'The Use of Interactive Dialogue to Study Failed and Recovering Business Enterprises among Self-Employed African Migrants in the UK'

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Abstract

This paper considers what interactive dialogue, or dialogic methodology, can offer in the quest to understand the high failure in African entrepreneurship in the post 2008 financial crisis period. The impact of the method is that it enhances the evaluation of the evidence of actual or perceived disadvantage in BME's business efforts and categorises these as endogenous and exogenous factors. The findings based on interviews with 20 leaders of 'dead' businesses indicate the impact that place, people and poverty (Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011) has on business success or failure and identify reasons explaining why small African businesses have failed at a higher rate compared to other minorities. Although Altinay and Wang (2011) may be credited with shining light on the impacts of religion on personal values, this study points out an often understated variable, culture, which is critical in understanding the deeper reasons why African small entrepreneurs continue to underperform and its impacts on individual and collective lives. Recovery solutions are formulated from participants' call for diversification, inter-cultural learning and integration as possible remedies.
Key words: Interactive dialogic methodology, SME, culture, failure, recovery, African migrant
Track: Impact of Research on Business

Introduction and Backgrounds

The arena of African small businesses is a maze of complexities. As Fairlie and Robb (2008: 3) argue "Racial inequality in education, income, and wealth are well known. Less understood are the large and persistent racial disparities in business ownership and performance". There is a need to understand the fabric and nature of African small businesses to ascertain why there are business ownership disparities between minority ethnic groups. To do so, this paper attempts to look into the mosaic of cultures Africans live with and do business in the diaspora. These complexities are often exacerbated by the impact of cultural interactions with host countries. For example, Africans in the United Kingdom do not only come from a multiplicity of national and other backgrounds but face cultural competition with other equally foreign minority groups, e.g. Asians, Latin Americans, Eastern Europeans, etc. They equally face the challenge of survival under the aggressiveness and often the opacity of the host culture. The foresaid complexities are compounded by forces linked to the cultural make-up of the host country, though not necessarily purely cultural. In this respect, technology, financial arrangements and legal regulations can also have an impact on the success or failure of such types of businesses.

In the past decade, the economic climate has generally been unfavourable to small businesses, let alone those from ethnic minorities. As the giant, large and powerful fall, there have been resounding, domino effects on smaller businesses. Familiar business faces such as Northern Rock, Lehman Brothers and Woolworths have been among the casualties. As a result, access to credit has been tightened, markets traditionally targeted by small companies are being heavily exploited by more established large companies; higher unemployment also means more business competitors as reported in local news. In the UK, it is estimated that over two million people became unemployed in the aftermath of the 2008 crash. The trend towards self-employment is not necessarily unavoidably linked to the recent recession since Lindsay and Macauley (2004) reported an increase in self-employment before the 2008 downturn. As noted by various sources, including the Guardian's, the trend has been exacerbated by the hardships from the tumult.

Small and medium enterprises are a significant part of a nation's economic landscape. Both in the developed and developing worlds, SMEs generate revenue, enhance employment and provide access to commodities for remote communities. In the UK, ethnic minority small businesses represent around 7% of all small businesses (HM Treasury, 2008). However, they make up in excess of 55% of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in advanced economies and 60% of GDP in less wealthy countries (Keskin and Senturk, 2010). It can be extrapolated that the life and employment wellbeing of the nation depend as much on the vitality of its SMEs as on the vivacity of large companies. Small enterprises bear more significance among ethnic minority communities in many countries and their proliferation in those communities is well documented, being historically linked to disadvantage - actual or perceived. This disadvantage includes employment, education and general status in society.

In employment circles, it is well documented that minorities suffer serious disadvantage accessing jobs. Unemployment, underemployment and ill-adapted skills are among difficulties African minorities have to overcome. This is perceptible from employment figures which show ethnic minorities consistently underperforming their counterparts. It is not peculiar to a specific country; the United Kingdom, United

States, France, Germany and Canada, to mention only a few. In the UK, for example, employment figures for whites have been consistent for decades. While the unemployment rate stood at around 5% for whites, for minorities this has been over 10%. The worst positioned in this fabric are Pakistani women (nearly 20%) and Black Caribbean males (nearly 15%) - (see Figure 1 below and Collins et al, 2015). Recent research by The Work Foundation, UK (2009) has largely confirmed this historical trend. This trend has been unchanged for the past decade and that the unemployment rate of people of 'mixed ethnicity' has deteriorated (see figure 1 below for statistical distribution amongst ethnic backgrounds).

