THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL, STRATEGIC, AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS, ALONG WITH MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES ON BLACK-OWNED SMMES PERFORMANCE: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Background: The worldwide discussion focused on investigating the impact of institutional constraints, management capabilities, and both structural and strategic constraints on performance outcomes of small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs). Objective: This study aims to enhance and widen the analysis by investigating how institutional, strategic, and structural constraints, along with management capabilities, affect the performance measures of Black-owned SMMEs, intending to provide a more thorough and expansive analysis

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative analysis approach was employed, using a structural equation model to examine the interconnections among various factors, including financial, informational, and human capabilities in relation to management capabilities, as well as financial and organisational development in relation to performance. A total of 544 small businesses owned by Black individuals in South Africa participated in the study.

Results: The results demonstrate a negative correlation between institutional constraints and business performance (H1), along with a similar negative relationship between strategic and structural constraints and performance (H2). In contrast, the anticipated positive link between management competencies and performance (H3) was not confirmed. These findings highlight the necessity for proactive measures to transform regulatory settings and improve organisational structures.

Conclusion: This study tackles a crucial void in the existing literature by exploring the connections among organisational limitations, operational and strategic challenges, management skills, and entrepreneurial success. There is an urgent need for collaborative initiatives among policymakers, business development agencies, and stakeholders to promote entrepreneurship, improve management skills, and bolster organisational frameworks. Through these interventions, Black-owned SMMEs will thrive, generate employment, inspire innovation, and aid in overall economic and social progress.

Originality/value: The present research is the initial exploration into the detrimental impact of institutional, strategic, and structural limitations, along with management capacities, on the entrepreneurial performance of SMMEs within South African contexts.

Keywords: black-owned SMMEs, business performance, institutional constraints, management competencies, structural barriers

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INTRODUCTION

Small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) are fundamental to South Africa's economy, significantly aiding in growth and generating jobs (Mothiba, 2022). These companies represent nearly 90% of all businesses in the nation and are crucial to the Gross Domestic Product (Hadisi & Snowball, 2024). In addition, SMMEs provide jobs for about 50% to 60% of the workforce, making them crucial for tackling South Africa's ongoing high unemployment rate, which hit 32.1% in the third quarter of 2024 (FinScope MSME South Africa Survey, 2024). Despite their significance, black-owned SMMEs encounter distinctive obstacles that hinder their development and longevity (National Planning Commission, 2019). Numerous individuals work in informal sectors, where their access to formal financial systems is still restricted. About 72% of micro-enterprises operate without formal registration, while 15% of the owners are completely barred from financial services (FinScope MSME South Africa Survey, 2024). These limitations are exacerbated by structural obstacles like regulatory intricacies, insufficient government assistance, and restricted market access (SEDA Quarterly Report, 2022).

For black entrepreneurs in particular, these challenges are intensified by historical inequities that still influence South Africa's socio-economic environment. Historically, these businesses have been sidelined because of systemic disparities, leading to restricted access to resources, financing, and markets (Kirsten & Rogerson, 2020; Tlhagale, 2020). The necessity to examine the performance of black-owned SMMEs stems from the acknowledgment that these enterprises are vital for attaining greater economic equity and empowerment in South Africa after apartheid (National Planning Commission, 2019). Even with government efforts to encourage entrepreneurship among black South Africans through measures such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE), numerous black-owned SMMEs still face high failure rates and lack sufficient support systems (Mabulele, 2020; Mutoko, Mistra, & Domeher, 2022). This research intends to investigate the institutional, strategic, and structural barriers that impede the expansion of these businesses, while also analysing the impact of management skills on improving their performance.

