UNIVERSITY OF ESWATINI

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

MAIN EXAMINATION

August 2020

TITLE OF PAPER	:	QUALITATIVE BUSINESS ANALYSIS
DEGREE	:	MBA
COURSE CODE	:	BUS 612
TIME ALLOWED	:	THREE (3) HOURS
Instructions	:	1. This paper consists of Sections (A) and (B)
		2. The case study on Section (A) is compulsory. Total marks possible: 40 marks
		3. Answer any three questions from Section (B). Total marks possible: 60 marks

Note: Marks will be awarded for good communication in English and for orderly presentation of work

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SECTION A

Study the synopsis of the following research article and respond to the questions below. Note that the synopsis deliberately excluded the literature review, data analysis and presentation of results.

Investigation of the challenges of implementing social sustainability initiatives: a case study of the apparel industry

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Introduction

The global apparel industry faces increasing criticism relating to social sustainability issues such as human rights abuses and labour-rights violations of workers in apparel manufacturing factories that are based in emerging and developing economies (Islam and McPhail, 2011). To address social sustainability issues, stakeholders of the apparel industry [including buying Organizations, industry bodies, trade associations and non-government organisations (NGOs)] introduce social sustainability initiatives in the form of corporate codes of conduct, social audits and certification standards (O'Rourke, 2006). In implementing social sustainability initiatives, apparel industry organisations may face challenges arising from numerous resource-based and institutional issues (Huq et al., 2014; Pedersen and Gwozdz, 2014).

The apparel industry is infamous for social sustainability-related problems, most notably workplace accidents such as factory fires and building collapses. Large-scale industrial accidents have caused many worker deaths and injuries.

For example, the Ali Enterprises factory fire in Pakistan in 2012 caused 286 worker deaths (Walsh and Greenhouse, 2012); and in Bangladesh, the Tazreen Fashions factory fire in 2012 caused 112 deaths and 300 injuries; and the Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013 caused 1,136 worker deaths and more than 2,000 injuries (BaptistWorldAid, 2016).

Following the Rana Plaza accident, global condemnation of the apparel industry led to the introduction of safety initiatives aimed at improving working conditions in factories. However, despite existing industry initiatives, continual accidents demonstrate failure or ineffective implementation of social sustainability initiatives, resulting in unsafe apparel manufacturing factories. For successful implementation of social sustainability initiatives, and to help improve factory working conditions, there is a need to investigate the challenges involved in implementing social sustainability initiatives in the apparel industry.

Considerable research on the implementation of social sustainability initiatives in the apparel supply chain has been conducted from the perspective of apparel buyer organisations (MacCarthy and Jayarathne, 2012; Li et al., 2014; O'Rourke, 2014; Shen, 2014). However, it is apparel supplier organisations who must implement social initiatives in their manufacturing factories. Implementation challenges faced by apparel suppliers remain under-researched (Ko¨ksal et al., 2017). Research on the challenges of introducing social sustainability policies and practices in apparel manufacturing factories has identified financial and local contextual problems (Perry and Towers, 2013; Oelze, 2017).

To further research on social sustainability initiatives in the apparel supply chain, the present research investigates the challenges faced by apparel supplier organisations in implementing post-Rana Plaza factory safety initiatives such as the Accord (2018) and the Alliance (2018). While previous studies have investigated the causes of the Rana Plaza accident (Haar and Keune, 2014), the application of the post-Rana Plaza initiatives (Taplin, 2014; Sinkovics et al., 2016), the effect of the initiatives on labour conditions (Huq et al., 2014) and the structural issues and progress made by the initiatives (Ansary and Barua, 2015), to our knowledge, limited research has focussed on the challenges of implementing factory safety initiatives.

The study addresses the following research question:

RQ1. What are the challenges faced by apparel supplier organisations in implementing factory safety initiatives and how can these challenges be effectively addressed?

3. Research design

3.1 Research context

Bangladesh is the second-largest apparel exporter in the world and is a primary supplier of apparel to the European Union (EU) and the USA (Agarwal et al., 2017). The Bangladesh apparel industry is notorious for dangerous working conditions, which have led to the death of thousands of factory workers (CCC, 2013). Unprecedented industrial incidents, namely, the Tazreen Fashions factory fire and the Rana Plaza building collapse, focussed world attention on the health and safety risks in the industry. International pressure has led many Bangladesh apparel suppliers to adopt socially sustainable business practices (Sinkovics et al., 2016). Following the Rana Plaza accident, several factory safety initiatives were established. However, there are challenges facing apparel supplier organisations in implementing social

sustainability initiatives in apparel manufacturing factories, and to ensure improvement in factory safety conditions in the Bangladesh apparel industry, these challenges need to be identified and addressed.

