

Assessing the Success Factors of Small Medium Food Entrepreneurship in Small Towns

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The purpose of the case study is to assess the internal and external factors that would contribute in terms of internal and external success factors in Small and Medium food Enterprises. The internal and external factors model adopted in this study is based on a study approach by Tahir, M. H and Aman, O; (2011) and Talib, H.H. et al; (2013). The study findings concluded that the measurement of the success factors practiced by the enterprise, included both internal factors: namely leadership, corporate planning, process management, customer focus and quality assurance process while the external factors included government support system and market accessibility. The internal and external factors identified have contributed to 'n' the product quality and business performance. The findings indicate that the degree of increase or decrease in the organization's quality performance was determined by the internal factors and supported by the external factors. Evidently, a strong and consistent internal factor influences the determinant performance factors of the small medium food entrepreneur.

Key words: *Small Medium Enterprise, entrepreneur, success factor, internal factor, external factor.*

Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are playing a significant contribution in economic development, social climbing and political stability globally. According to Hillary (2017), SMEs are the most important sector of a national economy as they create employment opportunity, develop innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, recognize individual creativity and allow competition. SMEs can be established for any kind of business activities in urban or rural areas and can be considered the back bone of national economy.

Due to the significant contribution of SMEs towards the development of the economy, various government agencies, have placed a lot of importance on their. Abdullah et al., (2011) stated that in order to strengthen SMEs a number of programs and facilities must be provided to enhance their performance and competitiveness. In this context, the Malaysian government has persistently allocated resources for SME development. This is supported by the Economic Planning Unit, (2010) and the Malaysian government allocation for the development of SMEs has been increased from RM 1,561.6 million in the Eight Malaysia Plan to RM 2,160.2 million in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan.

Despite this intensive financial support, the government has also established other support programs, institutions and agencies such as SME Bank, SMECORP etc., to provide guidance, promotion, production efficiency, R& D activities, and product development (Central Bank of Malaysia, (2015); Ahmad and Seet, 2009.

Research Issues

Malaysia's economy has undoubtedly passed through considerable transformation over the past decades as it moved from an agricultural based to an industry based economy. Now the economy is shifting from an industry based to a knowledge based economy to achieve the 2020 vision and to become a developed economy (Onget al., 2010). In the Malaysian economy, according to Radam et al., (2008) the role of SMEs is considered the backbone of the economy. Malaysian SMEs, particularly in the manufacturing sectors, are playing a very important role in economic development. Thurasamy et al, (2009) mentioned that in 2006, SMEs comprises of 99.2% of the business establishment in Malaysia and their contribution was 47.3% of the GDT. This is supported by Chelliah et al. (2010) who states that the total number of SMEs in Malaysia ranged from 10,000 to 30,000 registered with the various ministries over the past decade. Further, according to Khalique et al, (2011), small and medium enterprise are the majority of these business establishments in Malaysia and they mainly operate in general business, raw material, agriculture and the manufacturing sector.

However, irrespective of country, SMEs face common problems in respect of their survival or and in the context of competitive advantage. According to Reiss, (2006); Ahmad and Seet, (2009) more than 50% of SMEs collapse within five years of operation. This is supported by Portal Komuniti, (2006) and Ahmad and Seet, (2009) who note that in the case of Malaysia there is no reliable figure published, and that the estimated failure rate of SMEs is approximately 60%. Therefore, this reflects that SMEs in Malaysia are facing serious issues and a number of obstacles to maintain competitive enterprise in the market.

Moreover Bhatiasevi, (2010) posed the challenge of globalization has made it vital for Malaysia to move towards a knowledge based economy. Omar and Ismail, (2009) claim that in order to achieve vision 2020 and be a fully developed and industrialized nation, future progress must concentrate on the development of SMEs. According to Muhammad et al., (2010) many previous studies for example Saleh and Ndubisi (2006); Samad (2007); Abu Bakar et al. (2006); Aris (2006) and SMIDEC (2007), identified various challenges facing SMEs in the global environment. Muhammad et al., (2010) claim that SMEs should mainly focus on overcoming challenges, which include, among others, recession, barriers from global sourcing, low productivity, lack of managerial capabilities, and lack of financing, difficulty in accessing in management, technology and heavy regulatory burden.