Recent studies have underscored several elements that contribute to the difficulties encountered by black-owned SMMEs. Research shows that institutional obstacles, including regulatory challenges and limited financial access, greatly affect the sustainability of these enterprises (Ingle, Makhathini & Radebe, 2021; Fatoki, 2021). Moreover, managerial abilities that include expertise in strategic planning, financial oversight, and communication are essential factors for achieving business success (Rambe & Makhalemele, 2019; Maduku & Kaseeram, 2021). Although earlier studies have recognised financial limitations as a significant reason for the elevated failure rates of SMMEs (Fatoki, 2012; Coetzee, Visagie & Ukpere, 2012), an increasing amount of literature highlights the significance of non-financial elements like management capabilities and support from institutions (Islam, Khan, Obaidullar & Alan, 2011; García-Pabón & Klima, 2017).

This study aims to offer localised insights by concentrating on black-owned SMMEs in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, which can guide targeted actions by stakeholders and policymakers. Tackling the obstacles encountered by black-owned SMMEs demands a comprehensive strategy that takes into account both institutional structures and management methodologies. This research employs structural equation modeling (SEM) as a quantitative approach to examine the connections among different constructs: institutional, strategic, and structural constraints, management skills, and business success. The initial step includes recognising essential institutional barriers impacting black-owned SMMEs. These can encompass bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining government assistance programs, insufficient funding from conventional banking institutions, and regulatory challenges that disproportionately affect small enterprises (Kirsten & Rogerson, 2020; Ingle et al. 2021). Subsequently, it is important to evaluate the degree of managerial skills possessed by SMME owners. This encompasses assessing abilities linked to strategic planning, financial administration, marketing tactics, and human resources management (Rambe & Makhalemele, 2019; Fatoki & Chindoga, 2020). By recognising the existing skills of black entrepreneurs, specialised training initiatives can be created to improve their abilities (National Empowerment Fund, 2023). In addition, engaging stakeholders is essential for executing effective solutions. Working together with government bodies, financial entities, educational institutions, and industry groups can enhance resource sharing and develop supportive environments for black-owned SMMEs (Mabulele, 2020; Mutoko et al. 2022).

In conclusion, this study intends to offer practical suggestions derived from its results. The study aims to create evidence-driven suggestions for policymakers and stakeholders to improve support systems for black-owned SMMEs, while also contributing to academic literature on entrepreneurship by illuminating the distinct challenges encountered by these businesses in a developing nation setting. Ultimately, this study aims to connect policy goals with real results for black-owned SMMEs in South Africa, offering important perspectives that can promote their development and longevity.

METHODS

This research investigation employed quantitative data gathered from black-owned SMMEs within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. The data sources comprised self-completed questionnaires that concentrated on essential aspects such as managerial skills, organisational challenges, and performance metrics. The focus group included 925 black owned SMMEs identified in the municipality's records. Data was gathered using a probability sampling technique called random sampling, which sought to generalise results for the target population. A Raosoft calculator was utilised to ascertain a suitable sample size, leading to a final sample of 544 firms. This sample size offers a strong representation of the intended population. The self-completed questionnaires were created to collect quantitative data on the different constructs pertinent to the research. The examination of the gathered data included descriptive statistics for detailing sample characteristics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for exploring intricate connections among

variables. Validity and reliability were confirmed using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's sphericity tests, with factor loadings of 0.30 and more considered interpretable, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.60 or greater signifying acceptable reliability. The development of hypotheses was grounded in the premise that specifically:

H1: A negative correlation exists between institutional constraints and business performance.

H2: A negative correlation exists between strategic and structural constraints and business performance.

H3: A positive correlation exists between management skills and business performance.

These hypotheses were generated from current literature showing that institutional obstacles, strategic and structural constraints, and managerial abilities are essential factors for the success of SMMEs. A conceptual framework was created to visually depict the connections among the recognised factors affecting the performance of black-owned SMMEs. This model emphasises the relationships between institutional constraints, strategic and structural constraints, management skills, and indicators of business performance. This study developed a conceptual model and hypotheses using institutional theory. Figure 1 shows the study's conceptual model and three hypotheses:

H1: There is a negative relationship between institutional constraints and business performance.

H2: There is a negative relationship between strategic and structural constraints and business performance.

