

Process Reengineering and Business Repositioning in Uncertain Times: Lesson from the Corona Virus 2019, Pandemic.

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Abstract

Corona Virus 2019, alias COVID-19; a calamity never foresaw by any man, broke out and spread globally just like the wild wind. The economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is getting great and unbearable. This shows that uncertainties are here with us and it makes business conditions change from time to time. When faced with the need for change; market opportunities shrink, then it is time to revisit business positioning; consider the organization's current activities then look for result oriented strategies that will help the business to survive and stay focused always. One of the strategies that are at the heart of the organization's mission and customer-focused is Business Process Reengineering (BPR). This study establishes a relationship between process reengineering and business repositioning giving the uncertain times businesses face. Process reengineering; the stimulus variable was measured by quality, output, cost, and speed of service whereas, business repositioning; the response variable was measured by customer patronage, sales, and customer satisfaction. The study adopted a content analysis design from a review of the literature. Findings show that there is a relationship between process reengineering and business repositioning. Conclusion was drawn and proposals made based on the findings of this study for business practitioners, policymakers, and the larger society.

Keywords: Process reengineering, business repositioning, COVID-19 and unsure times

1. Introduction

Business big or small operates in changing times and many of the operators lose sight of actionable insights to endure the tides and waves of the unique change. Uncertainty makes many business operators adopt conventional or reactive approaches. Only a few of them are cautious and prepared to adjust their business strategies in line with the changes. Uncertainty remains constant and for this reason, business conditions are subject to vary from time to time. When faced with the necessity to change, maybe customer patronage is dropping or the adopted strategies are not yielding expected result, it is necessary to revisit the organization's current activities, and then look for strategies that will bring better results. It is important to spot signals which will help the business respond to the changes and stay focused. This might mean searching for new markets, improving controls within the business, or revisiting the organization's present position to determine customers' expectations.

Positioning; a crucial marketing metric and indicator of competitiveness is about influencing choice. It represents the alignment of a firm's offerings and solutions with ease. Repositioning is the change in the position of business activities (products/services).

BPR is a strategy that centers on the analysis of workflow patterns and business processes in an organization [9]; [5]; [22]. According to a study conducted by [10], companies are driven to reinvent by one of the three forces; desperation or crisis (60% of cases); foresight (30%); ambition (10%). The changing environment of business has led to an increasing interest in process re-engineering by successful firms. The indication is that business process re-engineering has helped many organizations to re-invent themselves for performance improvements and to position themselves better in their markets. This makes them ever prepared for the unforeseen.

It is expected that BPR will help organizations rethink the way to improve quality, output, cut operational costs, and improve the speed of delivery. As business reposition their process, factors that had caused weakness are turned to advantage [12]. To achieve sustained benefits, organizations must be ready to search for, identify, and implement winning strategies. They must assess the organization's current capabilities and process realistically [14].

A study conducted by [11] shows that about 436 million businesses faced a high risk of great disruption globally due to the coronavirus pandemic. Drawing from the foregoing, non-performing organizations can experience a rapid reversal of their fortunes if they respond accordingly to changes in their operations. As uncertainties heat up, a response is required to strategically accommodate or adjust the shifts.

1.1 Problem Statement.

Today, many organizations are not aware that changes are needed in their operations. Some misconstrue re-engineering for downsizing against the intent of re-engineering proponents, [8]; [3], and contrary to the thinking of [9]. An early BPR proponent [10], acknowledged that using BPR for cost reduction alone is not a wise decision. To him, factors like quality of output, continuous improvement, and speed of delivery are necessary. Today, a large number of firms do not know which areas to vary or the time to effect changes in their operations. Whereas the majority of the firms in the USA were either engaged in BPR projects or indicating their intention, this is often not the same with many firms operating in Nigeria. Conscious of two major aspects of investment decisions; evaluation of the potential profitability of investments and repositioning for quality services, often many businesses in Nigeria do not think outside the box to accommodate the changing times in their plans. Most of them employ defective strategies, if not descriptive, and unsuitable across changing times. Perhaps, it does not occur to them to give the necessary attention to product quality, cost of production, and speed of delivery of their offerings.