In the same way, Teoh and Chong (2008) argue that the major obstacles to entrepreneurship development are lack of access to credit, lack of access to formal business and social networks. However, Hashim and Wafa, (2002) and Muhammad et al. (2010) identified that the main problem faced by SMEs in Malaysia is lack of knowledge regarding marketing techniques, branding, customer loyalty and also lack of networking with other local and international enterprises. Alam et al., (2011) and Joshua, (2016) observed that SMEs in Malaysia have social barriers which are the main obstacles to achieve competitive advantage and consequently many SMEs in Malaysia lose out in terms of opportunities in a knowledge-based economy.

Research Objectives

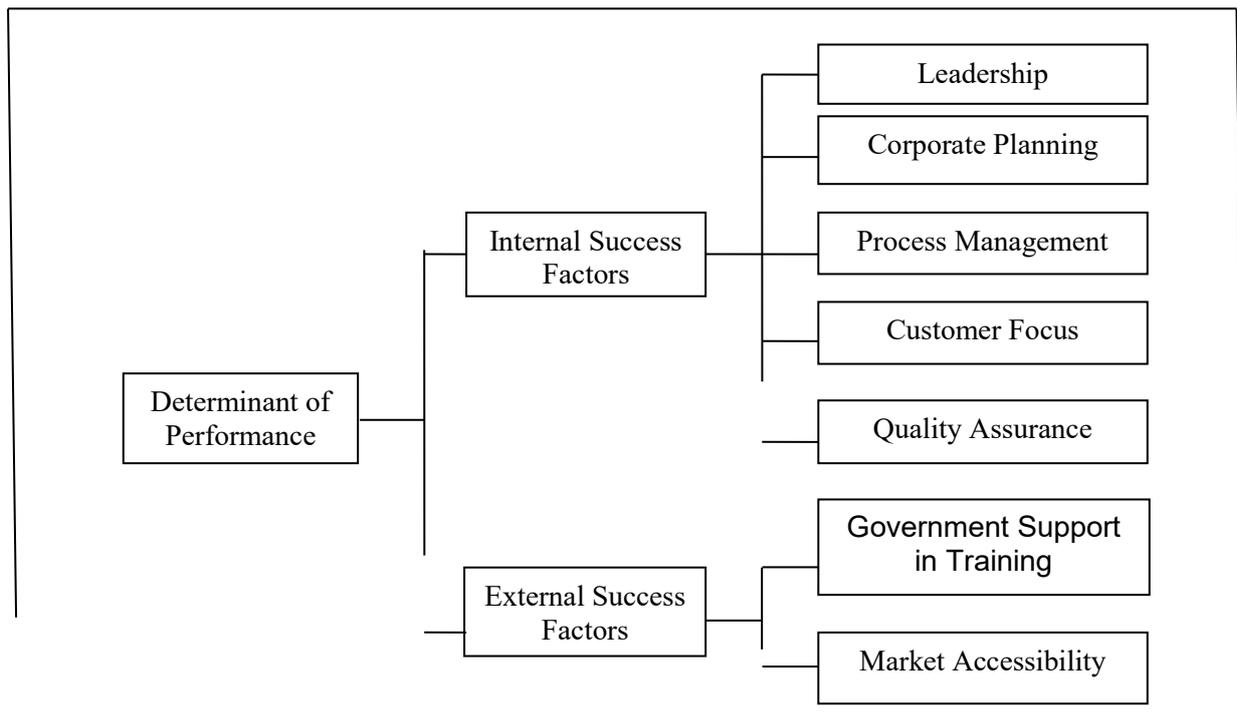
The overall objective of this study is to investigate the success factor of Small Medium food Entrepreneurship (SME) performance in Kampung Sijangkang, Teluk Panglima Garang. This case study would provide more information to the SME on how successful companies determine business performance by analyzing the internal and external factors relevant. In meeting this, the specific objective of this study can be outlined as follows: 1) To identify the dominant internal factors of food on Small Medium Entrepreneurs performance. 2) To identify the dominant external factors of food on Small Medium Entrepreneur performance. 3) To identify the most important determinant performance factors of food products for Small Medium Entrepreneurs. 4) To Propose future business competitive capabilities for LIN Agro Enterprise

Research Framework

Figure 1, shows the framework of the determinant internal and external factors on performance of food products on SME. The internal and external factors model constructs are based on the study approach of past researchers Tahir, M. H and Aman, O, (2011) and Talib, H.H. et al., (2013). However, not all the variables have been adapted into this study, only certain variables

has been chosen that are suitable in this case study. The internal success factor variables are adapted from Talib, H.H. et al, (2013) because these are suitable for Lin Agro Enterprise (LAE) business operation. Meanwhile, Tahir, M. H et al's, (2011) framework more precisely describes external success factor for the SME food processing industry in Malaysia.

