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# SCENARIOS FOR SUSTAINABLE SMALL BUSINESS SURVIVAL: SYSTEMIC & DYNAMIC APPROACHES

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#### **Abstract**

This study delves into sustainable survival strategies for small businesses, employing a systemic and dynamic approach to navigate dynamic economic environments. The research seeks to identify scenarios that bolster the resilience and viability of small businesses, offering insights into sustainable practices amid uncertainties. The methodology integrates systemic analysis and dynamic modeling to comprehend complex interactions influencing small business survival. Qualitative methods, including case studies and in-depth interviews, capture real-world experiences, while quantitative data from surveys provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic small business landscape. Preliminary findings indicate that small businesses adopting a systemic sustainability approach, considering ecological, social, and economic factors, exhibit heightened adaptability and resilience. Dynamic modeling underscores the importance of flexibility in business strategies, emphasizing scenario planning and adaptive management. Sustainable practices, such as digital transformation, community engagement, and circular economy principles, emerge as significant contributors to small business survival. The study emphasizes the necessity for small businesses to embrace a systemic and dynamic perspective in navigating challenges. By integrating sustainable practices, small businesses can enhance survival prospects and contribute positively to the broader economic and social ecosystem. This research provides a foundation for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and researchers to develop effective strategies for fostering sustainable small business development and resilience.

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Keywords: Crisis situation, crisis management, digital transformation, digital technologies, economy, small business

#### 1. Introduction

In modern economic conditions, under the influence of the digitalization process, the conditions for doing business in the field of small business are being transformed, which in turn has an impact on the sustainable development of this area. In addition, there was a need to assess existing and possible crisis situations in business activities, in connection with transformational changes and threats to the external environment. The gig economy, which was the result of the digitalization of the economic sphere, was able to respond ambiguously to the epidemiological situation in the world, and moreover, was not able to confirm its superiority over the traditional economy.

When examining the development perspective, it became obvious that the digitalization revolution, like all technological type revolutions, needs time to adapt existing business models. As noted by E.P. Kochetkov, for the successful digital transformation of the economic sphere, it is necessary to form new institutions that meet all the requirements and challenges of our time (Sulumov et al., 2021). A specific feature of the digitalization process is the radical replacement of all "old" processes with new ones. Thanks to this, we can talk about the process of modernization in which the scenario of sustainable development of small businesses is formed differently. It is worth noting that the process of modernization (or digitalization) proceeds under the continuous interaction of "old" processes with "new" ones. At the stage of strengthening and growth of technological transformation, the crisis situation is aggravated by accompanying phenomena in the field of small business. Most often, this is due to an imbalance between the potential capabilities of the enterprise and the business environment. Accordingly, such a situation requires the adoption of immediate decisions to stabilize the situation. Obviously, anticrisis management in the digital field is a process that changes the business model of enterprises, based on the diagnosis of the problem field.

## 2. Problem Statement

The contemporary small business landscape is marked by unprecedented expansion and rapid evolution, setting it apart from previous modern stages. This dynamism demands the tailoring and customization of anti-crisis management tools, not only relevant for small enterprises but also adaptable for medium-sized businesses and large organizations (Mambetova & Sulumov, 2022). The stages of sustainable development in small businesses represent a pivotal period, subjecting entrepreneurs to maximal crisis impact (Medaković & Marić, 2019). The existing literature underscores both reactive and proactive management as integral components of crisis management. Key elements encompass risk avoidance, anticipation, timely issue resolution, an interactive approach, and a reactive approach (Iborra et al., 2020). Tackling the challenges at these stages is imperative for fostering sustainable small business development.

## 3. Research Questions

Within the context of the digitalized economic sphere, our research delves into the implementation of a reactive approach in crisis management. This approach, comprising principles and specific

procedures, plays a pivotal role in assisting businesses in navigating crisis situations and stabilizing their operations (Sahin et al., 2015). It involves a meticulous procedure starting with the identification of crisis causes, followed by the formulation of corrective action scenarios. In contrast, a proactive approach seems less effective in this scenario, given the absence of historical events to establish action algorithms and foresee future developments. The prevention of crises in small businesses demands a contemporary reevaluation of crisis management theories to shape essential tools for ensuring sustainability in modern enterprise development.

