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An Analysis of Entrepreneurial and Business Skills and Training Needs in SMEs in the Plastic Manufacturing Industry in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

Bola Afolabi
(Corresponding Author)
Adjunct Professor
Faculty of Management and Commerce,
Department of Business Management, University of Fort Hare,
P. Bag X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
E-mail: bolaafolabi@yahoo.com

Richard Macheke
Department of Business Management, University of Fort Hare,
P. Bag X1314, Alice-5700
E-mail: richardmacheke@yahoo.co.uk

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Abstract

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are very vital in the development of today's global. They contribute significantly in terms of creating jobs, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and social welfare of most economies. However, there is high rate of failure among SMEs due to various reason of which lack of skills is one. The study at hand was undertaken to find out whether training in business and entrepreneurial skills could help SMEs to succeed. The study analysed the entrepreneurial and business skills and training needs in the Plastic Manufacturing Industry in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. A quantitative approach was used in which 74 questionnaires were distributed.The result showed that there is strong linked between training in entrepreneurial and business skills and success of such organisation. The results also showed that despite the linkage between success and training, most of the organisations still have a lot of unskilled workers in their pool. The research concluded with a strong argument for training as an essential tool for determining organisation success, effectiveness and efficiency.

Keywords: entrepreneurial and business skills, training needs and SMEs.

Introduction

There are unique success factors that determine the efficiency and success of all large businesses. . Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) should apply these success factors to enable them survive and grow in an increasing ever economically challenging world. These success factors manifest themselves in the skills and leadership qualities that should be passed

on by entrepreneurs and business owners to the employees and stakeholders for satisfaction of customer needs and service delivery.

SMEs are a large contributor to global economies and their importance is noted in every country. SMEs make a substantial contribution to the economy in terms of job creation, GDP, investment and social welfare (Nieman, 2006). According to the African Development Bank (2005), SMEs contribute more than 55% of total employment and 22% of the Gross Domestic Product in South Africa. Since they are so important to the economy, their creation is very important as it a positive move towards economic growth. However there is a need to keep these SMEs in operation and avoid failure. Lack of skills has been a major challenge to the SMEs (Smith & Perks, 2006) and skills acquisition through training can provide a long lasting solution to the survival battle of the SMEs.

Due to various reasons, some SMEs end up closing down business at an early stage. This could result from the view that the entrepreneur miscalculated the opportunity, and unforeseen threats that are too big for the business to overturn, lack of essential information on running the business and lack of proper funding of the business(Chimucheka and Rungani, 2011; Monk, 2000). There are a lot of other issues that may appear insignificant when the business is launched but will overpowering the business at the end, and eventually leading to its downfall. Seemingly there is a lot that needs to be done in all fields that may prevent the loss of jobs, revenue and increase of poverty in the communities by preventing failure in the SMEs. Apart from the financial problems that may affect the businesses, the input of the owner and the business skills (Smith & Perks, 2006) are very important in keeping the business afloat. There is therefore a need for a study that provides a rigorous and systematic analysis of entrepreneurial and business skills and training needs in the Plastic Manufacturing Industry in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

The purpose of this study is to examine the important entrepreneurial skills and the impact of training in the success of the business. This study will help new SMEs in the industry to be able to survive and keep growing, thus benefiting the province in development, employment and the country in revenues. These skills do not only promote business and manufacturing efficiency success but also efficiency and benefit the country at large. Therefore, it is, of great importance to assess and specify success factors that promote efficiency and survival of SMEs that could serve as benchmarks for emerging SMEs. It goes further to assess whether training can play role in the acquisition of these skills by entrepreneurs.

Research Problem

The success of SMEs is mainly attributed to the ability of the manager/owner in guiding the business through to success. For a firm to be prosperous, it should be well-managed while the entrepreneur should acquire the necessary resources to drive the business. SMEs are most vulnerable in terms of survival because of the liability of newness and smallness (Kangasharju, 2000). Empirical evidence have shown that the life span of SMEs tends to be short, with approximately two thirds of all start-ups failing within the first five years (Ladzani and Van Vuuren, 2002). Only small percentages stay in business in the long term, with many of the survivors achieving only marginal performance (Freeman, 2000).

The opportunity for SMEs to create wealth will be missed if they cannot attain their potential (Fielden, Davidson & Makin, 2000). Despite the challenges and difficulties of the SMEs, the sector has great potential for increased employment creation. While many SMEs fail, others survive beyond infancy and adolescence, becoming major success stories, creating wealth for their founders and jobs for the communities they serve (GEM, 2005a).