Amazingly, technical skills to fix issues, positive language to handle customers' complaints, are absolutely lacking. But these are ingredients organizations need to increasingly respond to uncertainties and changing times. Against the agenda for the rejuvenation of business after Corona Virus 2019, pandemic, many businesses are still losing clout in their domain thinking customer patronage is going to be as it were. Perhaps, they forget to know that changes resulting from uncertainty forces firms to reconsider how they operate and have a rethink.

Business process re-engineering seems to be a game-changer for an organization thinking of survival, yet it is being misused or abused. This makes one ponder what had gone wrong with improving the way things are done in an organization. Changes and uncertainties are here with us and will still be. Think of the outbreak of Corona Virus in 2019 in the Peoples Republic of China; an epidemic that spread like wild wind globally causing biological, social, and economic upsets.

Today, many businesses are stuck in the middle, some are struggling to pay their worker's salaries, there are layoffs here and there. Others are closing down; unemployment is increasing, there are hunger and growing insecurity in the land with its attendant negative impacts on the economy of the many nations. The scenario is should have challenged business operators to develop strategies to handle possible havocs or uncertainties which may rear its ugly heads on their business. This may have informed [15] to say that for a business to survive, it is crucial to understand quality, simplicity, speed, and adaptableness in the organizational system. It is the above-stated problems that triggered this study.

1.2 The Objective of the Study

The major aim of this study is to identify the relationship between process reengineering and business repositioning, drawing lessons from the Corona Virus 2019, Pandemic. Specifically, the study sought to find out the following:

- i. The relationship between product quality and customer patronage
- ii. The relationship between the cost of production and sales
- iii. The relationship between speed of delivery and customer satisfaction

1.3 Significance of the Study

During changing times, evolving attitudes and behaviors of consumers changes and this is often a significant business concern. Every business manager must make radical decisions when necessary to enable the organization to perform. The decision made has a fundamental impact on the direction of a business. The findings of this study will benefit organizations, the government, and therefore the entire society. With BPR, customers, employees, and other stakeholders will know the repositioning of their offerings. Again, the majority of companies do not respond to the rapid changes in their environment and intrinsically drifting until a more permanent decline sets in. The study will help them to maximize the benefits of BPR and apply its principles to achieve competitiveness in their industry.

When companies are performing below par, workers' income is affected, workers and their families who do not have an alternative source of income will find it difficult to survive. This virtually affects the standard of living of the people. From the foregoing, one can see clearly that organizational survival, the livelihoods of people, and the value of nations are often impacted by BPR, especially in times of uncertainties.

1.4 Contribution of the Study

This study is coming at a time when many organizations are looking for options to handle the effect of the Corona Virus in 2019 on their businesses. Options they can lean-on are scanty in management literature because this area has not received encouraging scholarly research attention. Often available options are not simplified for adoption. This study closes that research gap and contributes to the body of existing knowledge.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

This study adopted a content analysis design by review of the literature and focused only on three dimensions or drivers of business process re-engineering (product quality, speed of delivery, and cost of production). Output and service were not covered, the same goes for other indicators of repositioning because only three dimensions (customer patronage, sales, and customer satisfaction) were covered. Again, this study would have been more scientific, if we had applied a quantitative design but extending the scope of the study and applying a quantitative design will further increase the cost. These are gaps to be filled. It is expected that further studies will take care of the gaps.

Conceptual Framework

2.1 Concept of Business Process Re-Engineering (BPR)

Business process re-engineering had attracted several definitions from different scholars depending on their persuasions. Some of the definitions of BPR are presented here to serve the purpose of this study. Consistent with early BPR proponents [5], business process re-engineering is a change in performance to achieve the business objective. It is an elemental rethinking and redesign of business processes for performance in cost reduction, quality of product/service, and speed of delivery.

Business process re-engineering connotes the improvement of business processes to enhance product output, and reduction in operation cost. It entails changing the working processes in an organization; moving from something old to something new (moving from what is ancient to what is novel to people). BPR encompasses the analysis of workflows, finding processes that are sub-par or inefficient, and deciding ways to improve on them. In other words, business process re-engineering is a strategy employed for the design of workflows and its analysis.

It pertains to the design of the activity and the implementation of changes utilizing technological and human dimensions [1]. With this, organizations reinforce offering to enhance customer service, product output or quality, and cost reduction [9], [6], [22].

