scholars have worked on strategies and solutions to surpass organizational difficulties. Considering the matters implied in this study is possible to determine that the focus of 2020 was the study of COVID-19 and the development of solutions for organizations surpassing their constraints.

Figure 4 – Characterization of publications/ citations understudy



Source: Excel software 2019

3.9 Metadata Analysis

In this analysis, we represented five articles related to our study it's possible to understand that COVID-19 it's one of the most debated topics in sciences and the world, although it is an area that is suffering constant changes, the continuous research helps scholars, businesses, health, etc. to understand its path in sciences, how to surpass it some of the presented challenges, and answering valid questions.

Table 5 – Relevant articles for the study

Article title	Author	Journal Title	Year of publication (vol, no.: pp)	Cited reference count	Times cited
Quo vadis, dynamic capabilities? A content- analytic review of the current state of knowledge and recommendations for future research	Schilke, O., Hu, S., and Helfat, C.	*Academy of Manageme nt Annals*	(2018), *12*(1), 390-439	253	266
Organizational resilience: A valuable construct for management research?	Hillmann, J., Guenther, E.	*International Journal of Manageme nt Reviews*	(2021), *23*(1), 7-44	152	42
Contextualizing small business resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic: evidence from small business owner-managers	Hadjiielias, E., Christofi, M., and Tarba, S.	*Small business economics*	(2022), 1-30	143	0
Dynamic capabilities and SME performance: The moderating effect of market orientation	Hernández-Liniares, R., Kellermann s, F., and Lopez-Fernandez, M.	*Journal Small Business Manageme nt*	(2021), *59*(1), 162-195	135	45
Scenario analysis to support decision making in addressing wicked problems: Pitfalls and potential	Wright, G., O'Brien, F., and Goodwin, P.	*European Journal of Operation Reserach*	(2019), *278*(1), 3-19	134	14

4. Results

Table 6 presents the characterization of the sample. On average, small business owners are male (52.5%), between 26 and 35 years old (35.6%), have higher education (71.2%), and are Portuguese (86.4%). Despite the sample size, this opinion is in line with Stewart Jr et al. (1999), which indicates that most small business owners are male college graduates.

The only discrepancy when comparing our results with these authors is the average age of the owners. Nevertheless, this difference may be justified by the fact that the questionnaires were applied in different parts of the world, and if we compare Portugal with other Euro Zone countries, Portuguese owners tend to be younger.

Table 6 – Data Analysis

Characteristics	Questionnaire sample (n=59)	%
Gender		
Female	28	47.5%
Male	31	52.5%
Age		
18-25 years	21	23.7%
26-35 years	14	35.6%
36-45 years	7	11.9%
46-55 years	9	15.3%
56-65 years	7	11.9%
Over 65 years old	1	1.7%
Education		
Basic Education	4	6.8%
Secondary Education	12	20.3%
Higher Education	42	71.2%
Postgraduate Education	1	1.7%
Nationality		
Portuguese	51	86.4%
Other	8	13.6%

Most small business owners consider that the pandemic had an impact on their normal activity (88.1%). Inclusive 37.3% of the respondents had to close their business temporarily and 35.6% had to perform layoffs. Some owners had to take a more drastic measure and dismissed their employees (5%).

Although, in general, people consider that COVID-19 had impacts on their business there is no agreement as to whether these impacts were positive or negative. 27.1% of the inquires respond that COVID-19 was an consider an opportunity for business, while 25.4% agree that it was. Nevertheless, people believe that, regardless of its impact, this pandemic has reinforced that organizations need to constantly change their strategy (93.2%) and reshape business models (93.2%).

Due to COVID-19, 46.9% of the owners had to make family adjustments, however when it came to implementing strategies, they always took into consideration the needs of their employees (61%), because when problems are presented to them, it is important to look from a human perspective before seeking a technological solution (88.1%).

The strategies to maintain and/or restart the activity were mainly family adjustment, developing/improving marketing strategies, remote work, creating a presence on various digital platforms, search for other business areas, and government assistance (see table 7). 69.5% of respondents believe that these strategies contributed to changes in the organizational environment and 52.6% consider that they improved communication and the relationship between top management, middle management, and operations. In this way, it was possible for 62.7% to survive the effects of the pandemic, 15.3% to reach pre-pandemic objectives, and 13.6% to surpass the pre-pandemic goals.

Digital platforms also played a decisive role in the improvement of companies (78%) and helped to improve relations between workers and work colleagues (50.9%). In this way, the commitment to organizational resources becomes higher (71.2%).

The use of data/information during the pandemic becomes relevant to create various scenarios for a possible strategy (74.6%) and having this experience as a basis the surveyed owners consider that the appropriate working format in case of a pandemic is hybrids (55.9%), teleworking (28.8%) and face-to-face (15.3%).