H3: There is a positive relationship between management competencies and business performance.
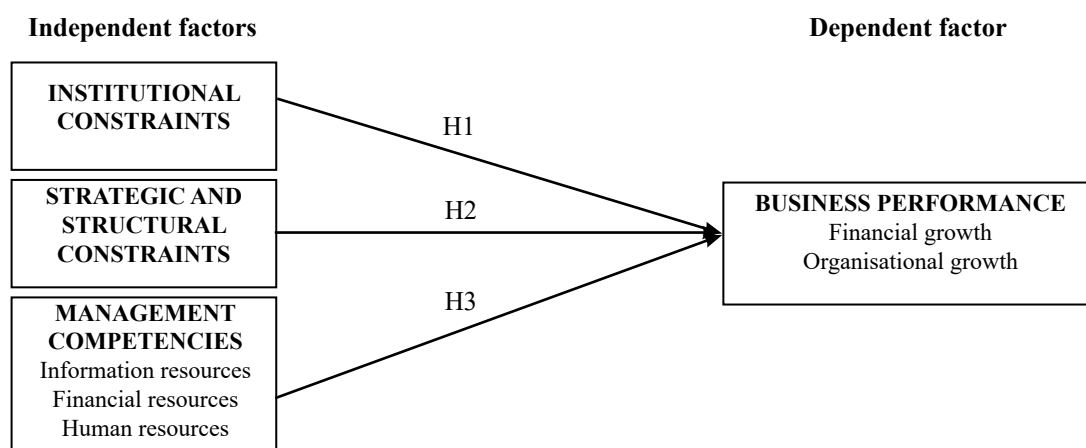

Figure 1. Research conceptual model

RESULTS

Reliability and Validity

In order to quantify reliability, Table 1 displays the Cronbach's alpha for the following factors: financial growth, organisational growth, information resources, financial resources, and human resources. According to Table 1, all components had internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.783 to 0.959, exceeding the 0.70 suggested limit (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014). This indicated that all of the components were legitimate and trustworthy.

The data could then be examined further to assess their suitability using the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity. After that, SEM would be employed to ascertain the association between the variables. Table 2 shows the results of the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table 2 showed that KMOs, which ranged from 0.735 to 0.957, were above 0.60 for every factor. For every factor, Bartlett's test yields a significant p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This result demonstrates that all factors are regarded as legitimate and reliable, and that a factor analysis on the items may be performed based on the construct's correlation structure. More data analysis is therefore feasible.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

In order to investigate the association involving institutional constraints, structural and strategic constraints, managerial competencies, and business performance, SEM was utilised in this study. The confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis are shown in Table 3.

The fit data of the two tested models were reported in Table 3. The data was well-fitted by all of the models. Grounded on the cut-off criteria for fit indexes by Hu and Bentle (1999), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the two overall measurement model fit indices.

Table 1. Reliability for institutional constraints, strategic and structural constraints, financial growth, organisational growth, information resources, financial resources, and human resources

Factors	Reliability statistics		
	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	N of Items
Institutional constraints	0,867	0.869	5
Strategic and structural constraints	0.930	0.930	22
Financial Growth	0.783	0.775	3
Organisational growth	0.959	0.959	11
Information resources	0.909	0.907	8
Financial resources	0.911	0.912	5
Human resources	0.953	0.953	11

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Factors	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
		Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Institutional constraints	0.834	839.659	10	0.000
Strategic and structural constraints	0.929	4437.684	231	0.000
Financial growth	0.735	781.939	6	0.000
Organisational growth	0.943	3405.074	45	0.000
Information resources	0.903	1740.409	28	0.000
Financial resources	0.861	1218.769	10	0.000
Human resources	0.957	3243.434	55	0.000

The results indicate a strong fit between the data and the first model, which has financial growth as its product: TLI = 0.990, CFI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.056, SRMR = 0.045, $\chi2$ = 1779.80 df = 15 p < 0.001. The associations involving all the factors are indicated in Figure 2.

