

The Association between Business Performance and Strategic Management Implementation among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how SMEs in the commercial districts of Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea, implement strategic management. It identifies the main factors for success and the key barriers related to planning, management, organization, and individual skills. Data were collected from selected wholesale and retail businesses. Tools like rank, weighted mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the findings and measure how barriers affect performance. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis. Results show that financial resources are the most important factor for success, as well as the biggest barrier in all areas studied. The test revealed no significant relationship between strategic management implementation and business performance ($p > .05$). The study recommends ways to help SMEs improve their strategies and overall results

Keywords Strategic implementation, business performance, key success factors, barriers, EHP SMEs

INTRODUCTION:

The SME Policy 2016 of Papua New Guinea (2016, p. vii) envisaged that it is challenging to meet the country's Vision 2050 to be a high-income nation. Such a situation necessitates more rapid development for the small and medium-sized enterprises. PNG envisions the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) sector developing and becoming a major contributor to the country's economy (PNG Ministry of Trade & Finance, 2016). Recently, however, SMEs encountered major constraints on advancement and investment, according to the World Bank's report (Park et al., 2023, p. 74). Per Tebbutt's (2024) research, the "financial and human capital constraints are evident in both the composition of the MSME marketplace." Barriers to SME progressive development require considerable attention. If neglected, the level of attrition among small businesses would be high, with just "50% surviving for five years or more" (Yusoff et al., 2018, p. 43).

The fate of SMEs requires closer attention "to helping new entrepreneurs develop a medium-term business plan, emphasizing strategic planning as a procedure to improve a firm's performance" (Kraus et al., 2008, p. 384). Moreover, the limited professional networking and mentoring opportunities that impede opportunity and the development of business acumen shall be addressed (Tebbutt, 2024, p. 13). However, a plan remains just a design unless it is put into action; the intents are actualized, and activities are performed with utmost efficiency. In addition, organisational performance should be monitored, measured, and evaluated strategically as planned.

An important idea in management is how to measure organisational performance (Tolici, 2021, p.166). Strategic management is an ongoing process of setting an

organization's goals, developing plans of action, and allocating resources (Alharbi, 2024, p.8). The cited functions of SM are necessary for the effective achievement of strategic intents and priorities that an organization needs to accomplish. Many companies use strategic management as a reliable measure to adjust to the competitive business environment (Alharbi, 2024, p. 29). To effectively implement the defined strategy for the company's enhancement, Joyce and Woods (2003, p. 145) advise that the "long-term intents and priorities should be developed earlier so managers could respond and implement them accordingly.

Studies on strategic formulation (or planning) are wide-ranging. However, the strategic execution part of smaller enterprises is limited (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021, p. 23; Kearney et al., 2019, p. 10; Kelliher & Reinl, 2009, p. 522). Hence, the current study explored the applicability of the strategic management implementation concept among SMEs and factors that contribute to the success of strategic implementation practices. Likewise, the study determines the obstacles hindering the strategic implementation activities mechanisms that affect the strategic intents and priorities of SMEs in the province of Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea.

1.1. Problem Statement

Most small to medium-sized businesses have formulated plans. However, due to several difficulties, implementation of these plans remains a major problem for them (Mwanza, 2025; Pisano, 2024, p.3). The escalation in internet usage, globalization, and internationalization of markets obliged them to change tactics to be in tune with the times. As affirmed by Wheelen & Hunger (2012; 2019), "poor planning or implementation of plans leads to business failure." Strategy implementation frameworks have been criticized for not emphasizing in-depth analysis of interactions

among factors, limiting full understanding of the process (Ahmed, 2021, p. 104). As Porter (1985, p. 23) cited, “the greater threat to strategy often comes from within.”