The employment record of SMEs would improve if, instead of failing, they could be assisted to reach a steady growth path (Kangasharju, 2000). If SMEs are to be vehicles for wealth and job creation they should be started, sustained and grown (Luiz,2001). The key challenge facing the South African government is how to promote and support the creation of more SMEs with growth potential and at the same time help those SMEs that are surviving to reach advanced levels of efficiency and profitability (Darroch, M. and Clover, 2005). The aim

should be to achieve entrepreneurial growth resulting in a net-firm creation, that is, firm-expansion exceeds the contraction of existing SMEs. This study investigates key success factors that cause SMEs in the Plastic Manufacturing Industry to succeed, to maintain profitability and to sustain employment opportunities. These factors may as well need to be acquired through training so that the SMEs embrace success in the businesses.

Objectivesof the Research

The following Primary and Secondary objectives will be explored.

Primary Objective

- To identify specific entrepreneurial and business skills that are essential for the success of SMEs and

Secondary Objectives

- To identify the training needs of entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs
- To find out if training in entrepreneurial and business skills is linked to the success of the SMEs.
- To establish whether re-training in skills is necessary for the success of the
- To establish the general profile of successful and emerging SMEs.

Hypotheses of the Research

The following Primary and Secondary hypotheses will be explored:

Primary Hypothesis

- H_0 SMEs success is not dependent on specific entrepreneurship qualities and skills.
- H_1 SMEs success is dependent on specific entrepreneurship qualities and skills.

Secondary Hypotheses

- $H_{2:0}$ SMEs' success is not dependent on business skills and entrepreneurship training.
- $H_{2:1}$The success of SMEs is dependent on business skills and entrepreneurship training.
- $H_{3:0}$ There is no significant difference between successful and less successful SMEs on their dependence on entrepreneurial skills and training.
- $H_{3:1}$ There is significant difference between successful and less successful SMEs on their dependence on entrepreneurial skills and training.
- $H_{4:0}$ There is no significant variance between how successful and less successful view their demographics as a success factor.
- $H_{4:1}$ There is significant variance between how successful and less successful view demographics as a success factor.

Literature Review

Many studies have established specific entrepreneurial and business skills essential for the success of SMEs. According to Botha (2006), the absence or low levels of key skills like motivation, ability to gather resources, financial management, human resource management, marketing and technical skills, may lead to zero performance, while weakness in a particular element would decrease effectiveness in the overall performance of the venture. This thus

means that the increase in the capacity of any of these skills can lead to an increase in the entrepreneurial performance of the entrepreneur (Botha, 2006). Supportive skills on the other hand, their absence would reduce performance, yet not completely destroy the business. This also means that an increase in the capacity of any of these supporting skills will also assist with SMEs performance. This gives a view that it is important to have all the core skills in place so as to get the desired performance and also the supportive skills to boost the business performance.

Entrepreneurial and business skills can be acquired through learning on the job or training. According to Antonites, A.J. (2003), the transfer of skills can effectively take place by means of participation of skilled individuals/employees in the learning of unskilled individuals. This study, based on the ways of entrepreneurial learning, emphasised on the importance of the development of entrepreneurial skills in order to lead a competitive entrepreneurial business. The UmsobomvuYouth Fund also offered some training programs which allude to the fact that to be successful entrepreneurs, required being equipped with both entrepreneurial as well as business skills to secure competitive businesses. It pointed out that all the business and entrepreneurial skills are vital to the sustainability of the business and should, therefore, be taught to the aspiring entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, Solomon (2004), in his study on entrepreneurial training, also discovered the need for entrepreneurial skills and business skills for the upkeep of the business. Kunene (2008) argues that the entrepreneur's initiative and skill are significant determinants of success. Training for small business is primarily internally focused and imparts generic management skills such as marketing, finance, record-keeping, human relations, as well as industrial relations (Solomon, 2004). In conclusion it is maintained that entrepreneurial training improves SME performance over time, showing that the business and the entrepreneurial skills are really of importance in the business world, especially for entrepreneurs. Business and entrepreneurial skills are important for the sustainability and profitability of businesses (Smith &Perks, 2006).

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the way in which data is gathered for a research project. It is the blue print for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data in order to achieve the objectives of the research project. Research methodology is important in a research work because it specifies the sampling design (Zindiye, 2008). Below is the research design of the study.