Figure 1. Research framework for The Success Factors of Small Medium Food Entrepreneurship: A Case On Lin Agro Enterprise In Kampung Sijangkang, Teluk Panglima Garang.



Significance of Study

This study researches the internal and external factors that are dominant in the performance of Small Medium food Entrepreneurs and seeks to determine the most important performance factors that contribute to the significance of this case study in two aspects; the academic perspective and the practical perspective. From the academic perspective, it will provide an understanding about the internal and external factors that dominant the performance of small medium food entrepreneurs. Due to the lack of information and research from previous studies that focused on Small Medium Food Entrepreneurs, this case study is considered to be a benchmark for future research of a similar nature.

From this practical perspective, the study will supply government bodies with information with regards to the external factors that have impacted on small medium entrepreneurs through

improving government assistance to Small Medium Food Entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the results of this study will not only contribute to the awareness of the relationship between the variables but it will provide the guideline to new Small Medium Entrepreneurs when becoming involved in the food businesses.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a case method research approach by using exploratory designs, to analyze the selected case in determining the internal and external factors of SME industry by measuring the important determinants performance factors of food products. Due to the nature of the study, the researcher found that qualitative approaches were the most suitable method of data gathering to use in order to obtain meaningful data.

Research Sample Size

The sample size of this study mainly focused on LAE involvement in Agro, specifically organic chicken and food processing in Kampung Sijangkang, Teluk Panglima Garang.

Data Gathering Method and Instruments

In order to gain insights of the stipulated issues in the research objective, primary data was collected for a period of approximately of 6 months, from January 2015 until July 2015. A series of interviews (face to face) with the Lin Agro owner were conducted in order to collect the data to cover the internal and external success factors of small medium food entrepreneurs. The data was in depth and collected in-situ in order to gather the information.

The objective of the interview questions is to understand the background of the company and to identify the internal and external factors that determine performance of food products for small medium enterprise. Prior to participating in the interview, respondents were informed through a notice attached to the questionnaire, of the objectives and purposes of conducting the interview and all information provided by them was strictly confidential. The observation at Lin Agro Enterprise was also a data collection measure and a checklist/guide was used when conducting the observation. The observation gathered information about the processes of Lin Agro operations such as preparation area for food products and BOKASHI product, site of the chicken farm, business operation and environmental site.

The secondary data information such as journals from past researchers, documents from the local authorities and Lin Agro information from the business magazine were analysed in support of the study.

Research Findings

Background of the Company and Profile of the Lin Agro Enterprise

Lin Agro Enterprise (LAE) is situated at Lot 1222, Jalan Selasih, Batu Sijangkang, Telok Panglima Garang. LAE as a business was started by Puan Ruslin, (39 years old) seven years ago and was a translation of his hobby, SME agro livestock and finished products, into an enterprise. LAE initially started the livestock business with 40 “ayam kampung” and 20 “ayam belanda” and this was a hobby as the owner was a housewife. After observing the organic chicken market and determining there was potential for success, the owner then became fully involved in the business along with her husband, Encik Masrul. LAE has 25 staff who support their business operation incorporating farm operation, production and sales operation. Support and guidance from government agencies department such as Malaysia Agriculture Research & Development Institute (MARDI) and Veterinary department was provided in terms of finance, research and marketing of the products. At the early stages of the business there were lots of obstacles, such as complaint from neighbors regarding the chicken manure as an environmental problem, implementation of marketing strategy entering into the agro market, staffing, capital injection, production error, chicken diseases and facilities.

However, with the support of family and government, LAE can now celebrate their success, not only in terms of raising organic chickens but also in the processing of organic chicken food products (Bokashi), frozen organic chicken “ayam kampung”, processing food products based on organic chicken and the application of Effective Microorganism (EM) technique into their agro culture technology. LAE has also been recognized as the most successful agro entrepreneur in Kuala Langat, actively participating in seminars and training organized by Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA). LAE is a trainer and role model for other agro entrepreneurs that aspire to apply Bokashi techniques into their agro production.

