

THE ANTS: UNFOLDING LESSONS TO NIGERIAN ENTREPRENEURS IN ERA OF ECONOMIC RECESSION

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Abstract

God created a lot of things to serve as lessons to man. One of such things is the ants. They have no developed brain to think like the entrepreneurs yet they are well co-ordinated. They have no managing Director, nor Supervisor to guide, direct, supervise, discipline them etc, yet very obedient. Like the ants the Nigerian Entrepreneur, should engage in business activities with foresight, have a good network of business with future objectives. Planning every aspect of his business is not only a must, but also builds habits that every business owner should develop, implement, and maintain. Always go out of his way to get involved in the community that supports his business. He/She can do this in many ways, such as pitching in to help local charities or the food bank, becoming involved in organizing community events, and getting involved in local politics. It was concluded that for Nigeria Business Entrepreneurs to survive in this period of economic recession, they need to learn lessons from the ants. Ants, though feeble but strong, weak but wise. Ants work tirelessly gathering for the rainy days. They are never discouraged by any situation, therefore the Nigerian entrepreneurs' need to learn from the characteristic behaviours of the ant, work tirelessly regardless of the economic recession of the country. Entrepreneurs should have the future of their business at heart and should not be deterred by any situation. Based on this, recommendations were made that both the Federal and the State governments should provide enabling environments for local entrepreneurs to survive. Government should be firm in her financial and business policies and avoid policy somersaults to attract investors. Entrepreneurs should be wise and truthful in their advertisements and business relationship with customers. This will go a long way to build goodwill as well as boasting the business reputations.

Ants are social insects of the family **Formicidae**. In this context ANTS is an acronym derived from the behavior of the insects. The letter 'A' means activity with foresight, 'N' means networking for the future, 'T' means tenacity despite feableness and 'S' means strategy against famine. Ants have foresight. They gather during the harvesting season and store their food against famine. Ants do a lot for their future. They are never lazy, weak or slumber, though feable but their strength lies in their persistence. They persist in whatever they do and eventually have a breakthrough. God created a lot of things to serve as lessons to man. They have no developed brain to think like the entrepreneurs yet they are well co-ordinated. They have no managing Director nor Supervisor to guide, direct, supervise, discipline etc them, yet very obedient. Like the ants the Nigerian Entrepreneur, should engage in business activities with foresight, have a good network of business with future objectives. The Entrepreneur like the ants needs to have the future of his business uppermost in his mind and think of what to do for survival in the face of down turn economy. The entrepreneur should neither be lazy, sluggish in business nor grow weary. The Holy Bible adjured us (the sluggish) to go to the ant consider her ways and be wise. They have no guide, no overseer, or ruler yet provided her meat in the summer and gathered her food in the harvest, (Prov, 6:6-8).

Economic recession is a period when the economy of a country has gone down the drain. It is a period of hardship, scarcity of purchasing power and few goods and services. Economic recession is a difficult time for the economy of any nation. It is characterized with less trade and industrial

activities than usual, mass unemployment and underemployment. It could also be described as the downward movement of the economy from the previous position to a worse situation, Hornby, (2014). The Entrepreneur is not expected to be lazy or sluggish. He should be enterprising. Entrepreneurship involves bringing something new to a business that does not exist before (an innovation). Even if the market already exists, there is no guarantee that the new product will survive the introduction stage of the product lifecycle, taking into consideration the teething competition.

Concept of Ants

Ants are social insects of the family **Formicidae**. Ants evolved from wasp-like ancestors in the Cretaceous period, about 99 million years ago and diversified after the rise of flowering plants. More than 12,500 of an estimated total of 22,000 species have been classified, Rabeling, Brown and Verhaagh (2008). They are easily identified by their elbowed antennae and the distinctive node-like structure that forms their slender waists. **Ants** are one of the most successful groups of insects in the animal kingdom. They are of particular interest because they are a social insect and form highly organized colonies or nests which sometimes consist of millions of individuals. Colonies of invasive ant species will sometimes work together and form super-colonies, spanning a very wide area of land. Ant colonies are sometimes described as super organisms because they appear to operate as a single entity, Agonsi and Johnson, (2013).

Ants communicate with each other using pheromones, sounds, and touch. The use of pheromones as chemical signals is more developed in ants, such as the red harvester ant, than in other hymenopteran groups. Like other insects, ants perceive smells with their long, thin, and mobile antennae. The paired antennae provide information about the direction and intensity of scents. Since most ants live on the ground, they use the soil surface to leave pheromone trails that may be followed by other ants. In species that forage in groups, a forager that finds food marks a trail on the way back to the colony; this trail is followed by other ants, these ants then reinforce the trail when they head back with food to the colony. When the food source is exhausted, no new trails are marked by returning ants and the scent slowly dissipates. This behaviour helps ants deal with changes in their environment. Ants attack and defend themselves by biting and, in many species, by stinging, often injecting or spraying chemicals, such as formic acid in the case of formic acid ants, alkaloids and piperidines in fire ants, and a variety of protein components in other ants, Rabeling, Brown and Verhaagh (2008).

