

STRENGTHENING ROLE AND RESILIENCE OF BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS (BMO) THROUGH MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS AND DELIVERED SERVICES

Sigitas BRAZINSKAS ^{1*}, Vida PIPIRIENĖ², Metasebia TIMOTHIWOS³

¹*Independent researcher, Vilnius, Lithuania*

²*Department of Management, Faculty of Business Management, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, 02213 Vilnius, Lithuania*

³*Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

Received 27 February 2023; accepted 11 April 2023

Abstract. Business Membership Organizations (BMOs) are important and recognized facilitators of a competitive economic environment and its development. However, they are under continuous demand to adjust their role in the business ecosystem and determine their strategic development directions. BMOs performance, their existing connections, advantages and benefits are challenged by changing business cooperation patterns, digital transformation, generation change and other emerging factors. The paper analyses how BMOs can sustain in delivering business value to their members and stakeholders (individual firms or other BMOs, government, public institutions) through existing and new service ranges, evaluate their business model and continue to be resilient organizations. It demonstrates with a benchmarking analysis across different BMOs how these organizations are important actors with significant benefit for sustainable and competitive business and its environment development. The findings add that reviewed and adjusted BMOs service ranges are among key success factors for BMOs to continue gaining an important role and remain resilient organizations in changing business ecosystems. The paper provides an insight of demand- and supply driven service approaches to meet business and public sector as well as BMOs to be development policy drivers and help determination of business development directions.

Keywords: international linkages to development, business membership organizations, business support, services, networks, skill.

JEL Classification: O19, I25.

Introduction

Business Membership Organizations (BMOs) play an important role by representing interests and bridging the private business and public sector. The definition of BMOs is significantly wide, and it can cover various existing organizations, industry, women, SMEs and exporter's associations, councils, federations, which represent relatively homogenous membership structure and allow to harmonizing members interests in engaging advocacy in specific issues. Such features enable this group of BMOs to deliver very specific and tailor-made services connecting to value creation for their stakeholders. Another and separate BMOs group is chambers (country, bilateral, multilateral). They are usually operating in a

defined geographic area or region, they are multi-sectoral BMOs and possess heterogeneous membership, it also provides balance between interests of all branches and sectors. All of them serve as a critical link between entrepreneurs, government, service providers and other stakeholders. BMOs are usually non-governmental, not-for-profit entities, and most of their revenues comes from membership fees, services, sponsorships and project management through international organizations, donors, and funds. According to the International Labour Organization (2020), Employer and Business Membership organisations (EBMOs) fulfil their major role to provide value for their members through policy advocacy work and delivered services, EBMO is an expanded definition. Both definitions (BMO and EMBO) have the

* Corresponding author. E-mail: sigitas.brazinskas@gmail.com

same meaning in the research, the explanation occurs while reviewing literature where different authors use one or another definition.

The research idea was inspired primarily by two factors: first, authors involvement in BMOs capacity building activities, long-lasting experience and overall goal to assess the latest trends, second, consider scientific research application in BMOs operating areas, identify service benefit and determine resilience opportunities.

Research purpose is to analyse service portfolio delivered by a defined number of different types of BMOs (APEX, chambers, sectoral/industrial and women led) and determine major drivers for benefiting BMOs members and stakeholders. Different BMOs types and their service nichification along with mutual service complementarity are the focus of the research and aims to solve a scientific problem of the latest BMOs transformation and dynamics through delivered services. The research methods are analysis of public BMOs sources and identification of services delivered to their members and stakeholders.

The main role of a BMO is the promotion of growth, sustainability and prosperity for its members and stakeholders, to provide business support services and a representative voice for its members (Bhaskaran, 2022; International Trade Center, 2019; Akpata, 2016; BEAM Exchange, 2011; sequa, 2008; World Bank, 2005). Sölvel (2009) defines six major components in clusters such as industry, finances, media, public bodies, universities, and organizations for collaboration (formal and informal networks, trade associations, cluster organizations). These organizations are a part of BMOs definition, have their features and an important impact on private-public-academic collaboration and cluster initiatives such as business development, commercial collaboration, business environment and policy development. BMOs can be considered as a part of a business ecosystem. Awano and Tsujimoto (2021), Valkokari et al. (2021) define it as an economic community supported by establishing of interacting organizations and individuals. An ecosystem can be a structure, an interactive process, it possesses features of networks, clusters where actors can create a synergy and complement each other by joining forces and creating value. Business ecosystem policy involves close cooperation between private, public, and third-sector actors through a fostered partnership. Operating in such ecosystems, BMOs can generate more value and are built on interaction between different stakeholders such Ecosystem policy involves close cooperation between private, public, and third-sector actors, partnership. Grothe-Hammer and la Cour (2020) conclude that organizations are now understood as a specific kind of social system with a main concern to make decisions.

