

Entrepreneurial Attributes responsible for Small and Medium Enterprise Growth in South Africa: Small and Medium Enterprise Owners' perspectives

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ABSTRACT:

Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) growth has been associated with overall business success and survival. The need to achieve success is the motive to do well and achieve a goal set for growth. Hence, this study examines the attributes embedded in small business owners that are responsible for the growth of SMEs in South Africa. It assesses creativity and entrepreneurial skills as attributes that influence SME growth within small business owners operating in the furniture-manufacturing sector. It was conducted in the eThekweni District Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa.

Of the 127 SME owners who represented their businesses, 112 participated in the study, representing an 88 per cent participation rate. Correlative analyses were used to test the two objectives, that is, to examine if creativity and the entrepreneurial skills of small business owners have an influence on SME growth. This study reveals that SME success depends on the proper use of entrepreneurial skills for starting and growing the businesses in the early years of establishment. If creativity of SME owners can be enhanced, this will lead to a better support of national goals on job creation for South Africa. The original value of this paper is its approach in uncovering business owner attributes responsible for SME growth within enterprises operating in the furniture sector.

Keywords – business growth, business owner, creativity, entrepreneurial skills, furniture Manufacturing, Small and Medium Enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa are considered as one of the main driving forces of economic growth and development (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020). These establishments operates in different geographical settings such as rural and urban areas (Snyman, 2012). Their formation span across traditional family, formal to informal businesses (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020). Irrespective of their organisational arrangements,

they are at the forefront of local economic development in South Africa (Jili, Masuku & Selepe, 2017).

Over the years, the level of economic dependence on areas of revenues and job creation in SMEs in South Africa has grown (Ramukumba, 2014). According to Abor and Quartey (2010), the South African government has laid appropriate foundation aimed at increasing the entrepreneurial opportunities among SMEs for the purpose of reducing pressure on the social security system. It increasingly places an emphasis on enterprise assistance programmes, particularly in the area of SME development. Ramukumba (2014) asserts that the creation and sustainability of new SMEs are vital to the economic prosperity of South Africa. Without the creation of new SMEs, the country may run the risk of economic stagnation.

There is a relatively high failure rate in the formal and public sector for absorbing the growing number of job seekers in South Africa (Ramukumba, 2014) and attention is increasingly focused on entrepreneurship, new business creation and its potential for contributing to economic growth, as well as job creation. Despite the noted contributions of new SMEs, their failure rate in South Africa is among the highest in the world. About 75 per cent of new SMEs do not become established businesses (Snyman, Schutte & Leipzig, 2014). According to Olawale and Garwe (2010), the probability of a new SME surviving in the early stages of its existence in South Africa is less likely than in any other Global Entrepreneurship Monitored (GEM) sampled countries, as shown in the 2015/2016 Global Report. It then becomes a question of whether running a successful small business results from the inherent business owner attributes that are responsible for business growth. Hence, this study is designed around the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Is creativity an inherent attribute that influences SME growth in South Africa?

RQ2: Are entrepreneurial skills the attributes within the business that enhance SME growth in South Africa?

SMEs play a pivotal role in the economy of South Africa through job creation, development and unemployment, all of which affect the government and its citizens (Ramukumba, 2014). They are expected to operate efficiently and run their businesses effectively in order to grow within their respective sectors (Tseng & Johnsen, 2011). However, the success of any SME depends on the entrepreneur who constantly seek to grow the business. Entrepreneurs constantly devise strategies to ensure business survival and growth (Olawale, 2010). Hence, it is pertinent to understand entrepreneurs' drive for business survival and growth. It is against this background that this study examines whether small business growth is a function that is embedded in business owners. It assesses the creativity and entrepreneurial skills variables of business owners that are responsible for SME growth.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section presents entrepreneurship as a model for SME growth. It elaborates on the growth of SMEs, the motivation and creativity in SMEs, as well as on entrepreneurial skills as a competence for SME growth.

Entrepreneurship: the model for the growth of SMEs

SMEs are fundamental to the growth of national economies (Manuere, Gwangwava & Gutu, 2012). Dalberg Global Investment Advisors (2011) state that SMEs play an important role in the economic fabric of developing countries through furthering growth, innovation and prosperity. The South African National Small Business (NSB) amendment Acts of 2003 and 2004 define SMEs as any entity, whether or not incorporated or registered under any law, which consists mainly of persons carrying on small business concerns in any economic sector, or which has been established for the purpose of promoting the interests of or representing small business concerns, and includes any federation consisting wholly or partly of such association, and also any branch of such organisation (Mahembe, 2011). The NSB Act further categorises small businesses in South Africa into distinct groups, namely survivalist, micro, very small, small and medium, hence, the use of the term 'SMME' for small, medium and micro-enterprises. Whilst the focus of the study is on the small and medium enterprises, the following Table 1 illustrates the schedule of size standards in South Africa.