Unemployment rate by ethnic background: UK, 2002-15
All people aged 16+, not seasonally adjusted
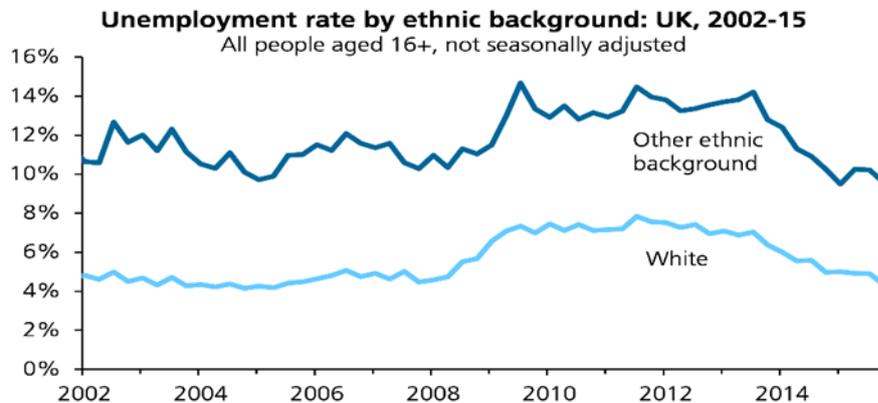
Source: ONS *Labour Market Statistics, April 2016*, Table A09

Fig. 1: Non-white unemployment rates, ONS, 2016.

These figures partly elucidate the fact that more minorities seek possibilities for self employment as a way out of the unemployment trap. In fact, as Baldwin-Edwards (2009) argue "Ethnic entrepreneurship has evolved as a significant survival tactic for economic gain" (quoted by Halkias *et al.*, 2009: 4). In the UK, there are around 275,000 black and minority ethnic (BME) businesses contributing £20 billion to the economy. The growth of ethnic enterprise has witnessed a rapid rise, from 5.6% in 2002 to 7.1% in 2007. These ethnic businesses are usually smaller in size compared to non-ethnic ones; the latter are more likely to have £250,000 or more in turnover (HM Treasury, 2008).

Despite the high spirit of enterprise, ethnic minority businesses are credited with a phenomenal failure rate supported with evidence from UK and the US. In the US for example, Black entrepreneurs set up more businesses but fail more. According to Maki (2004), Black people are 50% more likely to set up a business. Over a four-year period, among 1.7 million businesses that survived only 3200 have grown to reach over 100 employees but just 1% of Black businesses have achieved this. Trends in the UK are not dissimilar. Ethnic SMEs make up 6% of all UK SMEs. However, among ethnic minorities Black people are least likely to set up SMEs and this accounts for 5% and a large number of these fail alarmingly annually. In the UK, Whitehead, Purdy and Mascarenhas-Keyes (2006) found that Black businesses specifically trade for a shorter time than other businesses (i.e. less than three years) compared to well over four years for others. Interestingly, it is argued that in the Malaysian context the age of the business and access to finance are critical determinants of success. Ferguson (1993) formulated the S-C-P (Structure-Conduct-Performance) model that saw firms' performance as dependent on the market structure and the way the firm conducts business. In this model, a company performs well if the market structure is favourable and if its' internal organisational framework adequate. Though useful, the model can only partly be used to explain the high failure of small businesses because the notion of 'conduct' may simply refer to organisational structure, a limited parameter for judging the performance of SMEs.