Reliable and dialogue-determined cooperation between these three actor groups (public, private and BMOs) comply with market principles and facilitate competitive environment development. BMOs as

intermediaries fulfil a linking function between business and public sector through research, advocacy, public-private dialogue (PPD), trade facilitation, capacity building and other manifold services. Authors have personal comprehensive experience to perform various functions including board member at different BMOs and their findings are addressed that BMOs are disproportionately represented in the review of recent research, empirical findings, and personal involvement in cooperation with BMOs discover insufficient attention of the latest challenges towards strategic development of BMOs as organizations with principles such as leadership, management, value creation and modern service delivery. Services can be a key driving factor for BMOs to develop sustainable business models and become resilient through changing business environment. International Labour Organization (2019) emphasizes that this environment possesses a period of rapid change due to such factors as emerging technologies, expanded markets, and growing competition for talents. It also emphasizes that BMO fulfils a key role in advising their member companies to the right tools and advocating the message that gender diversity is good for business development and sustainability.

BMOs as a bridge and interest representation between business and public sector serving bilateral needs and providing significant contribution to improving business environment and enhancing competitiveness. Two-way pathway of BMOs role is illustrated in Figure 1.

The path I indicates a top-bottom approach when policy makers formulate a need for improvement (e.g., enhance national competitiveness and productivity or similar). BMOs can arrange PPD events together with the public sector and transfer policies to implement in business. In this respect, BMOs fulfil public sector interests to improve certain areas of economy. The path II

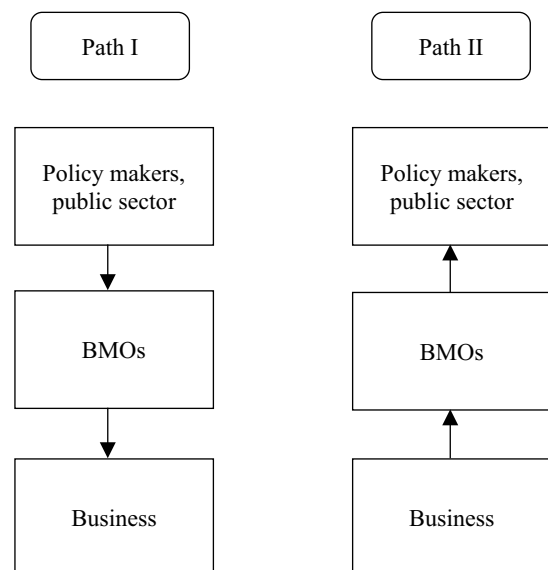


Figure 1. Two-way path of BMO role to bridge private business and public sector (source: authors' own experience)

indicates a bottom-top approach when BMOs identify a topic by representing business interests for improvement through research and problem analysis. Prepared recommendation paper is forwarded or presented through arranged PPD or other form of business interest representation to public sector for further assessment and improvement measures implementation. Both paths prove the significance of BMOs in representing interests and bridging public and business sectors.

Hence, firms need to adopt their business strategies and priorities. These firms already are or can be members of BMOs where they themselves act as intermediaries and take responsibility for their members' competitiveness and being resilient to rapid changes. However, as Stolz and Schrammel (2014) argue, the absence of such intermediaries leads to different decisions as in situations with existing intermediaries. SMEs need access to market information through specialized intermediaries. Their absenteeism causes increased firms transaction costs and influences choices and decisions of the economic actors. Such increased costs also hinder competitiveness.

A common practice is that regional or single sectoral related BMOs unite in another BMO to represent their member interests on national or international level. Such a cascaded bottom-up constellation of BMOs facilitates a united business voice and represents at a larger scale and impact. BMOs as organizations are institutional representatives of many companies across the world, their mission is to make business working and represent firms' interests (International Chamber of Commerce, 2023; Handelskammaren, n.d.; International Training Centre of the ILO, 2019). Organizations have to define their strategic development towards stakeholders and act as a constellation of knowledge. Peng and Meyer (2019) stated that organizational knowledge is a type of knowledge held in an organization creates a synergy and goes beyond the knowledge of individual members. BMOs can gain their value for stakeholders through services. Škačkauskienė and Vestertė (2020) argue that service delivery shall be customized and standardized to improve customer satisfaction.