Many Entrepreneurs make use of ants in cuisine, medication, and rituals. Some species are valued in their role as biological pest control agents. Their ability to exploit resources may bring ants into conflict with humans; however, as they can damage crops and invade buildings. Some species, such as the red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*), are regarded as invasive species, establishing themselves in areas where they have been introduced accidentally.

The Concept of Entrepreneurship

Shane (2013) described entrepreneurship as the act of being an entrepreneur. The word entrepreneur which is a French word means “one who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations in economic goods”. He opined that the result of entrepreneurship may be a new organization or a part of revitalizing mature organization in response to a perceived opportunity. The most obvious form of entrepreneurship to him is that of starting a new business. However, in recent years the term has been extended to cover such areas as socio-cultural, political, and educational forms of entrepreneurial activity. As a result when large companies venture into entrepreneurial activities within the organization, it is described as “intrapreneurship” or “corporate spin-off”. In today’s world, anybody, industry or business leader with innovative and creative business abilities is described as an entrepreneur or someone who engages in entrepreneurship (Okala, 2008). While the entrepreneur is the person venturing into the business of organizing and managing, entrepreneurship is the service rendered by the entrepreneur (Akanwa and Agu, 2015). These definitions view the entrepreneur as the person who perceives a business opportunity and takes advantage of the scarce resources to meet with unlimited opportunities

profitably. To this end, the entrepreneur is one who bears non insurable risks and directs the human and material resources to achieve both economic, social, and financial goals of the enterprise. Adam Smith and Robert Cantillon in the late 17th and 18th centuries respectively, observed that the entrepreneur is an actor in macroeconomics but the study of entrepreneurship was ignored theoretically until 19th and 20th centuries, and empirically until a profound resurgence in business and economy in the last 50 years. This giant leap is credited to the works of economist Joseph Schumpeter in the 1930s and other Austrian economist such as Carl Menger, Ludwig Von Mises and Friedrich Von Hayek. Most credit definitely goes to Schumpeter who described the entrepreneur as a person who is willing and able to convert new ideas or invention into a successful innovation (Schumpeter, 1942). Unlike most authors who described the entrepreneur as someone who bears risk, Schumpeter disagrees. The capitalist bears the risk. Drucker (1970), agreeing with Knight (1921) described entrepreneurship as being all about taking risks. He opined that the entrepreneur reflects a kind of person willing to put his or her career and financial security on the line and take risks in the name of an idea, spending much time as well as capital on an uncertain venture. Knight classified three types of uncertainty:

- **Risk:** Measurable statistically
- **Ambiguity:** Hard to measure statistically
- **True uncertainty:** Impossible to estimate or predict statistically. It is noteworthy to observe here that the act of entrepreneurship is difficult to predict statistically because it involves a high measure of risk and true uncertainty. Hence would be entrepreneur must be equipped and willing to face the future with their limited resources, and be determined to come out of that venture a success. Entrepreneurship involves bringing something new to a market that does not exist before (an innovation). Even if the market already exists, there is no guarantee that the new product will survive the introduction stage of the product lifecycle, taking into consideration the teething competition. Some authors see entrepreneurship as a service rendered by anyone who starts a new business. For instance, Akanwa and Agu (2015) defined entrepreneur as anyone who creates a business, establishes it and nurse it to growth and profitability, or takes over an existing business because the founder is dead or has sold it.

The Nigerian Entrepreneur like the ants should engage in business activities with foresight, have a good network of business with future objectives. Planning every aspect of his business is not only a must, but also builds habits that every business owner should develop, implement, and maintain. Always go out of his way to get involved in the community that supports his business. He/She can do this in many ways, such as pitching in to help local charities or the food bank, becoming involved in organizing community events, and getting involved in local politics. For Nigeria Business Entrepreneurs to survive in this period of economic recession, they need to learn lessons from the ants. Ants, though feeble but strong, weak but wise. Ants work tirelessly gathering for the rainy days. They are never discouraged by any situation, therefore the Nigerian entrepreneurs' needs to learn from the characteristic behaviours of the ant, work tirelessly regardless of the economic recession of the country.