To businesses overcome the impacts of COVID-19, people anticipated the reaction of the competition (45.8%) and defended the intellectual property of the company (28.8%). There is no preference for the environment of the strategy since 71.2% of the respondents consider that the company's strategy should be carried out both from the internal environment to the external environment and from the external environment to the internal environment. Table 7 – Characterization of the sample

Strategies used to maintain/restart small businesses	
Strategy	*%*
Family Adjustment	*39%*
Developing/improving marketing strategies	*35,6%*
Remote work	*33,9%*
Creating presence on various digital platforms	*32,2%*
Search for other business areas	*32,2%*
Government assistance	*28,8%*
Changes in product delivery to customers	*18,6%*
Resorting to support that subsidizes small businesses	*15,3%*
New suppliers	*11,9%*
Price reduction	*11,9%*
Financial Loan	*5,1%*
Long-term or short-term credit	*1,7%*

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study aims to determine the possible scenarios for small businesses to overcome the pandemic effects and return to normality. As we already realized during our research, several scenarios can be used to fulfill the present gaps, however, we need to highlight that the creation of scenarios for businesses is not a simple task.

We live in a world shaken by a global pandemic. The COVID-19 force was felt in all sectors (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and as Cucculelii (2020) stated above "these unplanned changes in organizations led managers to rethink business models and include new strategies to create value, take advantage of the new opportunities, and decrease the negative impact of the pandemic".

While examining our results it was possible to verify that sectors like the industrial have affected the sale of services and immaterial goods, the changes in the financial sector have influenced consumer income, purchasing power, and confidence and the more specific restrictions such as confinement, telework, and the mandatory use of the mask had an impact on the social life of individuals. In the labor sector, not all organizations suffered major effects from this pandemic. This study found that the small companies were not as affected or did not have to take radical measures because they did not have employees working for them and/or they weren't able to maintain their normal activity digitally and, therefore, did not have to make any changes in their daily routine.

Although Rashid (2021) talks about the cycle of delegation of multiple roles to other employees as a measure to reduce costs, this was considered an attempt to reduce nosiness closure and layoffs. We also observe the higher use of social networks and technology becoming a crucial part of daily operations as these instruments facilitate communication and, consequently, bring employees closer together.

Based on dynamic capabilities theory and the obtained results, this study revealed the existence of four essential scenarios that small companies need to be aware of and should take into account when designing their strategies: Work-life balance, increasing engagement, defending intellectual property, and reinforcing the use of digital platforms.

To begin, small businesses must consider the opportunities presented in the market and identify whether they should be valued. An example of this reality is a hybrid or remote work regime. From the perspective of most professionals, this is a practical method to work or continue daily operations. Although there are rigid mindsets that may or may not work well in this specific format or organization, the truth is that work-life balance is essential for employees and for the company itself, as it allows employees to have better control of their physical and mental health, and for the organization, because this well-being makes employees more productive and increases their engagement.

Using the most relevant scenario characteristics identified above (table 7), this study demonstrates that the technological tools/instruments have become a fundamental pillar to competitive advantage and business owners can create strategies to overcome the questions imposed by the pandemic and anticipate market reactions.

Another subject concerning to organizational resources is the defense of intellectual property which managers need to assume is necessary to protect their innovations, and the ability to not let other businesses increase their output and drive up their prices. One way to develop intellectual property is through the creation of intellectual communities that aim to develop the capabilities and skills of employees or through the acquisition of new tools and knowledge. Regarding culture, we observe the need to invest in training that allows employees to be prepared for the future and for any eventuality that occurs in the present. Also, the continuous integration of workers into business objectives, so that the feeling of integration is not lost.

Finally, there needs to be a strengthening of digital platforms to open both lines of communication (internal and external), to present the business to new customers and suppliers, and consequently promote the brand. These platforms will also support the speed with which information reaches employees and their customers.

The discovery and inclusion of these, or one of these, scenarios bring contributes to academia as it creates opportunities for future research in strategy and contributes to the labor market itself as it emphasizes the growing involvement of managers and offers small techniques to adopt in their small companies.

6. Limitations, Further Investigations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. The first one is related to the sample, mainly for two reasons: sample size and representativeness. It was only possible to survey 59 small business owners. As this is a niche market the population is smaller and that influences many owners who are uncomfortable sharing their strategies, afraid that someone will replicate them.

The second limitation is related to the fact that the sample is mainly Portuguese (84%). If this geographical specification did not exist, we would have more homogeneous results.

A third limitation is the sector. We understand that not all scenarios could be applied in all sectors, as each one has its own expectations and needs. Some are more beneficial and give answers to consumers' and employees' necessities (for example: the food sector) while others have become obsolete or not necessary.

Nevertheless, all these limitations are, consequently, opportunities for future studies. We suggest that this study be replicated in medium and large companies, as well as in other countries. In this way, it will be possible in the future to assess whether strategic scenarios vary according to company size and nation. Even the scenarios for medium and large companies can be adapted for small companies that aspire to leap. Regarding our further investigations we leave the following questions:

- How the outputs of scenario planning contribute to the decision making?
- What are the most intuitive tools that contribute to the creation of scenarios?
- What kind of adjustments organizations can do while using scenario planning?

To design a better scenario and acquire greater value, the following participation in scenarios are recommended:

- To established clear and strong links between the outputs of the scenarios and the decision making;

- Ensure that all the participants are openly challenged and welling to engage in future strategy;
- Undertake the scenario orientation to create new guidelines and design efficient, enjoyable, and collaborative experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank every participant that took the time to answer our questionnaire

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PROCEDIMENTOS ÉTICOS

Conflito de interesses: nada a declarar. **Financiamento**: nada a declarar. R**evisão por pares**: Dupla revisão anónima por pares.