Investigations into the generally high failure rate of small businesses have recorded multiple reasons in response to some of the earlier limitations (Rosli, 2011): lack of experience, lack of capital, unplanned growth, slack management, credit problems, wrong location, too much spent on assets, paying the entrepreneur too much, staff problems and red tape. However, little research has attempted to uncover specific reasons for the failure of Black minority businesses using interactive dialogue. Interestingly, Daley (1998) notes that the Black African population is understudied but not specifying how their views could be represented. An interesting study by Smallbone *et al.* (2003) emphasised that among ethnic minorities, Afro-Caribbeans appear more disadvantaged with regards to access to finance. The limited empirical evidence available relates to research carried out on new migrants and refugees (Hack-Polay, 2013). These studies largely emphasize informational, financial and educational disadvantages without specifying methodological aspects. Likewise, few studies have acknowledged other factors (e.g. culture norms) to explain minority disadvantages in relation to employment and hardly anything on methodology. Altinay and Wang (2011) have made an attempt on the limited impacts of the cultural

backgrounds of the entrepreneurs on success or failure. The authors found that religion affected only 'personal values' but not business practices. However, this finding is limited since only religion (though an important cultural element) has been used and other significant cultural and methodological variables (values, beliefs and interactions) were not. Altinay and Wang (2011) have registered limited inroads in SMEs.

When highlighting the difficulties faced, the literature often over-emphasises non-typical cultural forces such as Africans' lack of finance and information, and the complexity of the legal framework. This is at the disadvantage of methodological elements. However, the journey of African small businesses in the UK has far reaching and deeper ramifications than what has been presented thus far. Often the reasons for the failure are narrated from the perspectives of researchers who have attempted theorisation on the basis of statistical and other quantitative data (Nwankwo, 2005). In so doing, the voices of the 'dead' businesses and those of survivors have been under-researched, under-theorised and thereby least understood. The usual and common understanding of the premature failure of black businesses is situated in a framework of blame, which seeks to vilify black entrepreneurs in an often intellectual or mental caricature as incompetent. This is removed from the daily interactions faced as these are internally or externally engineered. Externality does condition internality. In fact, in black narratives, it seems that the message conveyed is counter-accusation of the external environment often framed in race relations, ethnicity and cultural stigmatisation. This has led Garner and Bhattacharyya (2011) to connect place, people and poverty. Within this context, an attempt of dialogue to understand the struggles and the 'invisible' and apparently antagonistic factors could provide an avenue for deepening our understanding and insights into the nature of Black business failures. However, in reality such a forum is rarely established based on counteracting forces such as the lack of steer from politico-administrative authorities and historically constructed prejudices that end up maintaining the (un-)employment status quo.

This piece of empirical research is about getting black businesses to speak about their experiences of failing or succeeding and hopefully air-out their views. The research situates itself in the framework of handing narrative back to the entrepreneurs, i.e. the Black research participants. In so doing, the researchers invite the reader to participate in making sense of participants' voices. The researchers do not seek to infer meaning from the narratives but create an interactive platform for the participants to dialogue with the reader. This is about enabling dialogue between a community of African small businesses and an audience (including researchers and the wider society) who might benefit from the Black business story.

Methodology

There is reluctance to categorise this research under the traditional interpretivist paradigm based on the following. Interpretivism is researcher-led through sense-making. This entails that the researcher attaches meaning to the participants' actions and narratives. Interpretivism is part of a process of theorisation, legitimately based on drawing meaning from data. This research could be viewed by readers as a piece of empirical investigation embedded in the broader qualitative approach. It seeks to generate data whose intelligibility (i.e. in terms of meaning) will predominantly depend on the interlocutors' own assessment of meaning. This is to assert that other investigation possibilities are open. In this study the researchers played a facilitators-of-dialogue role between the participants and the audience. This necessitates a different way of collecting qualitative data. The use of interviews provided the foundation for dialogue and data generation. As opposed to traditional semi-structured or in-depth interviews, here research questions were framed in a way to invite the participant to talk directly to those who would read the findings. For example, major questions were formulated as follows: 'How would you explain to those reading this document the reasons why your business failed? Why would they accept this as a key cause? As your interlocutors finish reading or listening, what is the one thing you think they should retain? If you were able to change people's perception of your business experience what would you say? Such questions are live questions similar to documentary makers'. In addition, they create a sense of interactive dialogue between the sender and the receiver of the message or narrative being explored.