$\chi2$ = 1907.07 df = 15 p < 0.001, TLI = 0.989, CFI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.063, and SRMR = 0.023 are the results indicating a good fit with the data in the second model with organisational growth as the outcome. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between all the variables of model 1: financial growth.

The interaction between information resources, financial resources, human resources, institutional restrictions, and structural and strategic constraints was depicted in Figure 2. First, the results showed that there is no correlation between financial resources (0.00), institutional restrictions (0.00), and financial growth. Second, there is a negative correlation between financial growth (-0.30), information resources (-0.06), human resources (-0.13), and structural and strategic constraints (-0.13).

The effects of information, financial, human resources, strategic, and structural constraints, and institutional limitations on the organisational growth variable are shown in Figure 3.

Table 3. SEM path analysis with confirmatory factor analysis

Model	CMIN	df	CMIN/df	p	NFI	RFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Model 1	1779.80	15	2.139	0.001	0.97	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.05	0.045
Model 2	1907.07	15	2.386	0.001	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.99	0.07	0.023

Note: CMIN(X2) = chi-square; df = degree of freedom; p = significance level; NFI = Bentler-Bonett normed fit index; RFI = relative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation. SRMR = standardised root-mean-square residual. Model 1= Financial growth, Model 2= Organisational growth.
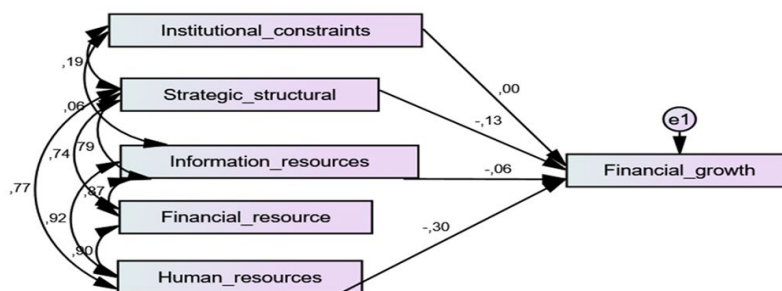

Figure 2. The effects of institutional constraints, strategic and structural, information resources, financial resources, and human resources on financial growth
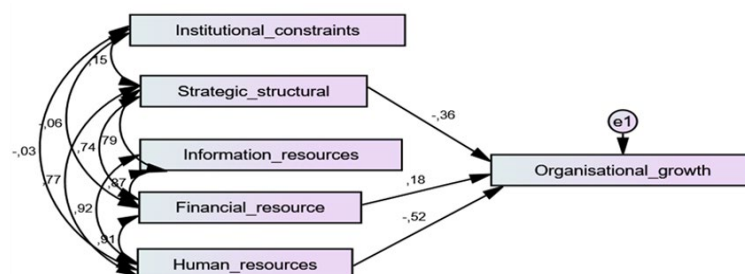

Figure 3. The effects of institutional constraints, strategic and structural, information resources, financial resources, and human resources on organisational growth

First, Figure 3 demonstrated that there is no correlation between organisational growth, information resources, and institutional restrictions (0.00, 0.00, and 0.00, respectively). Second, there is a negative correlation between organisational growth, human resources, and structural and strategic constraints (-0.52, -0.36, and -0.52). This suggests that a decrease in participants' perception of structural and strategic limits will probably have a detrimental effect on the expansion of the organisation. These results are in line with those of Rambe & Makhalemele (2019) and Fatoki & Chindoga (2020), who discovered that structural and strategic limitations had a detrimental effect on organisational growth. This suggests that, in terms of human resources, participants' perceptions of fewer resources would probably not have an effect on the expansion of the business. The research study's findings contradict those of Mabulele (2020) and Mutoko et al (2022), who discovered that education and human resources have a beneficial impact on business growth. Finally, there's a positive correlation between organisational growth and financial resources (0.18). Financial resources, therefore, influence organisational growth. This suggests that organisational growth is likely to enhance in situations where respondents have access to a variety of financial resources. This result is consistent with that of Fatoki (2012) and Coetzee et al (2012), who found that SMME survival and growth are impacted by a lack of financial resources.