BMOs are constantly challenged by emerging other forms of networks, the nature of membership is continuously changing, and BMOs must reconcile their business model. The authors own experience defines several advantages for individual firms or other organizations to join a BMO: acting alone, it is extremely challenging to perform business under fierce competition, networking gives a benefit of a community and provides a trust component of a member. Akpata (2016) defines following features for a member to join a BMO: getting access to business development services, opportunities and to influence favourable policies towards an improved business environment. However, generation change to habits of using social media and emerging digital transformation can be considered a form of membership or community at a large degree as well. Social media allows to create groups or communities on specific interests or areas of

performance. Wirtz (2019) defines LinkedIn as a primary professional networking of managers with a goal to lead the world's professionals to a more productive and successful performance through a sustainability, simplicity and individualization of communication and information exchange.

BMOs manifold service nature provides a significant value source for their members and transforms it into recommendations for public institutions to improve the business environment. These institutions are also business support institutions (International Trade Center, 2019).

Business Membership Organizations are operating in an environment where they interact with several stakeholders that have various forms of expectations to be met. Always different parties are requiring their interests to be fulfilled. However, BMOs are operating under several capacity limitations that hinder them to satisfy what are desired by such parties. One of key services is as BMOs represent their members through research and advocacy. Digital research is an emerging research discipline, it should be considered to bring data from peripherals to the centre stage (Quinton & Reynolds, 2018). BMOs with a mandate to represent regional business interests at national level can benefit from digital research as coping with members, collecting relevant issues, arranging PPD events and delivering suggestions to public institutions for further business environment improvement.

BMOs are faced with several challenges to sustain as resilient organizations. Resilience is a continuous process of improvement with demanded elements such as leadership, reputational risk, vision and purpose, financial stability (BSI, 2021). BMOs as every business organization are faced with these elements by answering the question why they exist. However, as Akpata (2016) suggests, membership of BMOs should form an integral part of every company's business strategy. Thus, there is a strong will between BMOs themselves to sustain their business model as well as business needs and interests' representation through BMOs and advocacy to the public sector. These business organizations are envisioned to maintain a sustainable business model and remain as key players in bridging private and public sectors through a variety of services and value sources.

1. BMO membership, review and hypothesis

Business Membership Organizations (BMOs) possess an important role and mandates such as facilitating public-private dialogue (PPD), promoting business interest and supporting business environment development (EU4Business, 2017).

Membership is considered as one of major concepts in organization theory, it is directly related to member expectations and needs which can be accepted under a precondition of membership attractiveness (Grothe-Hammer & la Cour, 2020; Stolz & Schrammel, 2014). Owing to BMOs natural variety, they can possess features

of different memberships. APEX bodies and confederations are established and operate under the laws of the recipient, they represent a high level of organization interests and are composed. There is no direct individual firm membership; such large organizations possess lower competition between other BMOs at national, regional or sectoral level. BMOs can join an umbrella organization and work formally to coordinate or represent common interests or goals. An umbrella organization represents the direct members of membership-based organizations, but these members don't pay fees to umbrella organizations. Bi-national or multinational BMOs strive to promote and represent interests of two or more countries (Law Insider, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2021; International Training Centre of the ILO, 2019; sequa, 2008).

BMOs are part of the business ecosystem. Their effective strategy must create value within the business ecosystem and next it must share the value with business ecosystem members (Awano & Tsujimoto, 2021). BMOs can act as BMOs successful membership plans are the key of organizations development strategies (International Training Centre of the ILO, 2019). The research paper further is designed on driving benefits to join BMOs, member needs, services and value delivery through acquired and retained membership.

1.1. Why to join a BMO?

Driving factors to join BMOs can be defined in four major groups such as interest representation and influence, social dialogue, access to networking, prestige and tradition (International Training Centre of the ILO, 2019).

According to the authors' own experience, BMOs services to their members and stakeholders can be systemized in three general robust groups as shown in Figure 2.

There are other views on BMOs service benefits. One of them, the International Training Centre of the ILO (2019) provides a diverse view on delivered services and added value benefits (Figure 3).

However, such a robust definition demands more explicit presentation due to the changing business environment and BMOs service evolution. The authors' hypothesis is addressed to services and that they can be among key benefits to joining BMOs. Some researches open findings of being a member of a BMO. Businesses

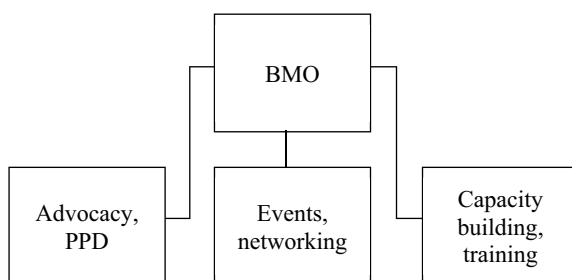


Figure 2. Major groups of BMOs services (source: authors' experience and approach)