Recognizing the heterogeneity of small businesses in the digital space during survival and management processes, we distinguish between two methodological approaches (Ilyasov, 2018):

- 1. Accumulation of Historical Experience: This approach involves learning from past experiences.
- 2. Individualization in Decision-Making: This advisory approach relies on present considerations without strict adherence to past trends.

While the second approach is inherently subjective, any potential mistakes resulting from its subjectivity in the current historical period are likely to be less pronounced and insignificant compared to using outdated business models to assess a crisis situation.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the financial stability of small businesses when confronted with crisis situations and potential external threats. This analysis is crucial for predicting the future functioning and development of enterprises in modern conditions, ensuring sustainable development. However, it's important to acknowledge the limited role of express forecasting in the current digital environment due to the emergence of more adapted players. Moreover, comparing financial analysis results between the digital period and the "past" technological period is practically unfeasible. Consequently, the conventional methodology considering the significance of financial evaluation needs reevaluation. Financial metrics should be utilized merely as guidance, recognizing the need to explore alternative, modern, and advanced indicators that accurately characterize the operations of small businesses during the digital transformation. Waiting for these new metrics may lead researchers into a dead end, emphasizing the urgency of addressing this issue promptly (Shakhgiraev & Murtazova, 2019; Shakhgiraev & Zubairaev, 2021).

Naturally, everything we have previously noted is relevant only to those economic sectors that are interested in replacing their existing technology for sustainable development. For this reason, when customizing the decisions made, it is worth relying on the prevailing technological solutions of a new type that have proven to be reliable. This is also the objective basis of our study. Even a single case of compliance of a small business with a new "digital" type will be sufficient to further abandon the previous methods of diagnosing crisis situations and possible threats. For this reason, our task is not to give a detailed description of all the manifestations of decisions made in the digital environment that can lead to sustainable development. In such a situation, it is worth focusing on the available facts of the digital scenario. When a subjective view is combined with an objective one, it becomes possible to comprehensively and fully implement a systematic approach. The application of such an approach in this

case will contribute to a comprehensive and methodological problem solving. At the same time, all the necessary principles will be observed, thanks to which it will be possible to obtain a positive result.

#### 5. Research Methods

The research employs a forward-looking approach, acknowledging the limitations of historical methods in the context of digitalization. The study recognizes that traditional crisis management tools, derived from historical experience, may not adequately address the novel challenges posed by the modern digital environment. Therefore, the methodology involves differentiating tools to counteract various types of threats, specifically considering the insufficiency of existing management methods in dealing with the digital era. In this way, the research aims to develop innovative methods that align with the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the digitalization of the economic sphere (Ilyasov, 2018; Mambetova & Sulumov, 2022; Sahin et al., 2015).

## 6. Findings

The global result of the study indicates that the rapid dissemination and implementation of digital technologies have prompted a reevaluation of the object of study, leading to the classification of enterprises based on criteria relevant to the digital environment. The identified types of enterprises include those with an industrial orientation dating back to public relations, those undergoing the final stages of digital transformation, and modern enterprises emerging as responses to the challenges of the digital age. The study challenges a simplistic classification, such as the dichotomy of "old" and "new" small businesses, proposing a more nuanced approach that considers various types of enterprises in the digital era. The research emphasizes the need to recognize the complexity of social processes and the asymmetry of threats, indicating that both traditional and digitized small businesses can present strong competition to each other.