The interviews involved 20 entrepreneurs of different 'dead' businesses. They had to bravely talk about their own failed ventures but also refer to the experiences of at least one other dead business they knew well. The interviews took two hours on average and were conducted on the premises of other African small businesses, i.e. a restaurant, shop, garage, salon and nightclub. The participants were asked if they knew a good place for the interview and were encouraged to select venues relating to African small businesses rather than the researchers having to impose this. The purpose of encouraging such a choice was to help them recover memories of their own business ventures and capture these interactively and vividly. The interviews lasted on average one and a half hour each, with two going beyond two hours. Five of the participants were selected through snowball sampling and the others

through the researchers' local knowledge. The researchers originally contacted colleagues involved with small start-ups who led to participants who met the selection criteria as follows: 1) African origin (migrant or first generation descendant of Africans); 2) over 25 years of age; 3) have run a small business that ceased in the last two years; 4) know at least another 'dead' African SME; 5) willing to participate in the interview; 6) willing to talk about their experiences. Criterion four was to help bring to 'life' a variety of 'dead' businesses. Data analysis was through a coding and categorisation process which participants led and provided cues when needed.

Findings and Analysis

The emergence of African Businesses

The reasons evoked by the participants for setting up SMEs are largely push factors and pull factors following the literature. The participants' own experiences combined with the experiences of people they knew highlighted four causal explanations denoting push factors: (1) protracted unemployment, (2) underemployment, (3) ill-adaptation in the workplace, (4) language barriers. While the first two reasons are common to Black Africans in general, the last two reasons are specific to newcomers whose first language is not English. Colette's story below translated reasons 1 and 2 as push factors. This supports evidence by Whitehead *et al.* (2006) that ethnic minorities are more likely to set up business as a reaction to unemployment (15.9%) compared to non-ethnic minorities (9.3%). After Colette completed her degree in drama in 1999 and a year-long unemployment she set up a small business. She recalled that "*the drama tuition centre I set up was a reaction to the lengthy unemployment period. I needed to gain experience and occupy myself. The business is not the most successful but I've hung on since 2001…it's not easy for black people to find jobs. It's not just me*".

Besides the push factors, four other key factors were highlighted by the participants, which can be categorised as pull factors: (1) inspiration from other successful minority businesses, (2) desire for independence, (3) cultural legacy and (4) desire to get wealthy quickly. Dote's account translates factors 1 and 3. Before coming to UK from Nigeria, Dote worked with her aunt. To illustrate cultural legacy as a pull factor, Dote argued that "*What I want people to understand mainly, is that for some of us setting up a business is like in our blood. I'm not used to working for someone. In fact, I've never worked for a company…*" When she came to the UK, she came in close encounter with two African shops in Peckham (South London), and she drew past business experience in Nigeria. The critical push factor was the fear of unemployment. Dote explained that "*I thought that will save me the headache of looking for a job for too long like some of my countrymen*". The participants' accounts support Baldwin-Edwards's view that "ethnic entrepreneurship has evolved as a significant survival tactic for economic gain" (quoted by Halkias *et al.*, 2009:4) and supported by Lindsay and Macauley (2004).

Types of African Small Businesses and Locations

The participants' experiences further helped to identify three main sectors of activities of black African small businesses. The main and dominant area in which African small businesses proliferate is the ethnic shop, bar and restaurant sector. This is followed by the technology and motor services which include computer networking, mobile phone accessories and car repairs. The third sector of activities of African small businesses is what we categorised as other services which include cleaning services, distribution, money transfer and entertainment. McEvoy & Hafeez (2009) argue that "minority businesses are concentrated in specific economic sectors, particularly the service industry". Figure 2 summarises the main sectors and their relative degree of success or failure.

Main sector of activities of African SMEs	Description	Extent of failure
Ethnic shops, bars and restaurant sector	Grocery shops, black hairdressing salons, bars and restaurants	Low
Technology and motor services	Mobile phone accessories, computer networking and car repair	High
Other service sector	Domestic and industrial cleaning, distribution, money transfer and car wash	Medium

Fig. 2 Main sectors of Black African SME activities

The failure rate among African small businesses from our data can be assessed as generally high, which is congruent with the literature. In the absence of statistical evidence from this research and based on the general lack of statistics on Black African small businesses, this conclusion was reached using participants' accounts. Three key parameters led to infer the high failure 1) all 20 participants knew of at least a failed business, 2) all participants knew and mentioned at least one other business that failed, 3) this conclusion is congruent with the extant literature. The shortest life among the 20

businesses was five months (one business) and the longest was recorded as two years and six months for eight businesses, with the remaining 18 survived less than two years (Holland, 1998).