The summary of assumptions from every model used to investigate the connection between institutional limitations, structural and strategic constraints, managerial competences, and business performance is shown in Table 4.

The examination of hypotheses reveals that most of the key hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) have been supported, as seen in Table 4. This observation reveals a key observation regarding the intersection between institutional, strategic, and structural constraints on the performance of SMMEs. In detail, H1 confirms a negative relation between institutional constraints and performance, postulating that companies with high regulatory or bureaucratisation constraints suffer reduced performance consequences (Kirsten & Rogerson, 2020; Ingle et al. 2021). Similarly, H2 confirms a similar relation between strategic and structural constraints and performance, with implications about the detrimental consequences of poor planning and ineffectuality in structures in an organisation (Rambe & Makhalemele, 2019; Fatoki & Chindoga, 2020). In addition, supporting sub-hypotheses for H1 and H2 have also been confirmed, confirming that institutional constraints have a detrimental impact on financial development (H1a) and that both financial (H2a) and organizational development (H2b) suffer from strategic and structural constraints, respectively.

Table 4. Summary of hypothesis decisions

Hypothesis	Decision
H1: There is a negative relationship between institutional constraints and business performance.	Accept
H1a: There is a negative relationship between institutional constraints and financial growth.	Accept
H2: There is a negative relationship between strategic and structural constraints and business performance.	Accept
H2a: There is a negative relationship between strategic and structural constraints and financial growth.	Accept
H2b: There is a negative relationship between strategic and structural constraints and organizational growth.	Accept
H3: There is a positive relationship between management competencies and business performance.	Reject
H3a: There is a positive relationship between information resources and financial growth.	Reject
H3b: There is a positive relationship between human resources and financial growth.	Reject
H3c: There is a positive relationship between financial resources and organisational growth.	Accept
H3d: There is a positive relationship between human resources and organisational growth	Reject

On the other hand, H3, assuming a positive relation between performance and competencies in management, fails to receive any supporting observation. This observation reveals that improvements in performance concerning competencies in management lack supporting observations in terms of collected observations. In addition, H3a, H3b, and H3d have been refuted, confirming that proposed positive relations between information assets, assets in humans, and financial development, and between assets in humans and development in an organisation lack supporting observations in terms of observations in practice. In contrast, H3c received supporting observations, confirming that efficient management of assets in finance can promote development in an organisation (Fatoki, 2012; Coetzee et al, 2012).

The primary conclusion derived from this analysis is that both constraint and strategic factors enormously hinder performance and development in companies, even though the impact of management competencies on performance is uncertain. In its strong imperative, for future studies to develop a strong platform for explaining complex relations between management competencies, constraint, performance, and contextual factors that could impact these relations, this study re-affirmed in agreement with past studies that both constraint and strategic factors have a detrimental impact on performance and development in business (Ingle et al, 2021; Fatoki, 2021). In contrast, such a conclusion refutes claims posed by Mutoko et al (2022), providing a critical platform for future studies to undertake an in-depth investigation of such complex interrelationships.

Managerial Implications

The identified reverse causality between institutional constraints and performance (H1) reveals that proactive intervention with the regulative environment is a necessity to mitigate such constraints. Engaging in such intervention could involve lobbying for legislative reform to enable enhanced access to assets and supporting infrastructure. By understanding specific institution-related impediments to performance, a manager can develop strategies that skillfully navigate such obstacles.

The findings suggesting a reverse causality between strategic and structure-related constraints and performance (H2) highlight a critical role for managers in closely evaluating planning structures and organisational frameworks. Managers must pay significant attention to simplifying processes and enhancing integration in planning to boost overall performance. Reorganisation could involve a critical review of organisational structures, optimising asset distribution, and a critical examination of information channels for dissemination in an attempt to ensure key objectives receive proper dissemination and assimilation at an overall level in an organisation.