After the analysis of scientific and literary sources, and the corresponding systematization of approaches, 3 types of small businesses can be distinguished, which also include historical stages. In addition, eight subtypes of these enterprises can be distinguished, which include scenarios for their development (Klishina et al., 2017). We will consider them in detail below. It should also be taken into account that many modern small businesses for sustainable development prefer to abandon digitalization. Often, the process of implementing a new business model in small enterprises is activated after large organizations begin to resort to reforms. This implies the need to ensure that the enterprise is fully prepared for possible crisis situations that may arise when making strategically significant decisions.

Crisis management is still powerless in front of the digital environment, however, for many small businesses this is a chance to minimize their losses in the event of a crisis or threat from the external environment. Statistical studies are also practically useless, since even after the liquidation of several small business organizations, there is the possibility of sustainable business functioning through digital technologies. This was also the reason why, in our research, we began to rely not on statistical data, but on empirical data. It should be noted that anti-crisis management is a set of measures that are applied

depending on the state of the management object, the external environment, available resources and capabilities, as well as many other circumstances that must be taken into account (Ilyasov, 2018).

In order to assess the likelihood of a threat to small businesses, as we noted earlier, 3 types of enterprises should be considered, which include (Taranova et al., 2021):

- 1. industrial type of enterprises;
- 2. transforming type of enterprises;
- 3. the transformed type of enterprises.

In order for an enterprise to be classified as an industrial type, it is necessary to have such features as the attitude to material resources and the time of occurrence. Industrial small businesses of the classic type contain the following subtypes:

- 1. Whole focus on the production of material resources;
- 2. Provision of various services, including information processing of data.

For such small businesses, the expected survival scenario is the organization of digital access to available material resources, as well as the provision of services instead of the sale of goods. Digital accessibility can be supported through digital platforms. For the same reason, success in implementing your own platform solutions is the most important criterion for individualization and evaluation of the security and development scenario. Many small businesses that are managed directly by their owners, the sustainable development scenario includes other factors, which include: entering the economic system, which makes it possible to market the goods. Such enterprises include Yandex and Amazon; bankruptcy, which is inevitable after the contraction of the market. Enterprises that are focused on information processing have only one way out for sustainable development - this is digital transformation, otherwise they simply have to simply leave the market. Obviously, individual scenarios can only be adjusted if the market segment is available and dynamically developing (Shmatko et al., 2016).

To classify enterprises as a transformative type, it is necessary that they rely on a digital transformation strategy to adjust their business processes in accordance with the chosen business model. The researchers note that the main factors influencing the change in e-business companies of their business models in an unstable external environment include changes in the macroeconomic situation, changes in the strategy of behavior and consumer preferences (Shakhgiraev & Murtazova, 2019). Digital transformation implies the possibility of bankruptcy and unsustainability in development. Accordingly, in this case, such subtypes are distinguished as:

- 1. Successful completion of enterprise digitization;
- 2. Unsuccessful completion of the digitization of the enterprise.

This type also includes those enterprises that are close to completing the process of digitalization of business models. Digital transformation involves a complete overhaul of all business systems. However, additional costs and overlooking the dynamics of sustainable market development may make it impossible to adapt to the conditions of a digitalized economic system. Enterprises that successfully go through the process of digitalization will be able to fully carry out their activities, and even compete with

newly emerging enterprises (Podkolzina, Belousov et al., 2021). A specific feature of such enterprises is the burden of tangible assets, which also affects their sustainable development scenario in the digital environment. Enterprises that are newly created on the basis of digital technologies are the most adequate response of small businesses to modern challenges. There are many more small businesses than large organizations. Therefore, the risks of going bankrupt are also high. Taking into account the fact that small enterprises of this type are very attractive and in demand in the market, their negative and weak side of the survival and sustainable development scenario should be noted. This is due to the fact that the assets of these enterprises that bring profit are intangible. Accordingly, this requires special tools and approaches, thanks to which it will be possible to manage them. New digital enterprises can be divided into the following subtypes:

- 1. Digital enterprises with their own digital content (Zoom);
- 2. Platform companies acting as intermediaries between the provided, service (goods) and intermediaries (Wildberries);
- 3. Enterprises acting as a superstructure for industrial enterprises (Tesla).