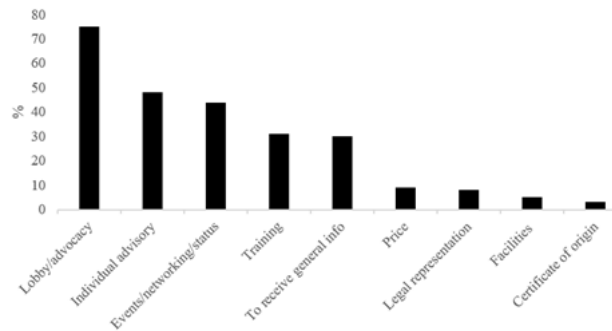


Figure 3. Why members join – added value (source: International Training Centre of the ILO, 2019)

can argue an additional fee for some external services through BMOs cooperation as they already paid membership fees and additional expenditures are not relevant for membership, it is based on regular fee. Members are required to pay regular dues, which typically provide BMOs with the majority of their funds (International Trade Center, 2019; BEAM Exchange, 2011). However, fees collection discipline at many BMOs is a significant challenge and organizations strive to find suitable BMOs to maintain financial stability. It is even considered that compulsory membership particularly at chambers will improve their stability while BMOs performance depends primarily on delivered service and business value. Masterfano (2011) identified that no difference was found between two groups of entrepreneurial firms as being members or not in terms of growth of revenue and number of employees. However, there are other benefits to joining BMOs, business should not expect their growth because of membership.

Driving benefits for individual members to join BMOs are presented in Figure 3.

As a BMO member, there are obvious marketing benefits such as brand building, in addition mentoring, collaboration on specific projects and resource of information exchange. BMOs are a hub for interaction and information dissemination, they provide remarkable networking opportunities for idea and knowledge sharing (Akpata, 2016; Masterfano, 2011).

1.2. Reviews of BMOs created value through delivered services and benefits

A professional organization can increase their paying membership by providing items and activities of value to their members that include knowledge sharing, opportunities for collaboration, expanding professional networks, and the availability of collaboration spaces (Adebo-Adelaja et al., 2019). According to the International Labour Office and International Organisation of Employers (2019), businesses are primarily seeking improvements in the business environment, infrastructure, and workforce skills.

One of the exceptionally leading services across BMOs is capacity building or training. According to the

United Nations (2023), capacity building is defined as the process of strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations can adapt and sustain in a changing environment. An imminent component in this process is transformation. Merino and Carmenado (2012) state that capacity characteristics can be divided into two major groups such as individual (technical and behavioural (leadership, entrepreneurship) and social aiming to facilitate sustainable organizational development in a long term (behavioural (trust, networking, team work, shared values) and contextual (vision, strategy, legal and financial skills, institutional building)).

BMOs represent interests of other BMOs or individual firms. SMEs are deservedly called the backbone of economies. In the European Union, they account for 99.8% of enterprises, 64.4% of persons employed and 52.4% of value added (Eurostat, 2022). However, other continents can have different views. In African economies, SMEs percentage of formal workers is lower due to the fact that these economies have a larger (not computed) and less productive informal sector (Gonzalez et al., 2014). Naturally, BMOs have to address their strategies and interests to the SMEs segment as members accordingly.

Another important service group is events or networking, linked to domestic or foreign markets. Exporting is important in economic development, particularly for developing countries. SMEs exporters are on average more productive, innovative and resilient than non-exporters. BMOs play an important role in trade and investment promotion support. These organizations are general (chambers) and sector-specific (trade associations, sector-based organizations, exporters' associations) types of business support organizations related to trade and investment promotion. Some BMOs manage their own training institutions such as academies and institutes, these entities fall into function-specific types (International Trade Center, 2019). On the other side, BMOs are faced with limited resources and absorptive capacity to deliver demand and supply driven services. This capacity depends on absorptive capacity at the individual level while it is not necessarily a sum of the absorptive capacities of its employees (Arshad et al., 2020). However, skilled employees determine internationalization of SMEs in all economic sectors (Buzavaite & Korsakiene, 2019).

Service segmentation and distribution between business support organizations is a suitable method to avoid political constraints and can support trade in both directions as import matters should be addressed to home country importers to a, e.g., chamber of commerce. In addition, the chamber of commerce or trade association is likely to organize business missions that are not led by a high-level person (International Trade Center, 2019).

BMOs perform a role of a direct value delivery source through direct services and project management. The latter approach is vital for BMOs as funding can come from various sources such as international organizations, bilateral

and multilateral support, government programs, Grants. BMOs enhance their profiles as intermediaries for fund application and value delivery to members (Stolz & Schrammel, 2014).