There were naturally large numbers of African small businesses in geographical areas with strong Black African presence. In London, where this research was conducted, there seems to emerge a clear geo-centric corridor from Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and Greenwich (South London) to Tower Hamlets and Newham (East London), and Hackney and Haringey (North London). These have the highest concentrations of Black Africans (Daley, 1998; Owen, 2001). Figure 3 below indicates the nature and spread of the geographical corridor with African businesses in London.

Fig. 3 Geo-ethnic corridor in London with strong Black African small businesses
The 20 respondents were found and interviewed in the area represented by the corridor shown in figure 3. The findings align with statistical evidence in the said London areas and support claim about links between place, people and poverty (Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011).

Causes of African Small Business Failure
Our findings fall within two broad categories of participants' perceived reasons for the high failure rate among African SMEs. These causes can be categorised as exogenous – outside the entrepreneur's control (racial bias, lack of finance) and endogenous factors – linked to the entrepreneur's own action (particularistic practices, strategic awareness, and diversification issues).

Host country attitude to race
According to most participants factors such as host attitude to race and ethnicity earnestly contribute to impair ethnic business development. It was a recurrent theme in many narratives that Black African small businesses suffer disadvantage because of the entrepreneurs' racial backgrounds, which was perceived as reflecting generally the social isolation experienced by some minority groups and social divide in the host country. Justine's account of the failure of his computer networking business reflected a feeling of segregation. Justine, whose business collapsed, claimed that he approached a number of organisations who were interested in his product. However, of the 20 companies, only four contacted him with contract offer. He argued that the successful contacts were all small black businesses. Justine concluded that "*the larger businesses headed by 'white bosses' didn't make an offer as mine is 'black'*".

Credit issues
Credit became rare to SMEs particularly during the 2008 recession. The participants believed that African small businesses suffered more as a result of multiple issues. For instance, length of residence, immigration status and generally lack of information, in combination or individually, affected African

entrepreneurs' access to finance. Linked to the credit problem is the issue of business premises. Peter and three friends set up a car wash business as a way of filling their time and earning some money following protracted unemployment after graduating. They located a piece of disused land near a railway line, cleared it and erected a 'car wash' banner and started operating. After a timid start, they were soon flooded with customers. Thirteen months later, the rail company that owned the land told them they had to evacuate. Peter explained that they did their utmost to secure funding but failed. "*The group approached a bank for a quick loan but we were turned down. We lost our business*".

Colette, another participant, told of her friend Matt's story in obtaining credit. She narrated: "*My friend Matt has a restaurant. It has remained small because he didn't get finance to expand. When he wanted a business loan, the bank asked for a business plan. He wrote a two-page summary of what he wanted to do. But the bank rejected it*". Matt is still operating but as a very small unit.

Particularistic practices

The testimonies of the participants denoted that African small businesses did not always run following conventional business models. Practices employed in the management of African SMEs have strong cultural underpinnings that echo deeply seated values often inherited or directly imported from the country of origin. These particularistic values were inherently observable in the way the African entrepreneurs handled staffing, dealt with misconduct at work and granted credit to customers. Cilia and Mario's stories epitomise endogenous influences. Cilia established a hairdressing salon in Peckham. Within a few months, the business was thriving. She invited her unemployed sister so as to cope better with the influx of customers. However, the sister started doing her friends' hair free of charge. Despite the growing number of customers but the till was often empty. When confronted Cilia's sister left, taking some important assets. Due to cultural reasons, Cilia could not take legal action: "*I couldn't sue her; this is badly perceived in my community. The business collapsed. I'm now looking for a job*".