The significant understanding and evidence of this concept, the strategic management implementation empirically employed in the PNG context, is limited. This study investigates the factors that contribute to the successful implementation of strategic management, the obstacles that impede it, and how these elements impact the organizational performance of SMEs operating in the commercial districts of Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the key factors across organizational structure, operations, human resources, and customer and market dimensions that influence the successful implementation of strategic management by SMEs?
2. What is the leading factor hindering the implementation of strategic management strategies among SMEs, considering the aspects of planning, organization, management, and individual employee roles?
3. What is the degree of impact of given barrier dimensions on the success of the strategic implementation of strategies of SMEs?
4. Is there a significant relationship between business performance and the strategic management implementation strategies employed by SMEs in the commercial districts of Eastern Highlands Province?

1.2. Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between business performance and strategic implementation strategies of the SMEs in the commercial districts of EHP, PNG.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between business performance and strategic implementation strategies of the SMEs in the commercial districts of EHP, PNG.

1.3. Purpose and objective

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge concerning SMEs’ strategic management implementation dynamics and business performance. It aims to determine whether strategic implementation practices are effective in enhancing SMEs’ productivity, operational efficiency, and profitability.

1.4. Delimitation and limitation

This study did not examine in detail the financial, administrative, and marketing operations of the participating SMEs, nor did it explore the operations of the provincial government of Eastern Highlands Province. The study was conducted in one province, but it provides a basis for the conclusion from the gathered data. Furthermore, the study employed a cross-sectional survey design rather than a longitudinal approach, which may have provided different insights over time; this is recognized as another limitation of the study.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. Business Performance

Financial and non-financial performances are the mechanisms of business performance in general. Financial performance is measured in monetary terms as a result of the business's financial operations. Non-financial performance cannot be measured in monetary terms (Artha & Satriadhi, 2023, p. 42). Examples of the latter are “brand reputation, customer satisfaction, organizational performance, and innovation activities” as provided by Artha & Satriadhi (2023, p. 43).

SMEs possess common entrepreneurial qualities. These qualities are intangible resources of the enterprises that enable SMEs to achieve their long-term goals of business sustainability. As affirmed by Hernandez-Linares et al. (2019, p. 452), “pro-activeness, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy” were found to be significant. The study of Grimaldi et al (2019, p. 17) finds that “better customer management and provider operational efficiency” is beneficial. For Fernando et al (2019, p. 8), “service innovation capability, eco-innovation and service innovation competence” enable an organization to achieve a competitive edge and sustain the business.

2.2. Strategic Management

Strategic Management (SM) involves devising long-term plans and executing the major goals and enterprises by managers on behalf of the owners and other parties interested in the business (Nag, Hambrick, & Chen, 2018, p. 943). The basis of SM considers various resources and the study of the internal and external environments that could affect the organization’s operations and achievement of the planned goals (Abbass F., 2003, p. 21). Strategic management helps businesses succeed and stand out from competitors (Parnell 2005, p. 16; Porter 1985, p. 3). It lets managers use “strengths and opportunities while cutting weaknesses and threats (David, 2005, p. 12).

Figure 1 illustrates the phases of strategic management (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008, pp 5-8).

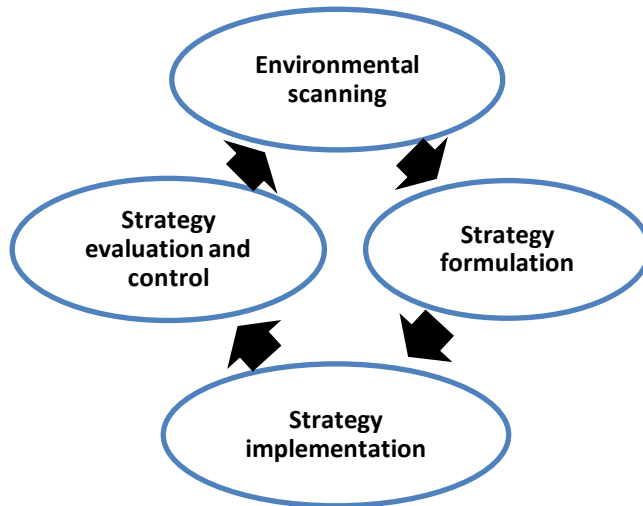


Figure 1: The Phases of Strategic Management

(Source: *Wheelen and Hunger, 2008, p. 11*)

Strategic Management’s function and definition take into consideration the current and desired business future position, strategy for achieving the planned future position, and evaluating and feeding back activities (Hofstrand 2007, p. 2).