Currently, LIN Agro Enterprise has more than 3000 organic chickens to be marketed and their products are well known among consumers, the name Lin Agro Enterprise not only is associated with their convenience food products but with fresh organic chicken and profitable Bokashi business production.

Bokashi

The term Bokashi is a Japanese word that means, “Fermented organic matter.” The Bokashi host medium can indeed be almost any fine organic grain or grass-like substance — bran, rice, wheat mill run (WMR), a waste product from flour milling), used mushroom growth medium, dried leaves, even sawdust, (Ruslin, 2015; Jamaludin, et.al 2016). This medium is inoculated with beneficial microbes that flourish in anaerobic, acidic environments but smell less foul than

do those in unfettered, natural anaerobic conditions. To prepare the inoculant, a brew that will attract the appropriate bacterial strains is prepared, the host material is immersed in it, and the microbes are allowed to ferment. Molasses provides an energy source for the microbes, which reproduce wildly for several days. Once the fermentation stage is over, the inoculated host can be dried, packaged, and stored for long periods.

The bacteria belong primarily to three strains: yeasts, (*Saccharomyces* spp.), bacteria that produce lactic acids (*Lactobacillus* spp.), and (phototrophic) purple non-sulfur bacteria (*Rhodospseudomonas* spp.). These, or bacteria like them, are the active organisms in yogurt and in silage, the fermented hay that is produced all over the world as a livestock feed. All smell sour or fermented but none produce a smell nearly as foul as those associated with natural anaerobic processes. During her training with the MARDI, Dr. Teuro Higa, a professor at University of Ryukyus, Okinawa, Japan, discovered or developed Bokashi (usually called EM or Effective Micro-organisms) around 1982 (Hoon Park and Michael W. DuPont, 2009).

In Asian countries, including Korea, deliberate collection and culturing of naturally occurring soil microorganisms has been a common agricultural practice for centuries and application of these cultures to crop soils is believed to minimize the need for applications of inorganic soil amendments. The purpose of using Bokashi is an inoculant in anaerobic composting, it can also be added to an aerobic compost pile, added directly to soil, or used to create compost tea for watering plants.

Internal Success Factor

Leadership

By setting the mission and vision as a platform to measure their company performance, the LAE mission is to provide organic halal livestock to end-users and to support the industry of small medium enterprise (SME). Their vision is to commercialize the industry of agro by adopted the technique of “Effective Microorganism” (EM) and by providing healthy food conscience to consumers, (Lin, 2015; Jalloh & Guevera 2017). LAE practiced quality planning, human resource management, learning and customer focus in order to achieve their goals. By actively attending courses organized by Ministry of Agriculture & Agro Based Industry Malaysia and Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, LAE manage to update and adhere to latest knowledge not only related to agro industry but also business performance.

From the observation in this research, it was found that most Lin Agro Enterprise staff had been exposed to the concept of Effective Microorganism (EM) in handling. This skill was acquired via training provided by Pn. Ruslin and also Malaysia Agriculture Research & Development Institute (MARDI) and Veterinary department, who observe and teach the correct technique to improve the process of EM. This leadership in professional learning is supported

by Ahire et al., (2012) who note that leadership and top management act as drivers for quality management implementation; creating values, goals and systems to satisfy customer expectations and to improve the performance of an organization.

Corporate Planning

Pn. Ruslin and her staff believe the element of corporate planning is significant to them because, the company has a clear, quality vision that has been communicated to every company employee. Corporate planning is important to examine how the company develops, communicates, implement and improves its strategy and policy to achieve company performance excellence and strong competitive position. To support this statement, Pn. Ruslin collaborated with MARDI to improve their product enhancement such as innovation of “organic ayam kampung” and satay ayam kampung, cucur ayam kampung, roasted ayam kampung and rendang ayam kampung as convenience food. Through this innovation, Lin Agro Enterprise has become recognised as the most successful agro entrepreneur in Kuala Langat which has had positive impact on sales and increased product demand, ensuring their popularity in Klang Valley. LNE mission into the future is to supply and cater to all the hypermarkets and supermarkets around Malaysia within 2 years times.

As well as supplying raw organic chicken and convenience food to consumers, Lin Agro Enterprise also focus on their Bokashi (using EM technique) method and train other entrepreneurs, organize workshops using EM technique and supply organic chicken breeders to others entrepreneurs.