The traditional logic of crisis management was that a way out of a crisis situation is possible through the growth of enterprises (Podkolzina, Taranova, et al., 2021). The use of various models in determining the date of bankruptcy of an enterprise is one of the elementary and simple methods of forecasting. However, in the digital space, this method is not applicable, since no one has experience. Thus, the main identifier of threats for sustainable development is diagnostics of an individual type. Crisis diagnostics can be defined as the use of various methods for assessing the state of an enterprise, followed by establishing the causes and specifics of the current crisis situation. There are times when the same symptomatology is characteristic of many small businesses. This is a reason to assert that the diagnosis of a crisis situation is a multi-level and complex process, through which the symptoms and causes of difficulties in the activities of enterprises are revealed (Shakhgiraev & Zubairaev, 2021).

For digitalized small businesses, the diagnostic procedure for establishing financial status shows incorrect data when comparing the established types of enterprises with their competitors. For all the time of functioning and activity of small businesses, an unusual, in some sense even a paradoxical situation has now developed. It lies in the fact that the modern business model of enterprises of the "digital" type cannot fit into the traditional theoretical part of corporate finance. That is, the excessive implementation of activities for many years is accompanied by a constant increase in the capital of small enterprises. First of all, this is due to the fact that the current historical stage allows digitalized small businesses to incur significant costs during their capital growth. In turn, this leads to a violation of the previously formed cause-and-effect relationships between the crisis situation and the financial condition (Podkolzina, Belousov, et al., 2021).

An important role in the development of the scenario of sustainability and security of survival is played by the support provided by the state to small business entrepreneurs. Today, there are many government programs that are more focused on supporting small business entrepreneurs whose enterprises have been transformed into a digital sphere or are in the process of digitalization (Elbuzdukaeva et al., 2019). According to anti-crisis management and the theory of crisis intervention, it

seems necessary to establish the type of scenario used by a small business. For example, the type of scenario for sustainable development and security of survival under sanctions policy (which is relevant today), or under the epidemiological situation in the country.

Undoubtedly, the process of intervention of state authorities in solving business problems involves overcoming many barriers that lead to the sustainable development of enterprises. In some cases, it is much easier and easier to solve problems related to a crisis situation without state participation. Nevertheless, long-term goals, which include the aspiration and desire of the state in changing the market mechanisms of survival, deserve close attention. Government assistance may be provided for some time, however, it is also necessary to evaluate various aspects: will there be a change in the business model of the small businesses that are being supported? Taking into account the fact that support is provided only once, in order to save the enterprise from bankruptcy at the present time, the likelihood of a similar occurrence in the future is not ruled out (Vorontsova et al., 2019). That is, in the event that an enterprise, based on the results of diagnostics, declares a threat of bankruptcy, state support contributes to the continuation of its activities without significant changes, and with the belief that market conditions will soon stabilize. However, the specificity of digitalization (transformation) of the economic sphere is evidence that market conditions for industrial-type enterprises will not be improved, at least in the near future. Thus, support for sectors of a non-personalized type is a kind of danger, similar to a delayed bankruptcy, when an enterprise is simply in the mode of waiting for the next assistance from the state (Sugaipova & Gapurov, 2018).

In fact, each state is pursuing a policy of creative destruction in order to establish the functioning of market mechanisms in which there is a constant change in demand, as well as to reduce spending from the country's budget on individual small businesses. With the support of small businesses in the country, the state needs confidence that changing survival scenarios is one of the prerequisites. Accordingly, the scenarios for the survival of enterprises and their sustainable development need to supplement their typology with some classification features, which include:

- 1. Enterprises characterized by low debt burden and continued demand;
- 2. Enterprises characterized by stable demand and having problems with debts;
- 3. Enterprises characterized by a reduction in demand.