Business process re-engineering (BPR) is the redesigning of activities to achieve the organization's mission [1]. It refers to the reinvention of the operation of a business on an outsized scale. It focuses on the enhancement of business processes that direct how resources are utilized to make products and services appeal to customers while making a profit for the firm.

Business re-engineering concerns business operations; the way processes function, how to recreate the processes, or the optimization of sub-processes [1]. Some of the characteristics are ownership, customer focus, and value-added. BPR entails re-designing; restructuring to remove unproductive activities, reducing enterprise costs, wiping out process redundancies, and reshaping processes differently for the benefit of the organization and its customers [1].

Basically, BPR takes a glance at how to improve a business system and make it more functional. It involves discovering how business processes currently operate, the way to re-design the process to eliminate wastes or redundant effort, and therefore the time to implement changes to enhance efficiency and achieve competitiveness.

It is aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the process within and across an organization [10]. It is goal and customer focused because BPR helps in creating customer value while minimizing the consumption of resources of a firm.

2.2 How Business Process Re-Engineering Starts

An evaluation of the organization's mission, strategy, goals, and customer needs is the starting point of BPR. Before a firm decides to adopt BPR, it should find out:

- Who the customers are and what values are offered to them?
- If the current process delivers expected values?
- If the process needs to be redefined or redesigned?
- If the process synchronizes with the long-term mission and goals?
- How to handle the prevailing processes?

2.3 The Benefits of Process Re-Engineering

Proper execution of the business process reengineering can help rescue a failing or stagnating company, increase its profits, and drive growth [22]. Specifically, process re-engineering helps a business to enjoy the underlisted benefits:

Total customer satisfaction and value: BPR helps to achieve customer satisfaction because customer satisfaction is a priority to the organization. An example is a service that exceeds customer expectations (giving a customer more expected).

Cost Advantage: Costs are saved through reshaping to scale back cycle time, removing unproductive activities, and organize teams to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of operations.

Competitive Advantage: Process re-engineering helps an organization to develop core competency that will be difficult for competitors to duplicate. This makes a firm to be competitive among its rivalries.

Clear Business Vision: Process re-engineering helps a firm to match its goals and objectives with customer's expectations and interests. This way, an organization acquires a brand identity.

2.4 When to Use Business Process Re-Engineering.

Process re-engineering is useful in the following circumstances.

- when the disruption in the business is caused by technology
- when competitors are prudent
- when firms intend to be the disruption in their industry
- when enhancement does not necessitate much input

2.5 Indicators or Drivers of Process Re-engineering

Drawing from the viewpoints of scholars on the concept of business process re-engineering presented above, the salient indicators, measures, or drivers are quality, output, cost, service, and speed.

Quality: This refers to the value or worth of something as measured against other things of a uniform kind; the degree of excellence of something, an improvement in product class or value, general excellence, a masterpiece, superiority, distinction, refinement, and incomparability. It stands for a specific attribute or characteristic possessed by something. Quality is usually measured by specialty in the process, initiating a regular meeting with all players, creating a top-quality chart, and developing quality results.

Output: This represents the product of an individual, machine, or industry. Anything that causes a reduction in labor, capital, or their effectiveness, causes a decline in output and its rate of growth. There are some ways to boost output levels, these are by improving employee engagement, implementing more training, investing in technology, setting realistic goals, providing feedback to staff, reducing the length of meetings, varying employees' work, offering flexible working, creating an environment that motivates employees and by giving them the specified tools to succeed.

Cost: This is often the price attached to an object or action. Cost represents payment for something before it is acquired, used, or done. One of the techniques of ensuring that business survives is by controlling the cost of operation. Cost control is usually achieved by practicing the following: Seeing each cost as important, negotiating reductions on the value of purchased products, sell more, a price higher and reduce all operation, review all cost, reduce the stock by purchasing only necessary items, do away with unproductive staff, stop additional hires, until there is a cogent need, evaluate salary levels consistent with the value each individual brings to company profitability, identify what actions raise revenue or reduce costs.

Service: This is often an intangible product; the action of helping or doing work for somebody. Service is intangible but measurable. It might be direct, just like the service of a teacher or after-sale service, as the explanation of the workings of equipment after purchases.