Process Management

Lin Agro Enterprise categorize aspects of process management through consideration of a range of elements: how they manage a combination of machines, tools, methods, material and people engaged in a production. For example, starting from the process of breeding, their “ayam kampung” is completely organically food and the farm itself is very clean and uses EM technique to avoid odour. Further, all staff are well trained by the LAE and veterinary organisations, starting with the process of breeding and progressing through slaughtering, processing, packaging and marketing.

The LAE management team is part of the project of Ministry of Agriculture and Agro Based Industry Malaysia for Small Medium Enterprise (SME) and is supervised by Department of Veterinary Services Malaysia to ensure SME Agro follow guidelines and technical procedures as per instructions by the Ministry. Other than that, Lin Agro Enterprise take part in workshops and training which are organized by Ministry of Rural and Regional Development and Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (FAMA) in terms of coaching and marketing to develop their business. The strategy LAE business performance and potential business of their marketing

aspect is overseen directly by LAE and by agents in the areas of Shah Alam, Kuala Langat and Klang Valley. LAE also take part in Entrepreneur Carnival, Pasar Tani, SME carnival and promoting their product by mass media such as newspaper, magazines, website and facebook.

Customer Focus

The results of this study support previous studies that found customer focus is one of the key elements of successful implementation in business (Krajewski *et al.*, 2003; Corbett and Rastrick, 2000; Prayogo and Brown, 2004, and Prayogo and Dermott, 2005). LAE customer focus is one of the company's internal factors, which is affecting the change and development of organizational performance and business performance. This element is considered a major driver for the internal factor practices to Lin Agro, which examine leadership and personal involvement in building, maintaining and supporting the total quality environment implementation that facilitates high organizational performance, individual development, and learning organization.

LAE measured customer focus by a measure of the organization's commitment to satisfy their customer's need such as providing halal, a range of products and product quality at reasonable price. Further, Lin Agro integrate the level of customer satisfaction within the company's corporate planning, the understanding of customer's needs and expectations, customer's feedback, and the level of interaction between Lin Agro and customers. Elements of customer focuses have a direct effect on financial performance of the company and this is a major objective to make sure their customer needs are fulfilled. LAE demand of organic agriculture such as "ayam kampung" is popular among consumers because currently, there is a trend for a health conscious lifestyle. The demand of organic chickens is around 300 to 500 per day however Lin Agro Enterprise is not able to cater to the demand because of lack of capital injection and land to breed the organic chicken.

Quality Assurance

Generally, quality assurance practice is measured by; (i) new product design review procedures, (ii) design for manufacturing procedures, (iii) control of product and work specification and procedures, (iv) preventive maintenance activities, and (v) quality control activities along the value added chain. However, other quality assurance practices in the food industry include food hygiene and safety, and Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP).

From the owner's observation and feedback, Lin Agro Enterprise has been certified by Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM) for their products and acknowledged by veterinary organisation as a quality and high breed of livestock. In terms of slaughtering process followed as per Jakim requirement, which is Halal procedure, this is

applied but Lin Agro Enterprise is still in the process of receiving halal certification for their convenience food product due to lack of processing facilities. Other than that, according to the Ministry of Veterinary Services, (2014) and LAE, the future plan is to have a SME technology factory of processing herbs ayam kampung and to export their products to the Middle East. However, in order to engage in the process of exporting, Lin Agro Enterprise must gain certification for GMP and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), which is a government certification.

This finding regarding operational performance involves customer satisfaction, product quality and safety as the measurement elements that quality assure food standards (Spiegel et al., 2007) said (Zainol et al., 2019). Thus, food manufacturers have to decide which QA system is most suitable to their specific situation. In the food industry, particularly in the Malaysian scenario, quality assurance systems, such as GMP, HACCP, Halal Standard-MS1500: 2004, ISO-series and etc., are applied voluntarily to ensure food quality and food safety. The purpose of those is to build and maintain consumers' trust (SIRIM, 2005; Achilleas and Anastasios, 2008; Al-Mhasnah et al., 2018).