TABLE 1: schedule of size standards of SMEs in South Africa

Type of Firm	Number of employees	Turnover (maximum Rand Values)	Balance sheet
Small	1-50	R13 million	Max R5 million
Medium	51-200	R51 million	Max R19 million

Source: Olawale and Garwe (2010).

The creation of new SMEs is seen as a significant factor in solving South Africa's development issues. Snyman (2012) indicates that SMEs contribute to over 55 per cent of GDP and over 65 per cent of the total employment in high-income countries, whilst SMEs and informal enterprises account for over 60 per cent of GDP and 70 per cent of total employment in low-income countries. In addition, they contribute about 70 per cent of GDP and 95 per cent of total employment in middle-income countries. Within the South African economy, by comparison, SMEs are responsible for 52 per cent to 56 per cent of the national GDP, constituting 56 per cent of private sector employment (Snyman *et al.*, 2014).

However, South Africa is also plagued with a high failure rate among SMEs. Ramukumba (2014) reveals that 40 per cent of new business ventures fail in their first year, 60 per cent in their second year, and 90 per cent in their first 10 years of existence. A number of challenges were identified as contributing to the failure of SMEs in South Africa and worldwide. Abor and Quartey (2010) attribute this high failure rate to a number of obstacles including finance, lack of managerial skills, equipment and technology, regulatory issues, and access to international markets. In a country that suffers from an official estimate of 25 per cent unemployment, an economically active population and job creation are principal concerns for government in its pursuit of encouraging economic growth (Ramukumba, 2014). However, according to the Adeniran and Johnston (2012) survey, South Africa lags behind its

counterparts in early stage entrepreneurship activity. One of the methods of addressing unemployment is to leverage the employment creation potential of small businesses and also promote small business development (Mutalemwa, 2015). Hence, this study investigates factors relating to SME growth. The next two sections, 2.2 and 2.3, discuss SME growth and SMEs as determinants of economic growth.

SME growth

The importance of SMEs as catalysts of economic growth cannot be disputed (Ayanda & Laraba, 2011; Preye, 2015). Thus, the interaction between SMEs and national economies can be viewed as an exchange process in which the activities of SMEs create economic growth, hence the SME growth must be safeguarded by the nation's economy (Amah & Eshegheri, 2017). These enterprises are a major part of the Gross Domestic Product of many leading economies and require immense support from government to succeed (Mberi, 2018). Creating a sustainable environment for SME growth leads to the achievement of broad socio-economic development goals (Sambo, Gichira, & Yusuf, 2015).

Business growth is typically defined and measured using absolute or relative changes in sales, assets, employment, productivity, profits and profit margins (Mutalemwa, 2015). Sales data are usually readily available and business owners attach high importance to sales as an indicator of business performance. In addition, sales growth is easier to measure compared with some other indices and much more likely to be recorded. Mutalemwa (2015) also states that sales are a good indicator of size and growth. They are considered a precise indicator of how a business is competing relative to its market. According to Abor and Quartey (2010), as a new small business starts and develops, it moves through several growth stages, each with its own distinctive characteristics. Olawale and Garwe (2010) identified five stages of growth. These include the existence, survival, success, and take-off, as well as resource maturity. In each stage of development, a different set of factors is critical to a business's survival and success. This stage development model gives an insight into the dynamics of SME growth, including the distinguishing characteristics, problems and requirements of growing SMEs and explains business growth processes amongst SMEs. Olawale and Garwe (2010) state that there is a moment in time that has not yet been theoretically determined where a start-up venture becomes a new business. However, the idea of business survival could be equated with an organisation that has fully completed the transaction of stage two of the five stages of small business growth. The challenge for new business growth in South Africa is that most newly established SMEs do not develop from the first stage (that is, the existence stage) to other stages such as survival, success, take off and resource maturity (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). Thus, this study establishes the role played by business skills in enhancing owners' intrinsic factors to achieve business goals.

Motivation and creativity in SMEs

Creativity is one of the most important factors in developing and growing businesses. The emphasis of this study is in understanding the conditions under which intrinsic motivation promotes creativity. Coon and Mitterer (2010) believe that intrinsic motivation is an important enabler of creativity. According to Hennessey (2010), intrinsic motivation is the

desire to expend effort-base or interest and the enjoyment of work that is being performed. Coon (2010) identifies the three interrelated psychological mechanisms through which intrinsic motivation may stimulate creativity.