3.2 Case-study approach

The study adopts a multiple case-study approach to collect data from Bangladesh apparel supplier organisations. Multiple case-study interviews were conducted to allow for a detailed analysis of a real-world issue and to obtain convincing and accurate findings (Yin, 2009). In the case study approach, conducting face-to-face interviews gives the benefit of immediate feedback, allows for confirmation of meaning and offers in-depth insights (Daft and Lengel, 1986). For multiple case studies, Eisenhardt (1989) suggests conducting between 4 and 10 cases to build theory and ensure richness of findings. In the case of study research, sample sizes between 4 and 10 are considered adequate for sampling amongst a homogenous population (Sandelowski, 1995).

The study applied purposeful criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) to identify and select information-rich case studies to gain insights and a more holistic understanding of the problem. For example, we included cases (companies) implementing Accord, Alliance, and other social sustainability initiatives. Purposeful sampling may be subjective and prone to researcher bias. Crucial aspects of this type of research include the knowledge and experience of the researcher and the availability, willingness and ability to communicate with the research participants (Etikan et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is important that the research is traceable and the processes by which data has been collected, analysed and presented are transparent (Galdas, 2017).

The member's list of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the country's largest trade association representing the apparel industry, was used to compile an initial list of 30 potential case-study companies. The companies were selected based on the following criteria (using information available on the corporate website): the company has been established for more than a decade; the company employs a large number (more than 500) of factory workers; the company supplies to major EU or US buyers; and the company implements a range of social sustainability initiatives in the factory. From the selected case-study companies, prospective research participants were searched and contacted through LinkedIn. Finally, 10 research participants from 7 apparel supplier organisations agreed to

participate in the research. The research participants are senior-level management of Bangladesh apparel supplier organisations, either factory managers or compliance managers with an average of more than 10 years of experience in the Bangladesh apparel industry. All research participants are involved with the implementation of sustainability initiatives and are ideally placed to provide valuable insights into the challenges of implementing social sustainability initiatives in apparel manufacturing factories. To ensure confidentiality, company and participant names are not disclosed.

3.3 Data collection and coding

For each case study, individual, in-depth interviews with research participants were jointly conducted by both researchers using a semi-structured interview guide containing openended interview questions. Nine of the interviewees allowed the audio recording of the interview. The researchers took notes during and immediately following each interview. Interview notes and recordings were translated and transcribed soon after each interview separately by each researcher. Both sets of interview transcriptions were cross-checked against each other. The interviews were on average of 90 min duration. Each interview was conducted on the premises of the apparel manufacturing factory and was followed by a factory tour that provided an opportunity to observe how post-Rana Plaza factory safety initiatives have been implemented.

This study uses "triangulation of sources" to examine the consistency of different data sources (data from interviews) by comparing responses of managers who expressed different viewpoints, and "analyst triangulation" by using two researchers to separately review the findings to avoid selective perception and illuminate blind spots in the interpretive analysis (Patton, 1999). We asked each respondent to discuss the challenges faced in apparel manufacturing factories and categorised the responses under the stated four broad challenge categories identified from the literature.

Each interview transcript was individually and manually coded around the four broad challenge categories (Miles et al., 2014). We followed Eisenhardt (1989) method of within-case and cross-case analysis for coding transcripts to theoretical constructs (challenge categories) identified from the literature. These were (i) Price pressure from buyers (ii) Limited financial support (iii) Lack of long term buyer commitment (iv)Inadequate government infrastructure. The initial step, the first-order analysis, involved the coding of the

interview transcripts, that is, open coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). After the first-order concepts were developed, the researchers coded the transcripts independently before reviewing results and discussing discrepancies. The second step involved constructing second-order concepts, that is, axial coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Thus, the interview responses were grouped into subcategories (or second order themes) under each category (or theme).

Questions

(a) Discuss the suitability of the research methodology and the manner in which it was applied to the study (15 marks)

(b) Demonstrate the manner in which the validity, credibility and generalizability of the results have been addressed in the research design (15 marks)

(c) Comment on the efficacy of the manual coding of data adopted in this study. (10 marks)

SECTION B

Question 1

Use examples to describe the features of the ethnography qualitative research approach, and comment on the kind of investigations to which it is best suited.   **(20marks)**

Question 2

The ultimate purpose of research investigation is to postulate generalizations, concepts and/or theories about specific phenomena. Critically discuss the process and manner in which this is achieved through qualitative research.   **(20marks)**

Question 3

Undertake a critique of the qualitative research methodology and comment on its usefulness in the face of such criticism.   **(20marks)**

Question 4

Interviews under qualitative research are usually purposed to gather rich and extensive data in order to conduct in-depth analysis. Identify and discuss the structure and manner in which such interviews are conducted, in comparison to those designed for quantitative study.
          (20marks)