Speed: Speed in marketing means developing or delivering a product without delay, while still maintaining high-quality standards in design practices. It is on-time delivery by the maintenance of realistic deadlines. Without speed in customer service, an organization finds it difficult to meet customer demands and eventually may lose valued customers to competitors.

2.6 Steps involved in Process Re-engineering

By adopting the steps presented below, one will successfully conduct business process re-engineering.

1. Define the business vision and objectives
2. Identify process gaps or divides, e.g., customer needs
3. Look for improvement opportunities within the prevailing process and validate them
4. Develop a leading-edge process plan
5. Operationalize opportunities and identify future changes
6. Implement the changes

2.7 Requirements for Successful Business Process Re-engineering

A successful business process is anchored on the following:

Organization-wide commitment: BPR is encompassing. It is important to seek support from all units of the organization. By involving unit members, the organization can gain valuable input before process implementation [12].

Team composition: The team is at the center of the BPR effort, they make key decisions, and help communicate the BPR agenda to the entire organization members. The factors that determine an efficient BPR team in agreement with [21], [23], [25], [26] are summarized below:

- competence and motivation.
- credibility and creativity.
- empowerment, training, and brainstorming techniques.
- leadership.
- organization.
- complementary skills.

- approach, and specific goals.

For efficiency as well as the effectiveness of the team members, manageable size of a minimum of ten is recommended [4]. Though team members selected from within the organization influence the results of the reengineering process according to their desires, the BPR team should compose of individuals with in-depth knowledge. It is necessary to incorporate members that possess the following features:

- People very knowledgeable that knows it inside-out
- Representatives of major stakeholders.
- Representatives of units/departments.
- One or two members of committed technology experts [17].

Business needs analysis: Another important thing to do for the success of BPR is to perform a needs analysis. In the need analysis, a series of sessions are held with stakeholders, on the need and strategy for BPR. The objective of the session is to hypothesize the right business process for the organization and design a process model. Besides, the BPR team should prioritize, and determine where to focus its improvement efforts [17]. The items that look unnecessary or unrealistic could be eliminated or modified in the analysis stage of the BPR.

Adequate IT infrastructure: An IT infrastructure consists of physical assets, intellectual assets, shared services, [19] and their linkages [18]. Adequate IT infrastructure is important for successful BPR implementation [27]. The use of IT is to challenge the work process that has existed before the advent of the computer and its know-how [10]. Factors related to IT infrastructure are critical to the success of BPR efforts [5]. These include:

Effective change management: BPR revolves around changes in people's behavior, culture, processes, and know-how [2]. This explains why organizations do not change unless people change but the faster a change is accomplished, the better for a transition [12].

Organizational culture: Organizational culture, is pertains to values, ethos, character, belief, attitude, and behavior of the people. The way people do things reinforce the work design and keep it going. Culture influences the organization's ability to adapt to changing strategy and BPR implementation.

The importance of the human element: Many BPR projects had failed because some firms did not recognize the importance of the human factor or the people's resource in implementing BPR programs. The understanding of people in the organizations, their motives, and past performances is vital. It creates an opportunity for successful business transformation [16].

Continuous improvement: Continuous improvement is the propensity of an organization to pursue incremental and innovation in its operations [17]. Many organizational change thinkers hold the view that organizations should adjust gradually and incrementally, and respond locally to individual changes as they occur [17]. The incremental changes are governed by the knowledge gained from the previous change cycle. IBM, Credit Corporation, Ford, and Kodak, were cited as examples of companies that successfully employed BPR as part of their continuous improvement programs [9].

3.1 Concept of Repositioning

When an organization sees a decrease in sales over time or a major change on its way, it is a sign to implement changes or to reposition its operations. Repositioning is changing consumers' perceptions of a brand with regards to competing brands [13]. Repositioning comes into play when an organization changes a product/service/brand's status including the marketing mix (product, place, price, and promotion).

Repositioning involves changing the customers' perceptions of an offering so that it can compete more effectively in its present market or new markets. In other words, it involves a significant change in the perception of the product's key benefits and features, relative to the offerings of the competitors [29]. An important starting part of repositioning is to observe the current position of a product, service, or brand over time. This helps to measure what is working or not. It serves as feedback to guide future strategies [1].