Firstly, the emotion theorists have proposed that when business owners are intrinsically motivated, they experience positive effect (Becchetti *et al.*, 2013). This stimulates creativity by broadening the range of cognitive information available, expanding the scope of attention towards assimilating a wider set of ideas and encouraging cognitive flexibility for identifying patterns and associations between ideas (Grant & Berry, 2011).

Secondly, Deci and Ryan (2011) propose that when business owners are intrinsically motivated, their curiosity and interest in learning enhances their cognitive flexibility, willingness to take risks, and openness to complexity, which, in turn, expands their access to ideas and potential solutions.

Thirdly, both the emotion and self-determination theorists suggest that intrinsic motivation promotes creativity by encouraging persistence. From the standpoint of the emotional theories, by fostering positive effect, the intrinsic motivation enhances psychological engagement and builds energy for sustaining effort, increasing the amount of time that SME owners are willing and able to work on their tasks (Coon & Mitterer, 2010). From the standpoint of self-determination theory, by fostering confidence and interest, intrinsic motivation encourages SME owners to persist with challenging, complex, unfamiliar tasks, as well as to concentrate their attention more effectively on these tasks (Hennessey, 2010).

Entrepreneurial skill as a competence for SME growth

Entrepreneurial competencies are sets of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that contribute to personal effectiveness (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). Entrepreneurial competencies are important to the survival and growth of new SMEs. Snyman (2012) establishes that the lack of managerial experience and skills are the main reasons new businesses fail. Since entrepreneurial skills influence the implementation of sustainable growth of SMEs, the entrepreneur's success depends on the identification of crucial entrepreneurial skills for starting a business as well as for helping the business to survive and grow in the early years (Antonites & Van Vuuren, 2014). SME owners should be aware of the variety of necessary basic and additional management skills that are not only desirable, but also required for successful guidance of the company. Hence, the SME owner needs to have more knowledge for passing his/her ideas to team members with complementary skills, and avoid situations in which he/she hires people with similar skills as his/hers (Snyman *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, this study investigates whether entrepreneurial skills are responsible for SME growth.

METHODOLOGY

The method of this research will be discussed under the following headings, namely: the target population, sample, measurement instrument, and the data collection.

Target population and sample size

The target population comprised of 127 SMEs owners of furniture manufacturing businesses operating in the eThekweni District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. Of the 127 SMEs that were recruited, 112 participated in the study.

Brief profiles of respondents

One-hundred-and-twelve furniture manufacturing SMEs participated in the study. The majority of SMEs, at 60 per cent, have been operating for more than five years. Seventy-eight per cent of the participants were male and 22 per cent were female business owners. Forty-three per cent of the participants were over 35 years of age.

Data collection method

Recruitment of respondents was undertaken with the aim of ensuring that all 127 SMEs in furniture manufacturing businesses participated in the study. As a result, the questionnaires were forwarded to the owners of SMEs who represented their businesses in this study by means of electronic mail. Of these, 78 completed questionnaires were returned via electronic mail and the remaining 34 were collected from their businesses, representing an 88 per cent response rate, considered high compared with the norm for surveys responses (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The main reason for this high response rate was due to the invitation letter sent to all the SME furniture manufacturing owners as well as consistently following up on the questionnaires through telephone calls.

Measurement and analysis

In line with the research framework, the study measured nine variables using the questionnaire. In addition, the study employed a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Creativity of business owners for SME growth

Three items listed in this variable (Grant & Berry, 2011; Coon & Mitterer, 2010; Deci & Ryan, 2011; Quartey, 2010; Olawale & Gawe, 2010; Antonites & Van Vuuren, 2014) are: creativity motivates SME owners to take business risks, creative SME owners have the ability to grow their businesses, and creativity in SME owners results in the development of a final product.

The reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha 0.746 was achieved. This value is close to 0.7 and indicates an internal consistency and reliability of the variables on this objective.

Entrepreneurial skills of business owners for SME growth

The variables in this objective were measured by four items. These were based on the entrepreneurial skills of business owners for SME growth (Antonites & Van Vuuren, 2014; Olawale & Gawe, 2010; Snyman, 2012). These include an interest in learning that encourages SME owners to take risk, the application of entrepreneurial skills develop new

SMEs, entrepreneurial skills influence the sustainability of the business and entrepreneurial skills result in the establishment of new jobs.

The reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha 0.617 was achieved. This value is close to 0.7 and indicates an internal consistency and reliability of the variables on this objective.

Correlation tests were used to analyse data. In addition, the software SPSS (version 23.0) was used for the data analysis.