Strategic awareness

An important research finding is associated with planning issues among African SMEs. It was generally noted that most participants did not have elaborate business plans at start-up or expansion stages. Strategic planning was perceived as less important than immersing themselves in the opportunities. Such an approach is largely reactive. This perspective is closely linked to cultural issues whereby some entrepreneurs go in business because it is perceived as a 'normal' activity in their particular ethnic group as opposed to first assessing capabilities and business opportunities. Mario set up a delivery business with friends. They enjoyed a good start. Things were very good until Bertin, a business partner, decided that they should sell alcohol on credit. Bertin genuinely believed in a cultural and moral duty to help his 'brothers' hoping to increase sales. Mario explained that "*Bertin believed the clients would pay back without a problem and we sold over £15000 worth of drink on credit. That was almost all our capital invested. As debtors weren't paying, we couldn't pay our suppliers. So we ceased trading*".

Diversification issues

A key area of investigation of the research related to the nature of the participants' failed business. The participants were asked about their range of products. All 20 participants asserted the strong, and sometimes exclusive, focus on culture-specific product. Cilia explained that she did only black African women's hair care, which meant that most of her customers were from the black African community. The lack of diversity atrophies the business, since there are other people around the community that could be potential customers, should Cilia open the business to others. Mario, the delivery business owner, contended that he and his partners were not confident that "*White businesses and Indian shops would contract them for delivery because they tend to use their own people*".

In total, the participants exhibited awareness that the exteriority of the reasons for failure could not be used as justification for all Africans' business venture failures. They acknowledged generally that there are variables that were within their accountability. Some of these are poor business planning and market analysis, inadequacy of networks, burden of home culture, strategy issues, predominance of culture or race-specific products (issues of diversification). Holland (1998) stated: "people don't plan to fail, they fail to plan".

Hierarchy of Causes of Failure

A supplementary question asked to the participants is to list four main causes at the forefront of the failure of their own business. The leading cause noted for African business failure was related to cultural issues. The hierarchy of causes that developed places lack of finance as the least of the causes of failure. The lack of finance, often acclaimed in the literature as a critical cause, was found only in four of the accounts studied; this, thus, challenges much of the existing literature. In seven of the twenty stories of business failure the cultural issues were consistently mentioned. Participants wanted to do business like 'back home' with some association with countrymen. Other cultural issues related to paternalism which 'prevented' the participants from taking legal action against relatives who were

oftentimes business partners. This finding is consistent with UK government statistics showing that "ethnic businesses are more likely to employ family members" (HM Treasury, 2008). This finding, more vigorously upheld than in Altinay & Wang's (2011) research, supports the view that culture has a profound bearing on ethnic businesses.

Psychological Effects of Business Failure

The research uncovered the psychological impact of business failure on the Black African entrepreneurs. A question was asked that required the participants to explain 'how they felt as a result of the collapse of the businesses'. Several symptoms of psychological ill-health and wellbeing were described. Among those symptoms, the most common were the sense of bitterness, loss of self-esteem, family break downs, stress, depression and burnout. These resulted from the accumulated debt and a personal sense of failure and shame, with potentially far-reaching consequences on lives.

Justice's account of the impact of business failure showed: "*The pressure kept building up. There was no money in the bank; so there were more arguments between my wife and me. Also there were bitter arguments between our business partners and with clients and creditors. When the business finally died and wound down, there was very little left of myself mentally. I was withdrawn, didn't have the strength to go out. Credit recovery agency letters kept coming in and those increased the stress level. I'm fortunate that I'm still with my wife but some other people I know, particularly my good friend CB had a family breakdown and lost his flat. It took me two years to recover, mostly with my wife's help… to start and run a business is financially and mentally draining and can sometimes ruin your life*".

Recovery solutions through learnt experiences

A critical research objective was to get the participants to formulate recommendations that could help would-be African entrepreneurs. These solutions came from self-reflection and criticism as part of the methodology adopted. In other words the participants were to look at what 'they would do differently'. Participants suggested:

Basic training

Many African entrepreneurs were highly qualified academically. However, as Claire pointed out, "*to run a small shop does not require an MBA in the first instance*". The majority of the entrepreneurs interviewed lacked basic training in business start-ups. They acknowledged that many of their fellows would rush to do Master's qualifications which did not help in the early period of the business. There were several issues linked to this. Qualifications were expensive and consumed start-up funds. Secondly, the courses focused more on strategy suited for big companies. Claire recalls: "*My first business ended in failure, I'm now doing one of these courses at the local adult education centre*".