2.3. Strategic Management Implementation

The planned strategies of an organization are actualized through strategic means and implementation (Weiser et al., 2020, p. 971; Heide et al., 2002, p 218). Strategic implementation is the most challenging phase of strategic management (Zaidi et al., 2018, p. 45; Ivancic, 2016, p. 17). In the study conducted by Raps (2004, p.102) and Cater & Pucko (2010, p. 210) found that “up to 90% of strategies fail during implementation.” Progressive organizations use strategic implementation to cope with market changes, information technology, globalization, quality customer demands, and tough competition (Manktelow & Carlson, 2014, p. 5). These factors do not exempt SMEs (Gamage et al., 2020, p 3).

The strategy implementation phase translates the outcomes of strategic formulation into positive actions. Strategy formulation and execution involve

entrepreneurial features such as “alertness, creativity, and judgment (Klein, Barney, & Foss, 2012, p. 13). Entrepreneurs create and capture value through resource acquisition and competitive positioning (Klein, Barney, & Foss, 2012, p.27). Strategy formulation and strategy implementation are assumed as two sides of the same coin “(Wheelen and Hunger, 2008, p. 19).

Table 1 mentions several strategic management authors and researchers who have identified and evaluated the significance of factors influencing strategic implementation.

It is evident that firms which implement strategic planning achieve better performances than those without such planning, but these strategies often fail due to problems encountered at the implementation stage” (O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2002, p. 247). Strategic decisions should, however, be implemented with full awareness that their success is vital for the organization in question (O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2002, p. 249). By identifying the factors that influence the practices and outcomes of the strategy implementation stage, an organization will be better prepared for future performance and ultimately will accrue to the bottom line (O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2002, p. 251).

Table 1: Factors Influencing Strategic Management Implementation

Source	Factors
Birnbaum (2007, p. 18)	“Action planning, organizational structure, human resources, annual business plan, monitoring and control, linkage “
Higgins (2005, p. 42)	“Strategy and purposes, structure, systems and processes, style of leadership, staff, resources, shared values, organizational culture, strategic performance”
Okumus (2001, p. 327)	“Content, context, process, outcome”
Lingle & Schieman (1994, p. 22)	“Market, people, finance, operation, adaptability, and environmental factors”

Sandelands (1994, p. 36)	“Commitment, time, emotion, energy”
Eisenstat (1993, 78)	“Competence, coordination, commitment”
Yip (1992, p. 29)	“Organization structure, culture, people, and managerial processes”
Skivington & Draft (1991, p. 46)	“Strategy, structure, systems, interactions, sanctions”
David (1989, p. 56)	“Motivation, leadership & direction skills, coordination”
Peters& Waterman (1982, 10)	“Structure, style, staff, shared values, skills, system, strategy”

According to Wheelen and Hunger (2019, p. 8), “the sole objective of strategic management and execution is the improvement and development of an organization's performance.” They also emphasized that “to continue operating financially and maintaining their competitiveness, every company must face challenges throughout the plan implementation phase”(Wheelen and Hunger, 2019, p. 272). The hardest part of the strategic management process is implementing the strategy. Okumus (2003, p. 240) advised that the organization should “make necessary adjustments to its operations, culture, and structure.”It must also provide ample resources and inspire staff membersto achieve the intended goals as planned (Okumuş, 2003, p. 432).