STUDY RESULTS

Creativity of business owners for SME growth

The bivariate Pearson correlation analyses were used to examine the strength of the identified association between variables (Dawson, 2009). These tests were used to find any significant relationship between study variables. The bivariate Pearson's correlation can reveal the significance of the correlation; if significant, whether it is positive or negative (that is, the direction of the correlation) as well as the strength of the correlation.

TABLE 2: creativity of SME owners for SME growth

Creativity of SME owners' variables	SME growth	
Creativity motivates SME owners to take business risks	Correlation	0.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.727
	N	112
Creative SME owners have the ability to grow their businesses	Correlation	0.226
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.083
	N	112
Creativity in SME owners results in the development of a final product	Correlation	0.267
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.044
	N	112

Source: Author's own analysis

The creativity of SME owner variables in Table 2 do not statistically have a significant relationship with SME growth (at $p < 0.05$). These include creativity as a variable that motivates SME owners to take business risks, as well as creative SME owners having the ability to grow their businesses. However, the variable relating to creativity in SME owners resulting in the development of a final product for business growth have a coefficient r -value of 0.257 (at $p > 0.05$). This is a directly proportional correlation between the two variables. This is supported by Mahembe (2011) who indicates that the effort to stimulate creativity for SME growth is by broadening the range of cognitive information available, expanding the scope of attention towards assimilating a wider set of ideas and encouraging cognitive flexibility for identifying patterns and associations between ideas.

Entrepreneurial skills of business owners for SME growth

The bivariate Pearson correlation analysis was also used to find any significant relationship between study variables.

TABLE 3: entrepreneurial skills for SME growth

Entrepreneurial skills variables	SME growth	
An interest in learning encourages SME owners to take risk	Correlation	0.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.727
	N	112
The application of entrepreneurial skills develop new SMEs	Correlation	0.226
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.083
	N	112
Entrepreneurial skills influence the sustainability of the business	Correlation	0.257
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.047
	N	112
Entrepreneurial skills result in the establishment of new jobs	Correlation	0.369
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004
	N	112

Source: Author's own analysis

The entrepreneurial skills variables in Table 3 do not statistically have a significant relationship with SME growth (at $p < 0.05$). These include an interest in learning that encourages SME owners to take risk, as well as the application of entrepreneurial skills to develop new SMEs. However, the variable relating to entrepreneurial skills as a variable that influences business sustainability as well as its impact on establishing new jobs for SME growth have a coefficient r -value of 0.257 and 0.369 respectively (at $p > 0.05$). They have a directly proportional correlation with SME growth. This is consistent with the theory of planned behaviour that must be exhibited by SMEs, the importance of accessing resources, as well as access to opportunities for business growth (Deci & Ryan, 2011).

DISCUSSION

This study examines small business owners' inherent attributes that are responsible for the growth of SMEs in the eThekweni District Municipality. One-hundred-and-twelve SME owners participated in the study. Correlation statistics were used to test the study objectives. This study revealed that the creativity in SME owners results in the development of a final product. Furthermore, it indicates that entrepreneurial skills influence business growth. Consequently, this results in the establishment of new jobs. The future of business growth depends on the extent to which business owners are equipped with entrepreneurial skills. SME success depends on the use of entrepreneurial skills for starting and growing the business in the early years of establishment (Martin & Staines, 2008).

IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The creativity of business owners influences SME growth. In addition, the study revealed that the business skills of business owners should have an enhancing effect on SME growth. Hence, the following conclusions can be made:

- 1) Creative SME owners must be the drivers of business growth in South Africa.
- 2) If the creative potential of SME owners can be enhanced, this will eventually lead to a better support of national goals for job creation in South Africa.
- 3) Entrepreneurial skills must play a role for SME sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of creativity and entrepreneurial skills on SME growth. It established the relationship between creativity of the business owner and SME growth. The entrepreneurial skills of business owners play a role in SME growth. Study findings revealed that creativity, entrepreneurial skills and environmental dynamism magnify the extent of business growth. This is consistent with the theory of planned behaviour, the importance of resources and access to opportunities for business growth.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in the eThekweni District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. Only SMEs in the furniture manufacturing sector participated. However, the respondents were geographically dispersed within eThekweni District Municipality.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings of this study, further research on the entrepreneurial competency of business owners in South Africa is required. Future studies should review the impact of personal values of business owners in relation to business growth. This includes their managerial skills for business sustainable growth. The participants should include various business sectors of South Africa.

This study assessed small business owners' inherent attributes that are responsible for the growth of SMEs in the eThekweni District Municipality. It established that SME success depends on the proper use of entrepreneurial skills for starting and growing their businesses in the early years of establishment. If creativity of SMEs can be enhanced, this will lead to a better support of national goals on job creation for South Africa.

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