The positive causality between competencies and performance (H3) re-emphasises the imperative for investing in developing manager capabilities through training and development programs designed to enhance competencies in key competencies such as financial administration, planning, and administration of humans. By creating an environment for improvement and development, an organisation can become adaptable and responsive to a changing environment, enhancing performance improvement.

Managers must prioritise effective use of informational assets during the transition towards a decision-support environment, leveraging human assets maximally, and employing financial assets in a planned manner for driving growth programs. Overall, inferences drawn in relation to hypotheses reveal that a manager must use a multi-faceted lens in dealing with institution-related and strategy-related impediments with a view to improving competencies in parallel with maximising asset use. By following such a multi-faceted lens, Black-owned SMMEs can maximise performance and drive sustained development in a competitive marketplace environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The research examined how institutional, strategic, and structural barriers, together with management abilities, affect the business outcomes of South African SMMEs owned by Black people. Research shows that business performance suffers due to institutional constraints and strategic as well as structural constraints. The research uncovered no positive relationship between managerial skills and business success.

The research findings complicate the established view that institutional constraints, along with management skills and structural and strategic barriers, heavily impact SMME performance. Black-owned SMMEs operating in South Africa face distinctive hurdles unlike those encountered by SMMEs in different environments.

Solving these problems demands specific targeted interventions. Interventions should target the enhancement of management abilities, together with organisational structural reinforcement and strategic planning refinement, in addition to regulatory framework improvements. Stakeholders who pursue comprehensive solutions for these challenges enable Black-owned SMMEs to reach sustainable development that supports economic advancement and fair wealth distribution in both local communities and the national economy.

The full potential of Black-owned SMMEs can only be understood through a comprehensive strategy that synchronises solutions to institutional, management, strategic, and structural challenges. Policymakers, together with business support organisations and stakeholders, must join forces to enact policies and initiatives that support entrepreneurship development while also building management skills and organisational frameworks.

Future research should investigate the restrictions established by national and international organisations. Ongoing research needs to examine if small business owners begin with predetermined motivations or if their motivations develop because of market survival requirements. The evaluation of personal traits along with entrepreneurial skill sets offers important information about business ownership mechanisms.

Recommendations

Initially, it is crucial for managers to participate in proactive actions designed to transform the regulatory landscape. This entails advocating for legal amendments that improve access to resources and infrastructure essential for business functioning. By recognising particular institutional obstacles that impede performance, managers can create strategies that successfully address these difficulties, thereby promoting a more supportive atmosphere for growth.

Secondly, the established reverse causality between strategic and structural constraints and performance highlights the necessity for managers to thoroughly assess their organisational structures. Streamlining procedures and enhancing integration in planning frameworks can greatly enhance overall effectiveness. This could entail reorganising current frameworks, improving asset allocation, and upgrading information sharing methods to guarantee that essential goals are conveyed efficiently throughout the organisation.

Third, the positive connection between managerial skills and performance underscores the significance of allocating resources to training and development initiatives that improve essential abilities like financial management, strategic planning, and human resource management. By cultivating a culture of ongoing enhancement and flexibility, organisations can more effectively address shifting market conditions and improve their overall performance.

Furthermore, managers ought to focus on the efficient utilisation of informational resources while moving towards a decision-support setting. Optimising human resources and strategically utilising financial assets will enhance growth initiatives and boost operational efficiency. Finally, a comprehensive strategy is essential for tackling both institutional and strategic barriers. By concurrently boosting management skills and maximizing asset use, black-owned SMMEs can elevate their performance and attain sustainable growth in a competitive market.

In summary, focused measures that emphasize regulatory enhancements, organizational reorganization, skill development, and strategic asset management are crucial for empowering black-owned SMMEs. Joint initiatives among policymakers, business support entities, and stakeholders will be crucial in establishing an environment that encourages entrepreneurship growth and fair wealth allocation within local communities and the larger economy.

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