Concept of Economic Recession

Economic recession is a period of general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, an increase in unemployment, and a decline in the housing market. Generally, a recession is less severe than a depression. The blame for a recession generally falls on the federal leadership, often either the president himself, the head of the Federal Reserve, or the entire administration. An economic recession is typically defined as a decline in **gross domestic product (GDP)** for two or more consecutive quarters. GDP is the market value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time. An example of one type of GDP would be the value of all the automobiles produced within the United States for one year. GDP only takes into account new products that have been manufactured. **High interest rates** are a cause of recession because they limit liquidity, or the amount of money available to invest. Another factor is increased inflation. **Inflation** refers to a general rise in the prices of goods and services over a period of time. As

inflation increases, the percentage of goods and services that can be purchased with the same amount of money decreases. Reduced consumer confidence is another factor that can cause a recession. If consumers believe the economy is bad, they are less likely to spend money. Consumer confidence is psychological but can have a real impact on any economy.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for this study is based on the scientific management theory and classical management theory.

Scientific Management Theory

This theory prefunded by F. W. Taylor and his team (1856 -1915) emphasizes on the systematic study of relationships between people and tasks for the purpose of redesigning the work process to increase efficiency. Based on Adam Smith's observations, early management practitioners and theorists focused on how managers should organize and control the work process to maximize the advantages of job specialization and the division of labour. Taylor believed that the production process would become more efficient if the amount of time and effort that each employee spent to produce a unit of output (a finished good or service) could be reduced. He noted that increased specialization and the division of labour could increase efficiency. Taylor believed that the way to create the most efficient division of labour could best be determined by means of scientific management techniques rather than intuitive or informal rule-of-thumb knowledge.

As with the ants there is division of labour and specialization among them, productivity and efficiency will improve with the application of scientific management theory. This calls for a complete mental revolution on the part of management and labor. Rather than quarrel over profits, both sides should try to increase production; by so doing, it is believed, profits would rise to such an extent that labor and management would no longer have to fight over them. In short, management and labor had a common interest in increasing productivity.

Classical Management Theory

Henri Fayol (1841-1925) is generally hailed as the founder of the classical management school--not because he was the first to investigate managerial behavior, but because he was the first to systematize it. Fayol believed that sound management practice falls into certain patters that can be identified and analyzed. From this basic insight, he drew up a blueprint for a cohesive doctrine of managers. While Taylor was basically concerned with organizational functions, however Fayol was interested in the total organization and focused on management, which had been the most neglected of business operations. From the theory it could be inferred that manager were not born managers but management is a skill that can be learnt and improved upon once its underlying principles were understood.

Lessons to Nigerian Entrepreneurs in Era of Economic Recession

Regardless of the definition, there are, great number of lessons the Nigerian Entrepreneurs should learn from the Ants especially in this era of economic recession. Among them are the following.

1. Take what you do seriously

You cannot expect to be effective and successful in business unless you truly believe in your business and in the goods and services that you sell. Many home business owners fail to take their own businesses seriously enough, and this makes them get easily sidetracked and not staying motivated and keeping their noses to the grindstone. They also fall prey to naysayers who don't take them seriously because they don't work from an office building, office park, storefront, or factory. Little do these skeptics, who rain on the home business owners, know that the number of people working from home, and making very good annual incomes, has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years.

2. Plan everything

Planning every aspect of your business is not only a must, but also builds habits that every business owner should develop, implement, and maintain. The act of business planning is so important because it requires you to analyze each business situation, research and compile data, and make conclusions based mainly on the facts as revealed through the research. A business plan also serves a second function, which is having your goals and how you will achieve them, on paper. You can use the plan that you create both as map to take you from point A to Z and as a yardstick to measure the success of each individual plan or segment within the plan.

3. Manage money wisely

The lifeblood of any business enterprise is cash flow. You need it to buy inventory, pay for services, promote and market your business, repair and replace tools and equipment, and pay yourself so that you can continue to work. Therefore, like the ants, all business owners must be wise money managers to ensure that the cash keeps flowing and the bills paid. There are two aspects to wise money management.

1. The money you receive from clients in exchange for your goods and services you provide (income)
2. The money you spend on inventory, supplies, wages and other items required to keep your business operating. (expenses)

4. Remember it's all about the customer

Your business is not about the products or services that you sell. Your business is not about the prices that you charge for your goods and services. Your business is not about your competitors and how to beat them. Your business is all about your customers, or clients. After all, your customers are the people that will ultimately decide if your business goes boom or bust. Just as the ants are focused, everything you do in business must be customer focused, including your policies, warranties, payment options, operating hours, presentations, advertising and promotional campaigns and website. In addition, you must know who your customers are and their wants.

5. Become a shameless self-promoter (without becoming obnoxious)

As the ants are shameless about their business, the entrepreneur should be shameless and self promoter of his business. One of the greatest myths about personal or business success is that eventually your business, personal abilities, products or services will get discovered and be embraced by the masses that will beat a path to your door to buy what you are selling. But how can this happen if no one knows who you are, what you sell and why they should be buying? Self-promotion is one of the most beneficial, yet most underutilized, marketing tool that the majority of business owners have at their immediate disposal.