LAE agro products are in high demand because the product is trusted by the consumers because of reasonable price, high quality and organic. However, Sufiya, (2015) staff of LAE noted that LAE practice quality standard for their product starting from the processing either for raw or cooked chicken until the marketing stage. For example: Lin Agro Convenience foods obtained SIRIM certification, one of the factors contributing to the building and maintenance of customer, trust. LAE future planning involves achieving quality assurance system and planning to win accreditation for GMP and HACCP with collaboration of government sectors that assist SME industry to improve their quality operational performance. LAE practice one of the latest technologies, Effective Microorganisms (EM) in their livestock, assisted by Amran Shahir, (2015) Veterinary department to control odour and ensure sustainable environmental practices. Environmental alert is part of LAE vision in their business practice.

External Success Factors

Government Support in Training

There are various Government ministries and agencies involved in the SME industry, the incentives that these agencies provide to aid SMEs, in addition to banking institutions that have products specifically for SMEs focus on the identified potential growth areas and challenges that these SMEs face. SME development was highlighted in the Ninth Malaysia Plan. The National SME Development Council (NSDC) was formed to guide and advice Government in their policies and coordinate all initiatives, in development or other matters, (SME Corp, 2014).

LAE have full support from Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority, (FAMA). LAE is an agriculture business based SME with support from FAMA which specifically oversee the development, marketing and promotion of agriculture products. For example, LAE is involved in the Agri Bazaar website, an online portal where farmers, producers, retailers and other staff can conduct trading as well as gain information on the amount of supply for a certain product, price quotations, logistics services and market projection.

The Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) helps Lin Agro Enterprise in terms of technology and product innovation such as with the processing of food products based on organic chicken like “Satay Ayam Kampung”, “Nuggets”, “Cucur Ayam Kampung”, “Marinated Ayam Kampung with varieties of flavor” and many more. Other than that, MARDI also give Lin Agro Enterprise training on Bokashi (processing of mud ball that applying in Effective Microorganisma (EM)) in order to control the odour of composting chicken manure and to ensure EM presence in the chicken tablet and drinks.

However, the main objective of MARDI is generating and promoting new, appropriate and efficient technologies towards the advancement of the food, agriculture, food and agro-based industries. MARDI is managed and guided by the regulations and policies set by the MARDI Governing Board and consented to by the Minister of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry. In matters pertaining to finance, the consensus of the Minister of Finance is also obligatory.

Department of Veterinary Services under Ministry of Agriculture & Agro- Based Malaysia also plays an important role in helping Lin Agro Enterprise in checking their livestock according to the schedule. This is to prevent and control animal and zoonotic diseases, to ensure foods of animal origin are clean and fit for human consumption, to promote the growth and development of animal feeds industry and to ensure the welfare and well being of all animals. The official site features services, approved abattoirs and plants, training and organizational support. Information provided includes: vaccine education, Nipah Virus, Avian Influenza; how to invest in livestock farming; cash-flow spreadsheets; guidebooks on livestock farming; local laws of veterinary industry and statistics.

Market Accessibility

Lin Agro products have established a good network with supermarkets, dealing with relevant agents in marketing their products. Even though their products are still in process of attaining Halal certification, the SIRIM label ensures that the products have full support from consumers as healthy products, offering comparable quality at a convenient price. Lin Agro Enterprise plans to penetrate their product into niche market area and export to the Middle East. For the local market, Lin Agro Enterprise also promote their products through exhibitions such as FAMA, Malaysia International Horticulture and Agriculture (MAHA), AGRO bazaar.