The idea of product repositioning is to change the position of a brand to make it more meaningful to the target segment [29]. Often products are repositioned to appeal to a wider or different target. To successfully reposition a product, the firm should specialize in creating a niche for an offering that was not existing previously. The repositioning process, on the other hand, evaluates the position of a product, service, or brand and focuses on the time to alter the positioning.

Repositioning helps to vary market perception and improve competitiveness. It involves effecting changes in intangible products (differentiation) and other intangibles, such as adjusting its selling price. Sometimes differentiation and repositioning are accomplished through changes in the promotional messages and approaches without changing the products or service itself. The repositioning efforts often make a current target segment to perceive a product or service with a replacement perspective.

Repositioning often aims to change market perceptions in ways that make an offering more appealing to a broader segment of the market. It helps to keep track and make necessary adjustments on products/services. It commences after the market perception has already been established. Effective repositioning is to preserve what is good from the prevailing market positions and build or shift thinking toward something new.

Repositioning helps in the successful reshaping of perceptions, to create a more powerful, and meaningful product, service, or brand.

To reorganization, their operations during the 1990s Ford Motors, GTE, and Bell Atlantic employed process re-engineering. The re-engineering process they adopted brought a substantial achievement to them, dramatically lowering their expenses, making it easier to handle increasing competition, and accommodated uncertainties. Initially, Ford Motors had employed 500 people to manage her sophisticated accounts payable department.

In the early 1990s, Ford Motors examined their accounts payable department and found that they had inefficiencies and many errors. Ford felt that reducing its workforce by 20% could fix this issue. On realizing that Mazda employed only 5 people in their accounts-payable unit, Ford made some basic improvements with IT as part of its BPR initiative in their accounts payable department. With the adoption of BPR, Ford achieved the following:

Introduction of invoice less processing,

Reduction of their workforce by 75%,

Digitization of accounting process and

Improvement in vendor relationships

Taco Bell's K-Minus initiative is another example of a successful BPR program. The retail foodservice organization decided to maneuver the food preparation job from its restaurants to a centralized commissary in 1989. This decision helped them to achieve control, lessen employee injuries in restaurant kitchens, and encouraged employees to deliver better customer service.

3.2 Reasons for Repositioning

There is a need to reposition a product, service, or brand for the following reasons:

Need or opportunity identification: When a firm sees the need or opportunity to reinforce the demand for his or her offering, in declining performance, sales have dropped, patronage is shrinking, and getting smaller, it is necessary to reposition.

Launching a replacement or superior product: Some firms choose to launch a replacement or superior product (or brand) instead of repositioning an existing one. Introducing a superior product tends to occur in technology-driven markets (where an organization introduces improved products consistently). Replacing an existing product will assist in reducing product cannibalization to generate higher overall sales and profits. This is apparently the practice of the various bottling companies in Nigeria today.

Changes in the environment: Companies may choose to reposition their offering because of major shifts in their environment: Competitors entering or exiting the market sometimes join forces to make their rivalry's offering obsolete to have an edge over the market or cannibalize it. Economic downturn or recovery; changes in consumer behavior, political factors, or social forces, changes in organizational leadership, and acquisition or development of the latest know-how account for the repositioning of offerings.

Repositioning is vital when a brand or product line has been classified as a dog in the BCG matrix or it is needed to support an overall strategic change, especially when entering new markets or pursuing new segments. Also, the desire to make a brand to be perceived as new, unique, convenient, helpful, and so on can necessitate the adoption of a repositioning strategic direction.

3.3 Elements of Successful Repositioning

Repositioning is successful when a business record stable and increasing customer flow. Below are some factors that can make a repositioning strategy successful.

- Complete overhaul: to realize success in repositioning, all the parts involved in a brand should experience changes.
- Investment: an organization should be ready to take advantage of changes to make investments.

Marketing changes: because of the organization changing nature, changing the strategy is necessary. For example, a person can reposition his marketing strategy from radio and television adverts to the use of social media to him function well in the digital era.