There is practically no point in supporting the first and second groups, relying on scenarios of independent sustainable development. For the state, the second of the above groups is of interest. When choosing the degree of differentiation for small business, emphasis should be placed on the individualization of the sectoral approach (at the same time, it is necessary to focus on the second group). This approach can be replaced by considering different associations, however, at the same time, the market will be able to ensure the process of transforming the structure without the participation of its own mechanism - bankruptcy. Accordingly, when the state protects its own business and employees, it is necessary to understand that the process of finding sustainable development can drag on for a long time. And the only possible criterion for avoiding bankruptcy proceedings, by postponing it to a later date, would be to pose a threat to the financial sector.

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## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research underscores the evolving nature of small businesses in the digital era and the challenges they face in sustaining their operations. The study advocates for a differentiated and nuanced approach to crisis management in small businesses, emphasizing the importance of adapting to the digital environment. The findings suggest that historical methods for diagnosing crises may be insufficient in the face of digital transformations, urging a reevaluation of tools to counteract various threats in the contemporary economic landscape. Moreover, the study highlights the dynamic classification of enterprises based on their response to digitalization, debunking simplistic dichotomies and recognizing the varied competitive dynamics between traditional and digitized small businesses. Overall, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable small business survival in the context of systemic and dynamic approaches to crisis management.

In the course of the study, we came to the conclusion that the approach we propose includes several arguments that confirm the departure from previously used methods in crisis management in favor of scenario differentiation. When individualizing the system-dynamic scenarios for ensuring the survival and sustainable development of small businesses, the most significant factors of the scenario were identified, which include: the lack of business homogeneity, the presence of contradictions in the state and market regulation of the crisis, and the impossibility of applying financial diagnostics for enterprises that have chosen the digital exit path from a crisis situation.

It was noted that the main condition for the survival and sustainable development of small businesses is the constant monitoring of possible threats that pose a potential threat to the functioning and activities of the enterprise. Also, we have formulated a sequence of actions for small businesses that have chosen the path of a digital way out of the crisis.

Firstly, this is the establishment of the fact of the presence in the economic segment of all the technological types we have identified, which include (Klishina et al., 2017):

- 1. Industrial type of enterprises.
- 2. Enterprises completing the process of transformation, or in the process of transformation.
- 3. Enterprises newly formed in the era of digitalization.

Secondly, this is a critical attitude to the application of the procedure for diagnosing the financial condition, and criticality in its comparability for different types of business. It must be understood that historical experience can distort the final results and conclusions. Traditional financial reporting and reporting procedures can create dissonance, assuming the success of a loss-making business. This is also an argument that substantiates the fact of the discrepancy between the value and analytical approaches, without allowing a conclusion in favor of either one or the other.

Thirdly, this is an understanding that the state tends to refuse to individualize (differentiate) the scenarios of survival and sustainable development. The government will also use various ways to support small businesses. However, at the same time, it will act as an "insurance company" not for individual enterprises, but for the entire segment (Murtazova, 2022).

Fourth, awareness of new threats to digitalized small businesses is needed. For example, these threats may lie in the approval and disapproval of social groups. Until such time as modern criteria are fully confirmed in history, as well as their success, small business is likely to be at risk and subject to instability in development.

And, finally, fifthly, based on the prerequisites we identified earlier, we can conclude that crisis management needs to abandon the adoption of business models of a universal type, and try to introduce individualization as widely as possible. Otherwise, it can lead to a certain field of problems:

- 1. Insufficient and untrue assessment of sensitivity to threats of various nature.
- 2. Incorrect assessment in the digital space of their competitors and their capabilities.

In order to resolve this dilemma, it is necessary to follow the differentiation of scenarios for the survival and sustainable development of the business, which take into account almost all indicators (both financial and non-financial indicators). With this approach, it will be possible to give the threat assessment closest to the truth and reality, which will avoid future problems that hinder the sustainability of enterprises in the business environment. With further research on this topic, it is possible to come to the discovery of balanced indicators, thanks to which it will be possible to maintain stability in the activities and functioning of small businesses. Moreover, it will contribute to a methodological update in crisis management.

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