In conclusion, an analysis show that three types of membership benefits can be considered such as knowledge-based, intangible (not-knowledge based such as networking, advocacy, and member collaboration with those who are like-minded and similarly employed), and tangible (e.g., grants) benefits (Adebo-Adelaja et al., 2019).

The International Labour Office and International Organisation of Employers (2019) emphasize that EMBOs help business to anticipate changes. They play an increasing critical role to assist business as business landscape is changing. However, being determined to assist members, EMBOs face changes themselves in their own structure as well as identifying new opportunities. The study reveals that only 15.7% of companies with a number of less than 250 are members of EMBOs. This is a segment primarily of SMEs. Share of companies having more than 1 000 employees is 27% being member of EMBOs. If these organizations would play more active role in assisting business to respond global change challenges, SMEs share expecting to join EMBOs can be 80.7%.

The authors found that research literature provides substantial number of studies, guides and publications prepared by international organizations and project while there is a limited number of academic researches on more specific topics.

2. Research method

The research goal is to clarify service range delivered by BMOs, capture value and identify the latest trends and open gaps to emerging opportunities for BMOs as both membership organizations and business development service providers. This paper aims to contribute to existing findings and literature through BMOs insights and open further areas of research to analyse benefits and advantages provided by BMOs and their members. Service segmentation remains a key concept for BMOs to address their services where SMEs lay in focus. Facilitation or direct provision of selected demand-driven services and through advocacy aimed at creating a better business environment for SMEs (World Bank, 2005). Authors have accumulated substantial experience in BMOs areas, they are responsible for project management and capacity building for BMOs across different programs and continents.

The research method is public BMOs sources analysis of delivered services. It included web-site and social media sources of defined BMOs. The research was structured on the two-fold model: 1) authors came across European and African BMOs analysing their service message through their web-sites to design a suitable sampling. These two continents were selected due to the nature of authors' involvement in professional activities, available network and full-fledged understanding of BMOs services, development trends and noticeable regularity;

2) other communication tools were analyzed such as BMOs accounts on social media, messaging services and ecommerce-tailored marketing platforms. Integration of digital technologies is a key component along with communication, connectivity, digital public services, skills, and sharing of information (Brazinskas et al., 2019).

BMOs were categorized in the following four groups such as APEX and umbrella organizations (confederations, federations, cross-continental BMOs), regional BMOs (city chambers), sectoral/industrial associations and women-led organizations. According to the International Training Centre of the ILO (2019), members and their database are the key asset of an Employers and Business Members Organization (EBMO) as these organizations are founded by, composed and have legitimacy because of them.

BMOs delivered services were identified and listed. They were connected to services shown in Figure 3 as well as expanded with other services delivered by BMOs: mediation, court of arbitration, regional trade agreements, business consultation and advisory, trade documents (ATA Carnet, Country of Origin and other), clusters, innovation and digitalization, climate coalition, energy and environment, project management.

Finally, the calculated summing impact ratio as per service (r) in relation of the accumulated number of all BMOs delivering that particular service.

$$r = \sum_{n=1}^x (n)10 / x, \quad (1)$$

where: r – summing impact ratio of a service; n – amount of a particular service delivered by EBMO group; x – number of analysed EBMOs.

The research goal was set on a hypothesis that different forms of EBMOs (APEX, chambers, sectoral associations and women-led) can have their specific niches of intervention and service while serving members and stakeholders interests. The overall scope of EBMOs can create a constellation of unique values on mutual complementarity basis and deliver accumulated benefits to interest groups.

According to the International Labour Organization (2021), employers' organizations traditionally represent matters of industrial relations and the labour market, while chambers of commerce-trade and investment are associated with product markets. These two models combine the representation of labour market interests and product market interests by promoting the economic and social interests of their members.

3. Results

Research hypothesis stated that BMOs can provide stakeholder interest representation by different degree of intervention, every group of four can have its own niche while a united service package can serve interests at the higher degree, including the concept of mutual complementarity and nichification. The International Labour Organization (2022) declares that advocacy is the

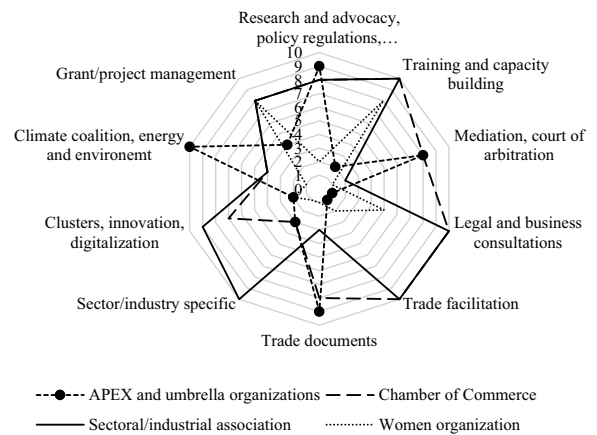


Figure 4. Weight of services by group of BMOs (source: authors' research)

first role of EBMOs, providing a collective voice for the membership base and improving the environment where members function.