2.4. Barriers to SM ImplementationSuccess

Organisations often face difficulties in executing their plans (Vernizzi et al., 2019, p. 66). Though some companies have good and solid strategies, they achieve “disappointing results because they are not implemented strategically” (Vernizzi et al., 2019, p. 66). A strong strategy with no implementation has no value. Strategy implementation is critical because the level of success or failure significantlyimpactsthe organization's financial performance and sustainability. The major downsideof the plan’s implementation is the clarity and speed with which the proposed strategy is made known andeffectively understood by employees. If this drawback is addressed, employees could implement the planned strategy effectively (Sanad, A. & Anitha, S., 2018, p. 112).

Some scholars, for example, Marginson (2012, p. 39), Lares-Makki (2014, p. 19),and Koske (2013, p. 67) identified several challenges in the strategy implementation. They are: “weak and poor management implementation’s positions”, “lack of or inadequate communication”, “lack of awareness or comprehension of the strategy”, “lack of commitment to the strategy”, “unaligned organizational resources and processes”, and “poor coordination of work”. Alashloo et al. (2005, 76) categorized these challenges as issues and consequences

of “planning, organizational, managerial,and individual employees”.

2.5. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Contingency Theory to support the conceptual framework. According to the RBV, “businesses perform differently, as each business has different internal resources. The internal organizational resources refer to the strengths and weaknesses that exist in a particular firm” (Wernerfeldt, 1984, p. 172). These include the assets, capabilities, information, and knowledge that are controlled (owned) by the firm in question (Barney, 1991, p. 101; Wernerfeldt, 1984, p. 174). Therefore, the business’s competitive advantage comes from internal resources.The RBV focuses on the firm’s ability to maintain a combination of resources that cannot be owned by or built in the same way by competitors. The RBV holds that “firms compete using the resources and capabilities available within them” (Peteraf & Bergen, 2003, p. 1028). Furthermore, Khotimah (2014, p. 52) highlighted that the “RBV sees firms as groups of resources and capabilities.”The RBV focuses on the firm’s ability to maintain a combination of resources that cannot be owned by or built in the same way by competitors.

On the other hand, Contingency Theory in management proposes that “the most effective leadership approach depends entirely on the specific situation at hand.”It emphasizes the importance of matching leadership styles, organizational structures, and decision-making processes to each business’s unique circumstances (Fielder, 1960, p. 26). Contingency theory revolutionized how managers think about management effectiveness. It challenged traditional “one best way” approaches and introduced a more nuanced, flexible framework for organizational success (Peek, 2006, p. 14).

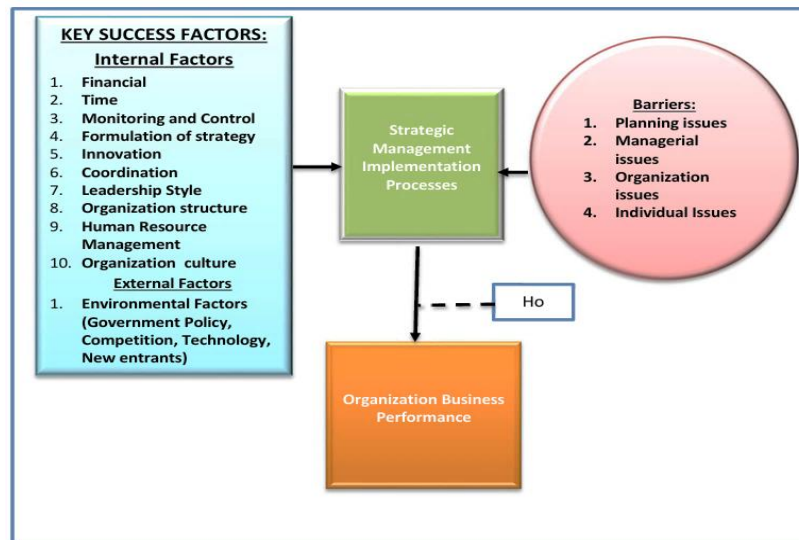


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Author's idea)