Research Design

Primary research is the gathering of raw information pertinent to a particular research problem. It has the advantages of its relevance to the situation and timeless, thus it is more recent. As such, this research study made use of quantitative research techniques requiring mathematical calculations and analysis. According to Burns and Burns(2008), quantitative research uses formal questions and predetermined response options in questionnaires administered to a large number of respondents. The reason for choosing this type of research method is that it gives the actual information from the respondents. The sample data will be collated, coded and interpreted to derive results for interpretation.

Research Method

The research technique that was used to collect primary data was the self-administered questionnaire. A self-administered questionnaire is a form containing a set of questions, usually presented to the respondent by an interviewer or a person in an official capacity that explains the purpose but does not actually complete the questionnaire (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). This technique reduced interview bias as well as saving time and money. Data was

collected within a short period of time because many respondents could answer the questionnaire at the same time.

Research Technique

The scientific technique was preferred to historical technique. Initially the topic and hypotheses were formulated. This was followed by conceptualising and operationalising the research problem. Eventually, data gathering and analysis as well as hypotheses testing were done.

Survey Population

A survey population is the total composition of elements from which the sample is drawn (Cant,Gerber-Nel, Nel and Kotze, 2011). Burns and Burns (2008) describe the population as all elements/subjects that meet the criteria for inclusion in a study. According to the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC, 2010) there are 71 SMEs in the Plastic Manufacturing Industry in the province.

Sample Size

Churchill and Brown (2004) noted that the correct sample size in a study is dependent on the nature of the population and the purpose of the study. The sample size usually depends on the population to be sampled, although there are no general rules. Generally, sample sizes larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research. However, in multivariate study, the sample size should be several times as large as the number of variables in the study in order to achieve good results. Nevertheless, the determination of the sample size is usually a balance between the margin of error and the confidence level.An online RAOSOFT (Raosoft, 2012) sample size calculator was used to calculate the sample size. The RAOSOFT sample size calculator gives a sample size of 61. This is after assuming a margin of error of 5%, confidence level of 95% and response distribution of 50%.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is “the instrument which measures the repetition of the research findings”, where the validity is the extent to which research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation (Cant *et al.*, 2011). This study used Cronbach’s alpha as a measure of reliability. Cronbach’s alpha is a test for survey’s internal consistency. It is also called scale reliability test. It is a measure of how well each individual items in a scale correlates with the remaining items. Validity relates to the extent to which the research data and the methods for obtaining the data are accurate, honest and on target (Denscombe, 2003). According to Cooper and Schindler (2006) the researcher may choose to do it alone or may use a panel of experts to judge how well the instrument meets standards. The questionnaire which was used in this study was given to a statistician to evaluate it for face and content validity as well as for conceptual clarity and investigative bias. The questionnaire is pre-tested among a few industries before being used to the rest of the population to check for the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The results of the final data collection were consistent with the results from the pre-testing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of running various statistical procedures and tests on the data (Cooper

& Schindler, 2006). It is the conversion of meaningless information into something which can easily be understood. The purpose of any research is not simply having data, but to deduce information from the data gathered.

The collected data was analysed by the Statistics Department of the University of Fort Hare. The package which they use included the statistical Analysis System V8 which is used to provide descriptive analysis and statistical interpretation The analytical methods to be used are descriptive analysis and the correlation is used for testing associations of respondents; correlation usually refers to the degree to which a linear predictive relationship exists between random variables, as measured by a correlation coefficient (Churchill & Brown, 2004).

Hypothesis Testing

The main objective of this study was to find out whether training in business and entrepreneurial skills could help the SMEs to succeed. The focus of the study is on the Plastic Manufacturing Industry in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The primary hypothesis is formulated on the notion that firms depend on the entrepreneurial and business skills for their success. The secondary hypothesis is based on training as means of equipping the unskilled in entrepreneurial and business skills for success. Finally, the last analysis is the impact other factors such as age of the firm, location of the business in the determination of success. The research used the chi-square, t-test and ANNOVA for hypotheses testing.

Chi-Square

The chi-square was used to test the significant differences between the successful and the less successful groups about their views on whether they depend on specific entrepreneurship qualities and skills to succeed. The confidence level used was 95% meaning that the *p* value must be lower than 0.05.