The advocacy role is the primary benefit. The second primary role of EBMOs is to provide services to its members who are not fully motivated just to pay membership fees for advocacy service. Retention rate is one of key indicators to monitor BMO performance. To keep it a higher value, EBMOs must provide value-added services.

The research results are presented in Figure 4.

It shows four major BMOs groups such as APEX, chambers, sectoral associations and women-led organizations accumulated service weight. Services are significantly dispersed among these four groups. But the positive sign is that all accumulated services provide a synergy effect and enhanced value for BMOs value. The chart clearly identifies that training and overall capacity building is among key services of BMOs, dealing with routine matters at micro level.

Discussions

As shown in Figure 3 that BMOs members join such organizations by several determining factors. The major expectation is lobby and business interests' representation. Another important factor is consultancy. However, business expects advisory on a long-term basis. This important connection between these two factors requires in-depth analysis as additional research to define scope of service intervention, BMO staff capacities, skills and required finances to be generated from certain sources and mode (membership fee, external grants or similar). It can open a need to capacitate BMO personnel to provide both consulting on a specific short-term subject and advisory on a long-term basis.

As shown in Figure 4, BMOs possess an expanded service portfolio. In total ten services were analysed. The research clearly demonstrates that cross-cutting issues are more applicable for APEX organizations. APEX organizations tend to represent their members in specific cross-cutting issues such as climate, green energy. As

an example, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has encouraged the private sector to pay attention to environment issues and developed a calculator to monitor carbon footprint (it can be downloaded at www.2030calculator.com (International Labour Organization, 2022)). APEX organizations in the African continent are currently engaged in awareness capacity building of impact of regional trade agreements (e.g., African Continental Free Trade Area).

The study reveals that chambers and sectoral associations are engaged in regular and routine services such as trade facilitation, business advice and information sharing.

Conclusions

BMOs are important actors in business environment improvement, they fulfil significant role in bridging public and business sectors. BMOs service portfolio provides competitive advantages and resilience through dynamically changing environment and business needs.

BMOs are able to evolve and provide a variety of services. However, a nichification is a key success factor, it also brings a positive impact to business related environment improvement and operations as BMOs having limited resources must specialize in certain areas of service delivery. This is clearly shown in Figure 4. Such constellation of services creates a unique synergy of BMOs impact, role and advantages where the benefit is manifold: BMOs itself identify clear own intervention area and this facilitates their resilience as service provider in relation to other actors such as public or private consulting sector which can make a direct intervention to business or vice versus.

Finally, important benefit by BMOs is for public sectors and business as they provide community-based networking and peer-to-peer platform. Only being united, business can act through single voice to represent their interests (Bhaskaran, 2022; International Trade Center, 2019; Akpata, 2016; BEAM Exchange, 2011; sequa, 2008; World Bank, 2005).

EBMOs can support their members with tailor-made issues through the promotion of employee involvement programmes such as productivity circle and suggestion scheme (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Originally EBMOs had an aim to enhance members' influence and represent interests against external pressure. However, EBMOs have shifted towards proactively supporting members by focusing on a range of services such as training, advice, representation or support (International Labour Office and International Organisation of Employers, 2019). Despite fostered cooperation between EBMOs and business, certain risks can occur. E.g., vertical competence approach where business would need specific technologies and market intelligence, but an EBMO would lack resources and skills to satisfy such demand. EBMOs are traditionally strong on horizontal competence approach to deliver training on topics applicable for a larger number of members such as strategic

planning, digital transformation, research and advocacy peculiarities or similar.

Project management under different funds and programs plays an exceptional feature to deliver a range of services to members. On the other hand, it demonstrates BMOs dependency on existing external funding sources, programs and projects where BMOs act as implementing partners.

The research also opens an interesting finding in BMOs communication with stakeholders. BMOs need to align with their members' communication pattern, to know their customers and be in the communication space where they communicate. As digitalization emerges, European BMOs use a variety of communication and social media solutions on targeting different interests' groups and providing substantial information about deliverables (primary business social media LinkedIn, Omnisend as an ecommerce-tailored email & SMS marketing automation platform) while traditional and centralized instant messaging services prevail at African BMOs with opportunities to embrace modern communication tools.