3.4 Repositioning Risks and Pitfalls

As one considers repositioning opportunities, he should avoid the underlisted pitfalls:

- Insufficient research: marketing research influences one's choice on how and when to reposition to enhance the market perception of a product, service, or brand. It helps to spot on time the way target segments react to the repositioning and to avert sudden adverse reactions. Thus, repositioning is difficult where there is insufficient research.
- A bridge too far: It is dangerous to initiate repositioning when one is trying to tidy things up. When customer perception of the offering cannot accommodate the new message or image, the offering loses credibility, this is a problem.
- Underestimating the basics: Sometimes repositioning is undertaken because the target segment is unsure what a product, service, or brand stands for. If it does not offer a transparent message for customers or they are unsure what to

believe. Marketers may engage themselves with reducing positioning right down to its bare essentials in terms of competitive advantage, this takes some resources.

- Overpromising: When faced with strong competitive threats, there is a need to reposition the benefits that a product, service, or brand is ready to deliver. If this is not done and sustained, it creates customer expectations that the organization cannot live up to.

- Confusing positioning: Repositioning can create confusion between the old positioning and the new, especially if they seem to contradict each other.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Business process reengineering was popularized by [10] in the 1990s, in a study, titled; Re-engineering Work: Do not Automate, obliterate, published in the Harvard Business Review. This theory explains that many businesses were using new technologies to automate unproductive processes, as against creating something different that is built on new technologies. In his illustration, [10] used technology to upgrade a horse with lighter horseshoes which made it move faster, as against building a car. In their work; Re-engineering the Corporation: A manifesto for Business Revolution, [9] identified the principles of re-engineering. They are:

1. work should be result-oriented and not process-oriented: This principle explains that tasks performed by different people should be combined into one specialized task. In their words, sequential activities lead to errors, rework, and delays.
2. Merging data collection and processing units: This principle is what obtains in the division of labor. It means that for instance, data organization should be done by the same person that collects it. This reduces the number of errors by eliminating external contact.
3. Shared database to interconnect dispersed departments: Centralized databases provide economies of scale as well as flexibility and quick responses to the purchasers. The advances in information technology allow the organization to connect separate units that are geographically dispersed by employing a shared database.

(iv) Bridging the processes which are running on similar lines: According to [9], activities must be unified. Parallel functions must be synchronized using communication networks and a shared database. These parallel activities must be linked to unceasingly and synchronized for execution. This might eliminate the high costs and delays of plans.

1. Decision making should be in the area of the work performed: Decision should be made by the people that carry out the tasks provided they are educated and knowledgeable [10].
2. Capture data at its point of origin: This is often the principle of capturing information only at the source where it had been created. This eliminates the problem of transmitting the information and it does not have to be recorded at different locations at various times.

5.1 Findings

The findings of this study were drawn from the review of the works of [24], [9], [6]; [22]. It shows that majority of firms surveyed in the USA were either engaged in BPR projects or indicating their intention to engage in BPR projects in the future [24]. It means they are deriving benefits from BPR. BPR helps organizations to rethink the way to enhance customer service, product output, quality, or reduce or cut costs [9], [6], [22], citing IBM Credit Corporation, GTE, Bell Atlantic, Ford Motors, and Kodak as examples of organizations that had successfully employed BPR. Also, this result is in agreement with the findings of [10], that business process re-engineering has helped many failing and even successful organizations to re-invent themselves; position themselves for a better place in their markets, and improve in performance.

The findings of [9], [6], [22], report that process re-engineering helps businesses to radically redesign their process for improvement in modern measures of performance, such as cost, quality, service, and speed of delivery. BPR benefits an organization in total customer satisfaction, cost, and competitive advantage. In summary, proper execution of process re-engineering can rescue a failing or stagnating organization; increasing the profits and driving growth [22].

In conclusion, the two variables of this study are Process reengineering (X); the moderating or independent variable, and repositioning (Y); response or variable. Thus, $Y = f(X)$. The independent variable is decomposed as Quality (X1), Output (X2), Cost (X3), Speed (X4)). Therefore, the model specification for process reengineering and repositioning is based on the assumption of a linear functional relationship as $Y1 = f(X1 \dots X4)$. This enabled us to elucidate that there is a link between process reengineering and business repositioning. Thus, implementing BPR can help organizations to redesign their existing process and achieve the benefits of saving costs (reduced cost), speeding processes (faster processing time) which eliminate process redundancies, bettering product/service quality, increased revenue, improved customer service, higher employee retention, and increase workflow efficiency.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, we propose that organizations should adopt process re-engineering to enable them to reposition their products/services, especially during uncertain times.

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