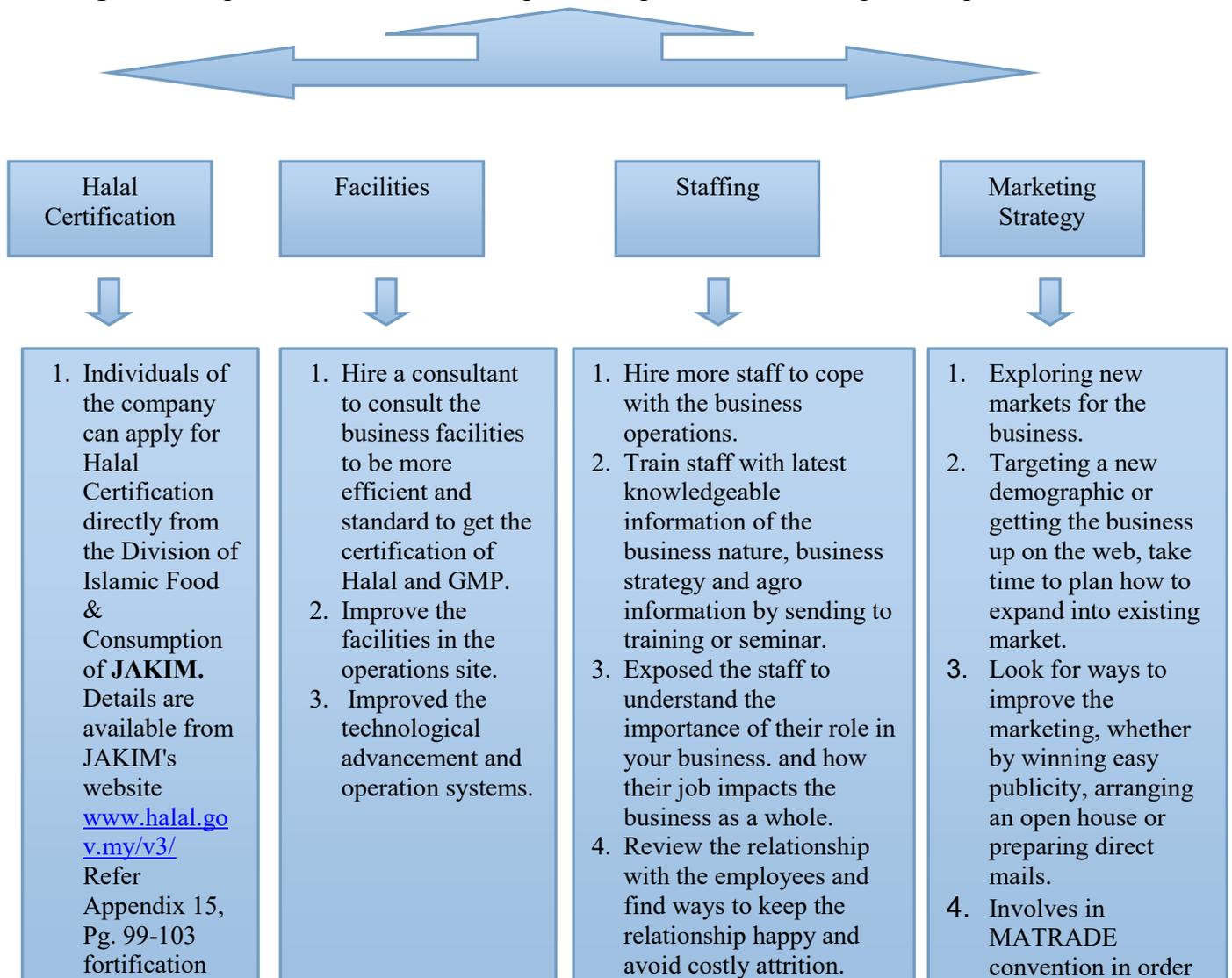
Indirectly, by getting involved with exhibitions, their products are promoted by the organizer and the brand name enjoys word of mouth expansion through existing and new customers.

Recommendation

This case study evaluates the internal and external factors the LAE SME business enterprise and encompasses an investigation of leadership, corporate planning, process management, customer focus, quality assurance, government support in training and market accessibility which are all found to be positive in the implementation of food processing for SME industry.

Recommendations from this study in terms of future planning for Lin Agro Enterprise focus on the achievement of a further series of business success in Agro industry and food processing. To expand its business globally, the LAE have to be accredited for ISO, GMP and Halal in order to export their product to the Middle East. Lin Agro also has to overcome their identified weaknesses and become more competitive and prudent in implementing their business strategy. For future research, it is suggested that a study on personality test of entrepreneurs be conducted in order to identify the quality of entrepreneurial behavior that is most advantageous in SME business enterprise.

Figure 2. Proposed future business competitive capabilities for Lin Agro Enterprise



Conclusion

Based on research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that to measure the success factors practiced by LAE both Internal and External factors must be considered. In this study, Internal Factors were (1) leadership, (2) corporate planning, (3) Process Management, (4) customer focus, (5) quality assurance process and the External Factors were (1) government support system and (2) market accessibility. These factors have significant effect on product quality and business performance. The findings indicate that the degree of increase or decrease in the organization's quality performance was determined by the internal factor and supported by the external factors. Evidently, a strong and consistent internal factor influences the most determinant performance factors of food products for Small Medium Entrepreneurs as in the case of Lin Agro Enterprise.

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