The study has several limitations, which were beyond this paper's scope to address. First, BMOs services were analysed on their own experience and what they deliver through their communication channels such as web-site and social media. However, there can be a degree of misinterpretation as a lot of services are delivered. Second, BMOs members as service recipients were not included in this survey to identify their expectations and how BMOs services meet demand (their or market driven needs) or how BMOs act as business development service (BDS) providers to envision and formulate business environment improvement as policy makers or initiators. Third, the degree of a delivered service can be understood by a BMO in different approaches and the degree or volume of a service can be different (e.g., a specific service by one BMO is delivered on an occasional basis while another BMO delivers that service on a regular basis, both BMOs have that service in their service range, but the scope volume and member value of both BMOs is different).

The research possesses novel aspects as it complements existing international organizations publications and guides with an academic component. The paper delivers a specific and tailor-made task by a small group of researchers with accumulated own expertise on BMOs development. Findings focus on the BMOs services and nichification while facilitating to identify a preliminary niche of BMOs intervention.

The future research requires a balanced approach to intervene with a larger scale of in-depth interviews both at BMOs and member side. BMOs can remain grouped as four suggested (APEX, chambers, sectoral associations and women-led), but tailor-made assessment would facilitate better picture development on nichification and intervention areas on service offer.

Another research is desired to analyse BMOs and members on combination of demand and supply driven services. Current domination of demand driven services

can be not always correct as members might either require impossible services or required services don't make a significant impact on competitiveness growth. Therefore, BMOs shall act as pioneers to determine future service and competitiveness growth scope by offering supply driven (new or improved existing) services.

Managerial implication

The implications are important for firms as direct members and for BMOs which can host individual firms or be members of other BMOs through primarily APEX or umbrella form organizations.

Individual firms can consider the benefits for joining a BMO under certain motives and obtain business value. International practice shows that firms are members of different BMOs at the same time, on horizontal or cross-cutting issues representation such as chambers or specific sector related as sectoral or industry associations.

Firms are also guided on BMOs service range while BMOs are promoted among business as its interest representative through lobby and advocacy, leading to improved and more competitive business environments. Such synergy makes a positive input on overall economic development at national or international scale.

BMOs are guided on developing a resilient business model through nichification and expanded or adjusted service portfolio, embracing new potential services such as climate change or green economy. These services can be applied not only at national or international levels, but also on microlevel at firms in BMOs geographic or sector performance area.

Communication is essential to demonstrate BMOs achievements, build a two-way communication path through applications of a variety of tools, including not only traditional, but embrace and align with emerging new communication solutions.

Women empowerment through membership at women-led BMOs is among the latest and demanded development strategies. BMOs service range will guide such organizations with further organizational growth directions and facilitate new service launch. The authors' latest findings show that women-led business is demanding access facilitation to finance. However, this service wasn't a part of the current research.

The reference list provides valuable and practical guides developed by international organizations in one place as a library for BMOs and business to download, use and enhance capacity. Templates ready for use can facilitate strategic document preparation at BMOs level. Earlier implemented BMOs capacity building projects and available publications can act as valuable project management guides for ongoing initiatives.

Funding

The study didn't receive any specific grant or other kind of support from any other source.

Contribution

All authors contributed to the research by distributed and assigned tasks.

Conception, design of the work and research writing was implemented by Sigitas Brazinskas, he also completed the first draft version of the article. Literature review and relevant information was provided by Vida Pipirienė, she also supervised intellectual content. Metasebia Timothiwos contributed with acquisition, analysis and interpretation of received data. The first draft was reviewed, commented on and finally approved by all authors.

Disclosure statement

The authors don't have any competing or conflict of interests in publication of this research.