Intra-group solidarity

A marginal but important theme that emerged is the lack of support within the African business community itself. There was a perception that African entrepreneurs display strong reluctance to collaborate with newcomers and novices. Intra-group solidarity, perceived as a significant success factor in Indian or Jewish communities, is neither visible nor contemplated with Africans. Mario believes that "*Between Africans (entrepreneurs), there's no solidarity. Everyone does their own thing and don't care about others*". Grace advocates intra-group solidary: "*If we could help each other more to settle in this country and set up businesses that will work. But presently those who are doing well don't even want to help or talk to those who are starting. If this could change, I'm sure we'll do better*".

Diversifying business operations

A key perceived cause of the failure of African small businesses was the ethnocentrism surrounding operations and strategy. It was accepted by the participants their products were often exclusively culture and ethnic-specific. However, in Ugbe noted "*my business came back from the 'dead' due to embracing different products and business opportunities which became the essential survival and recovery kit for me*". Introducing common products such as sweets ensured that local kids of all backgrounds, not only black kids, could come to the shop. Some morning passer-by popped in for drinks and travel cards. Ugbe added that "*Occasional photocopying isn't great business but it does attract customers*". Diversification represented a critical ingredient for recovery of Black SMEs.

Community partnerships and social responsibility

Ugbe explained that "*Frankly, we were dying. We could no longer wait for the customers to discover our existence*". Creating opportunities for partnering with the local community emerged. Ugbe explained that "*I heard some customer say that they didn't know what to do with their Tesco supermarket vouchers for schools*". He decided that his business could become a collection point for two local schools and erected a notice inviting parents to drop unwanted vouchers. Shoppers without children were encouraged to collect supermarket school vouchers and dropped these at the shop. Ugbe concluded that "*the next thing I saw was the name of my business in the 'thank you' section of the schools' newspaper and head teachers praising my business's involvement in school life…it was great for the*

sale of sweets". Involvement in social and community action had emerged an important engagement strategy. However African SMEs operated outside the norm.

Inter-cultural learning

Business is situated in the context of competition. Black Africans faced cultural competition and the SME leaders had awareness of such competition. The desire to do better, compared to other juxtaposing groups led some participants to recognise intercultural learning. Kwaku believed that Africans ought to learn from the Indian and Chinese businesses and emulate them. "*In every corner you find a successful Indian shop; many Chinese restaurants and small businesses are also enduring. There must be some cultural things that can be learnt*".

Discussions and Conclusion

Ethnic minorities have experienced disadvantages, which are captured in the literature (Garner and Bhattacharyya, 2011). The road to recovery is a long way away since the underperformance of black businesses stems from deeply rooted real or perceived historical prejudice and disadvantage. These could be explained from complex contexts, e.g. race, ethnicity, and a colonial legacy that undermine the validity of African creativity. African small entrepreneurs felt they had to assert their membership and identity in the UK. The voices of the 'dead businesses' demonstrated four critical levels of change:

(1) *Changes in business ventures* that are more inclusive.

(2) *Diversification as an axiomatic strategy* that captures a wider product market.

(3) *Necessary engagement with social responsibility* to help recovery.

(4) *Realistic personal development strategy* that starts from basic business education.

The perspective of the participants and this paper is that the value of business goes beyond money to include culture. The ability of business success to rehabilitate social groups must equally be underscored. Such perspectives enable social groups to collectively make contributions. The Work Foundation (2009) contends, skills are the key (Kitching et al. (2011). Interactive dialogic methodology has helped in this regard as argued. Future work could use dialogic methodologies to study successful Black businesses in post-Brexit Britain. From the data, recovery amongst small African businesses is multidimensional the cultural facets of which could be surfaced by using interactive dialogue. Such a framework is different from interpretivism as argued. The latter is researcher-orientated whilst the former is participant-centric-driven. Interactive dialogue is used as a method to underscore the cultural and other hidden realities behind Black minority business failures.

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