Table 2: Chi-Square on Dependence

	P Value	DF	SIG (2-Sided)
Business Systems	4.589[a]	3	.004
Business Linkages	5.115[a]	3	.014
Communication	2.541[a]	3	.048
Computer Literacy	5.346[a]	3	.148
Creativity	6.027[a]	3	.110
Financial Management	2.043[a]	3	.031
HRM	15.609[a]	3	.001
Legal	23.384[a]	3	.000
Life skills	52.603[a]	3	.325
Literacy & Numeracy	12.072[a]	3	.217
Marketing	21.856[a]	3	.000
Operations	22.677[a]	3	.000
Research&Development	26.642[a]	3	.000
Risk	34.223[a]	3	.100
Models	12.781[a]	3	.205
Resources	12.336[a]	3	.006
Motivation	13.054[a]	3	.005
Strategy	18.773[a]	3	.000
Supplier	21.330[a]	3	.000
Technical	7.481[a]	3	.050

α=0.05, Confidence Interval= 95%

There were significant differences between the successful and less successful SMEs in terms of how they depend on entrepreneurial skills for their success with $p < 0.05$ for 14 out of 20 of the skills as listed in the table above. Of the six skills, there is no significant difference between the successful and the less successful how they depend on those skills. **The hypothesis: SMEs success is not dependent on specific entrepreneurship qualities and skills are thereby rejected.**

The second chi-square test was done to determine whether the SMEs depended on the business skills and training for their success. This was done to find out if the training on business skills had an impact in the success of the SME. It will measure the significant difference between the successful and less successful SMEs on whether they depend on the training of the skills. The 95% confidence interval was also used and the *p* value was 0.05. The results from the chi-square are shown on the table 5.4 below.

Table 3: Chi-Square on Training

	P Value	DF	SIG (2-Sided)
Business Systems	13.649[a]	1	.000
Business Linkages	26.885[a]	1	.000
Communication	20.193[a]	1	.000
Computer Literacy	28.904[a]	1	.000
Creativity	16.648[a]	1	.000
Financial Management	9.947[a]	1	.002
HRM	23.621[a]	1	.000
Legal	15.928[a]	1	.000
Life skills	17.904[a]	1	.000
Literacy & Numeracy	7.617[a]	1	.006
Marketing	.707[a]	1	.400
Operations	4.700[a]	1	.030
Research&Development	10.057[a]	1	.002
Risk	7.822[a]	1	.005
Models	10.619[a]	1	.001
Resources	13.733[a]	1	.000
Motivation	8.643[a]	1	.003
Strategy	13.154[a]	1	.000
Supplier	8.595[a]	1	.000
Technical	15.311[a]	1	.000

α=0.05, Confidence Interval= 95%

There were significant differences between the successful and less successful SMEs in terms of how they depend on training of the business skills and entrepreneurial skills for their success with $p < 0.05$ for all the skills as listed in the table above. **This is with the exception of marketing only. The hypothesis: SMEs' success is not dependent on business skills and entrepreneurship training is thereby rejected.**

T-test

The t-test was used to compare whether there were significant differences between the mean scores of the variables in the entrepreneurial skills on the successful and the less successful respondents. The following results are on the t-test on the dependence on the entrepreneurial skills on Table 5.5 below:

Table 4: T-Test-Dependence

	Successful		Less Successful		SIG (2-Sided)
	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	

Business Systems	.970	3.00	.942	2.51	.038
Business Linkages	.857	2.83	.790	2.54	.007
Communication	.895	2.72	.882	2.44	.022
Computer Literacy	.938	2.94	.854	2.49	.024
Creativity	.878	2.78	.951	2.13	.017
Financial Management	.857	2.83	.885	2.51	.005
HRM	.802	3.06	.977	2.31	.006
Legal	.802	3.06	.929	1.92	.000
Life skills	.594	3.33	.506	1.49	.078
Literacy & Numeracy	.618	3.50	.968	2.56	.230
Marketing	.808	3.22	.790	2.18	.000
Operations	.752	3.28	.790	2.18	.000
Research&Development	.826	3.28	.854	1.82	.000
Risk	.857	3.17	.637	1.59	.115
Models	1.149	2.44	.677	1.74	.106
Resources	.808	3.22	.850	2.41	.001
Motivation	.717	3.00	.916	2.05	.250
Strategy	.900	2.89	.754	1.90	.000
Supplier	.786	3.17	.774	2.08	.000
Technical	.907	3.00	.885	2.49	.048

α=0.05, Confidence Interval= 95%

There were significant differences on the dependence of the entrepreneurial skills ($p < 0.05$) with only the exception of five skills. This means that the successful respondents depend much on the entrepreneurial skills than the less successful. However, there was no significant difference on both the successful and the less successful on the following entrepreneurial skills; Life skills, Literacy and Numeracy, Risk, Models and Resources. This mean that both the success and less successful agree that they depend on the skills listed above. The hypothesis: **There is no significant difference between successful and less successful SMEs on their dependence on entrepreneurial skills and training is rejected.**
The following is the t-test on the training of the skills with the information on table 5.6 below:

Table 5: T-Test Training

	Successful		Less Successful		SIG (2-Sided)
	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	
Business Systems	.383	1.17	.468	1.69	.000
Business Linkages	.383	1.17	.339	1.87	.000
Communication	.383	1.17	.409	1.79	.000
Computer Literacy	.428	1.22	.270	1.92	.000
Creativity	.383	1.17	.442	1.78	.000
Financial Management	.383	1.17	.493	1.62	.001
HRM	.323	1.11	.409	1.79	.000
Legal	.461	1.28	.389	1.82	.000
Life skills	.461	1.28	.366	1.85	.210
Literacy & Numeracy	.428	1.22	.493	1.62	.005
Marketing	.511	1.44	.502	1.56	.009
Operations	.485	1.33	.486	1.64	.030
Research&Development	.485	1.33	.427	1.77	.001
Risk	.502	1.39	.427	1.77	.005
Models	.502	1.39	.389	1.82	.420
Resources	.428	1.22	.442	1.72	.001
Motivation	.428	1.22	.486	1.64	.003
Strategy	.485	1.33	.389	1.82	.001

Supplier	.461	1.28	.468	1.68	.003
Technical	.428	1.22	.427	1.77	.000

α=0.05, Confidence Interval= 95%

There were significant differences between the successful and the less successful respondents on the samples of the skills trained. Most of the successful respondents had been trained in most of the skills with the less successful have been trained in less skills. Life skills and role models have been identified as the only skills in which there is no significant difference between the successful and the less success. This means that both the successful and the less successful have been trained in these skills. **The hypothesis: There is no significant difference between successful and less successful SMEs on their dependence on entrepreneurial skills and training is rejected.**

One Way ANOVA

ANOVA was used to test the significant variance between the success and the less success in the following demographic factors if they are an influential factor in success: Gender, Age, and Ethnic, Education, and Business type, Area, Experience and Turnover.

Table 6:ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	.705	1	.705	3.030	.087
Age	.202	1	.202	.205	.653
Ethnic	.980	1	.980	.818	.370
Education	22.745	1	22.745	5.324	.025
Business type	1.368	1	1.368	1.045	.311
Area	1.512	1	1.512	1.164	.285
Experience	10.886	1	10.886	12.559	.001
Turnover	16.886	1	16.886	27.579	.000

α=0.05, Confidence Interval= 95%

From the figure above there is no significant variance in the way the successful and the less successful SMEs view demographics as a success factor. Age (0.653), gender (0.087), ethnic (0.370), business type (0.311) and area (0.285) all have got p value more than 0.05. The remaining variables, education (0.025), Experience (0.001) and turnover (0.000) have shown that there is significant variance in the way the successful and the less successful SMEs view

demographics as a success factor. **The hypothesis: There is no significant variance between how successful and less successful SMEs view demographics as a success factor is hereby accepted.**

Conclusions

The major conclusions from this study are that the SMEs in the PMI depend on the entrepreneurial and business skills for their success. This study also found out that SMEs in this industry need training in these skills so as to succeed and most of the respondents indicated that they have not yet under gone training. This was major concern for the development of the PMI.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been noticed from the results that were analysed in this research project:

- The most important business skills such as business linkages, business systems, communication, computer literacy and financial management should be integrated into all training programmes of SMEs in all the stages of the entrepreneurial process.
- The most important personal skills like leadership skills, creativity and innovative skills should also be integrated into all training programmes of SMEs in all the stages of the entrepreneurial process.
- Training intervention should be developed for all identified skillsets..
- The training plan for emerging entrepreneurs and school leavers should focus largely on both soft skills, management skills and the technical skills of the proposed venture. Existing SMEs should analyse their strengths and weaknesses in each of the skills categories. They should also enrol themselves in outcome based skills development programmes that furnish them with competence in the identified key skill areas.
- Private training consultancies, mentors, tertiary institutions; NGOs, community-based organisations and industry training organisations who focus on entrepreneurship development should develop competency framework bespoke to varied class of SMEs
- Local Business Service Centres (LBSCs), government agencies, government-sponsored organisations and foreign donor agencies that support small business and youth development should ensure that the programmes they support include training of the all skills specified in this study.
- Regulatory institutions should develop periodic compliance monitoring audit on registered SMEs, to ensure that statutory obligations are fulfilled and entrepreneurs attend requisite manpower development initiatives.

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