6. Project a positive business image

You have but a passing moment to make a positive and memorable impression on people with whom you intend to do business. Entrepreneurs must go out of their way and make a conscious effort to always project the most professional business image possible. The majority of entrepreneurs do not have the advantage of elaborate offices or elegant storefronts and showrooms to impress customers. Instead, they must rely on imagination, creativity and attention to the smallest detail when creating and maintaining a professional image for their business.

7. Build a top-notch business team

As the ants work as a team, team spirit is required of an entrepreneur. No one person can build a successful business alone. It's a task that requires a team that is as committed as you to the business and its success. Your business team may include family members, friends, suppliers, business alliances, employees, sub-contractors, industry and business associations, local government and the

community. Of course the most important team members will be your customers or clients. Any or all may have a say in how your business will function and a stake in your business future.

8. Invest in yourself

Top entrepreneurs buy and read business and marketing books, magazines, reports, journals, newsletters, websites and industry publications, knowing that these resources will improve their understanding of business and marketing functions and skills. They join business associations and clubs, and they network with other skilled business people to learn their secrets of success and help define their own goals and objectives. Top entrepreneurs attend business and marketing seminars, workshops and training courses, even if they have already mastered the subject matter of the event. They do this because they know that education is an ongoing process. There are usually ways to do things better, in less time, with less effort. In short, top entrepreneurs never stop investing in the most powerful, effective and best business and marketing tool at their immediate disposal--themselves.

9. Build a rock-solid reputation

Ants are never hidden wherever they are, therefore the entrepreneur's reputation should speak for itself. A good reputation is unquestionably one of the entrepreneur's most tangible and marketable assets. You can't simply buy a good reputation; it's something that you earn by honoring your promises. If you promise to have the merchandise in the customer's hands by Wednesday, you have no excuse not to have it there. If you offer to repair something, you need to make good on your offer. Consistency in what you offer is the other key factor. If you cannot come through with the same level of service (and products) for clients on a regular basis, they have no reason to trust you . . . and without trust, you won't have a good reputation.

10. Get involved

Always go out of your way to get involved in the community that supports your business. You can do this in many ways, such as pitching in to help local charities or the food bank, becoming involved in organizing community events, and getting involved in local politics. You can join associations and clubs that concentrate on programs and policies designed to improve the local community. It's a fact that people like to do business with people they know, like and respect, and with people who do things to help them as members of the community.

11. Get and stay organized

The key to staying organized is not about which type of file you have or whether you keep a stack or two of papers on your desk, but it's about managing your business. It's about having systems in place to do things. Therefore, you want to establish a routine by which you can accomplish as much as possible in a given workday, whether that's three hours for a part-time business or seven or nine hours as a full-timer. In fact, you should develop systems and routines for just about every single business activity. Small things such as creating a to-do list at the end of each business day, or for the week, will help keep you on top of important tasks to tackle. Creating a single calendar to work from, not multiple sets for individual tasks or jobs, will also ensure that jobs are completed on schedule and appointments kept. Incorporating family and personal activities into your work calendar is also critical so that you work and plan from a single calendar.

Conclusion

For Nigeria Business Entrepreneurs to survive in this period of economic recession, they need to learn lessons from the ants. Ants though feeble but strong, weak but wise; have no managing director or supervisor to direct their affairs yet very obedient, orderly and hard working. Ants work tirelessly gathering for the rainy days. They are never discouraged by any situation, therefore the Nigerian entrepreneurs needs to learn from the characteristic behaviour of the ant, work tirelessly regardless of the economic recession of the country. Entrepreneurs should have the future of their business at heart and should not be deterred by any situation.

Recommendations

For Nigerian entrepreneurs to succeed in this period of economic recession the following recommendations are made:

1. Both the Federal and the State governments should provide enabling environments for local entrepreneurs to survive.
2. Government should be firm in her financial and business policies and avoid policy somersaults to attract investors.
3. Entrepreneurs should be wise and truthful in their advertisements and business relationship with customers. This will go a long way to build goodwill as well as boasting the business reputations.
4. Entrepreneurs should contribute to the development of the local community where they operate business. This will help to foster harmonious relationship between the community and the entrepreneurs which will guarantee security.
5. Government should protect the local entrepreneurs from excessive competition with foreign entrepreneurs but encourage them to standardize their products by regulations.
6. The Export Promotion Council of Nigeria should help the local entrepreneurs to market their products by locating foreign markets for them.
7. Banks and other financial institutions should assist the Nigerian entrepreneurs raise additional capital for expansion at lower rate of interest.

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