References

- Adebo-Adelaja, A. F., Daramola, F. A., Patrick, J., & Breckon, D. A. (2019). How does a member's perception of value influence their decision to join a professional organization? *Muma Business Review*, 3(3), 29–39.
- Akpata, J. (2016). *Companies and business membership organizations: To join or not*. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/companies-business-membership-organisations-join-joyce-akpata/>
- Arshad, M. Z., Ahmad, M. J., Khan, W. A., & Arshad, M. H. (2020). The role of government business support services and absorptive capacity on SMEs performance. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(3), 1492–1499.
- Awano, H., & Tsujimoto, M. (2021). The mechanisms for business ecosystem members to capture part of a business ecosystem's joint created value. *Sustainability*, 13(8), 4573. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13084573>
- BEAM Exchange. (2011). *Making business membership organisations work for the poor*. <https://beamexchange.org/resources/313/>
- Bhaskaran, E. (2022). *Business membership organisations*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358620091_BUSINESS_MEMBERSHIP_ORGANISATIONS
- Brazinskas, S., Pipirienė, V., & Khayrzoda, Sh. (2019, 9–10 May). Digital business and media platforms – enablers of manifold regional and global opportunities. In *The International Scientific Conference “Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Economics Engineering 2019”*. Vilnius, Lithuania. <https://doi.org/10.3846/cibmee.2019.070>
- BSI. (2021). *Organization resilience index*. <https://www.bsi-group.com/en-GB/our-services/Organizational-Resilience/Organizational-Resilience-Index/>
- Buzavaite, M., & Korsakiene, R. (2019). Human capital and the internationalisation of SMEs: A systemic literature review. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 7(3), 125–142. <https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2019.070307>
- Eurostat. (2022). *EU small and medium-sized enterprises: An overview*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20220627-1>
- EU4Business. (2017). *EU4Business in Armenia*. <https://eu4business.am/en/>

- Gonzalez, L., Piza, C., Cravo, T., Abdelnour, S., & Taylor, L. (2014). Protocol for a systematic review: The impacts of business support services for small and medium enterprises on firm performance in low-and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 10(1), 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/CL2.130>
- Grothe-Hammer, M., & la Cour, A. (2020). Organization and membership: Introduction to the special issue. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*, 37(3), 419–424. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2682>
- Handelskammaren. (n.d.). *South Sweden Chamber of Commerce*. <https://handelskammaren.com/in-english/>
- International Chamber of Commerce. (2023). *About ICC*. <https://iccwbo.org/about-us/>
- International Labour Organization. (2019). *Women in business and management: The business case for change*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_700953.pdf
- International Labour Office and International Organisation of Employers. (2019). *Changing business and opportunities for employers' and business organizations*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_679582.pdf
- International Labour Organization. (2020). *Driving up productivity: A guide for employer and Business Membership Organizations*. https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_758749/lang--en/index.htm
- International Labour Organization. (2021). *Onboarding handbook for Board members of small employer and business membership organizations*. https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_773483/lang--en/index.htm
- International Labour Organization. (2022). *The role of employer and Business Membership Organizations in supporting business adaptation and mitigation to climate change*. https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_863816/lang--en/index.htm
- International Training Centre of the ILO. (2019). *Membership Strategies and Policies. A manual for Employers and Business Membership Organizations*. <https://www.itcilo.org/resources/membership-strategies-and-policies-manual-ebmos>
- International Trade Center. (2019). *A guide to commercial diplomacy*. <https://intracen.org/media/file/2427>
- Law Insider. (2023). *Apex organization definition*. <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/apex-organization>
- Masterfano, M. K. (2011). Effects of participation in paid membership organizations on entrepreneurial success. *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 14(2), 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/NEJE-14-02-2011-B003>
- Merino, S. S., & Carmenado, I. de. (2012). Capacity building in development projects. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 960–967. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.231>
- Peng, M., & Meyer, K. (2019). *International business* (3rd ed.) (pp. 423–425). Cengage Learning.
- Quinton, S., & Reynolds, N. (2018). *Understanding research in the digital age*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716573>
- sequa. (2008). *BMO Toolbox*. (2008). https://www.sequa.de/fileadmin/user_upload/04_Mediathek/02_Publikationen/04Kammer-_und_Verbandsfoerderung/BMO-Toolbox_Vers-sequa.pdf
- Skačkauskienė, I., & Vestertė, J. (2020). Tasks for service modularization planning. *Business: Theory and Practice*, 21(2), 813–819. <https://doi.org/10.3846/btp.2020.12776>
- Stolz, T., & Schrammel, T. (2014). Business membership organizations as a policy approach to increase SMEs' EU funds absorption. In *Proceedings of International Conference for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Development ICEIRD* (pp. 239–249). Cyprus.
- Sölvel, Ö. (2009). *Clusters. Balancing evolutionary and constructive forces* (pp. 13–30). Ivory Tower.
- United Nations. (2023). *Capacity-building*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/capacity-building>
- Valkokari, K., Hyytinen, K., Kutinlahti, P., & Hjelt, M. (2021). *Collaborating for a sustainable future – ecosystem guide*. VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland. https://publications.vtt.fi/julkaisut/muut/2021/Collaborating_for_a_Sustainable_Future.pdf
- Wirtz, W. W. (2019). *Digital business models*. Springer Nature Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13005-3>
- World Bank. (2005). *Building the capacity of Business Membership Organizations: Guiding principles for project managers*. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/985691468314676363/building-the-capacity-of-business-membership-organizations-guiding-principles-for-project-managers>