Figure 1 presents the study's theoretical and conceptual framework. The framework indicates that internal and external factors influence the success of the strategic management implementation process. As indicated by the arrows, all factors have equal influence on the strategic management's implementation stage. Three of the factors, collaborative management (coordination and leadership style), collegial support (human resources, formulated strategy), and unity of purpose (financial resources, time, monitoring and control, innovation) directly deal with how the employees and managers should relate to each other in accomplishing their task. The barriers to planning, management (Robbins & Coulter, 2018, p. 145), operations (Slack & Brandon, 2020, pp. 56-59), and individual employee issues (Mathis & Jackson, 2017, p. 212) relate to knowledge, skills, attitudes, environment, technology, and stepwise services and processes that the organization engages in. As highlighted by Hill & Jones (2021, p. 92), all "these barriers affect the organization's working environment, culture, and strategic implementation mechanisms" in achieving the planned results, favoring the organization and its business performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized mixed-method research. It involves a questionnaire as a quantitative method and an interview as a qualitative method. To collect the required quality data and information using a quantitative method, an open-ended questionnaire was issued to industrial managers and entrepreneur respondents. For the qualitative method, the researcher utilized semi-structured interview questions. The questions pertain to the KSF and the barriers encountered during strategic implementation.

The mixed-method in research is useful because it leads to the illustration, elaboration, enhancement, and clarification of the outcome by comparing it with the output received from another method; helps identify and detect possible conflict and paradox in the result; and discovery of a new viewpoint and perspective structure or framework (Srivastava, 2011). The data came from the responses of 80 randomly sampled small and medium

enterprises (SMEs) in the province of Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea. To achieve the purpose of the study, the respondent-participants were the SMEs' proprietors and/or managers directly involved in planning and implementing business strategies and activities for three years or more.

The questions on the KSF and the barriers for the intervening variables were evaluated based on five-point Likert scales. A mean of 4.50 – 5.00 means the level is very high, a mean of 3.50 – 4.49 means the level is high, a mean of 2.50 – 3.49 means the level is moderate, a mean of 1.50-2.49 means the level is low, and a mean of 1.00 – 1.44 means that the level is very low. To test the significance of two categorical variables, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to compute the validity of the study's hypothesis. The Pearson correlation coefficient is also an inferential statistic, meaning that it can be used to test statistical hypotheses (Pallant, 2020, p. 128; Turney, 2024).

4.0. Findings of the study

4.1. The Key Success Factors (KSFs)

Table 2 shows that SMEs in EHP strongly agreed on the eleven (11) key success factors chosen by the study. The results of the interviews disclose that the identified factors are important variables alongside the various activities in implementing the planned activities towards the achievement of the respective businesses' intents and priorities.

Under the organization dimension, it appears that the SMEs are knowledgeable about the importance and role of having a strategy formulated, a factor which they ranked first. SMEs have limited resources, including funds, talent, time, and technology. A well-formulated strategy identifies the most important and ensures that limited resources are distributed efficiently and effectively. Moreover, without a well-formulated strategy as a guide, SMEs may engage to unwise spending that would result in resources wasted on low-value activities and therefore undermine the enterprises' implementation efforts. In effect, a well-established strategy supports

management decision-making, enhances coordination and collaboration, enables the owners to conduct performance measurement and control, and builds adaptability and resilience.

On the human resources factors, the SMEs highly favored the “coordination” factor. As such, they recognized that coordination is a critical support to successful strategic implementation. Coordination refers to the process of integrating and synchronizing the activities, resources, and efforts of individuals, teams, and departments within an organization to achieve its strategic objectives. Without effective coordination, even well-formulated strategies can falter during execution.

For the operational dimension of the study, the randomly sampled SME manager/owner-respondents

overwhelmingly claimed that “Financial Resources” is the most important factor towards the successful implementation of the strategic intents and priorities by SMEs in the province. Financial resources are all kinds of funds available within an organization that are ready for use in the business. SMEs use this resource as a business continuity measure to ensure the progressive and efficient business operation within an organization. Companies can also use financial resources to enforce operating costs, increase reproduction costs, meet financial obligations, and create economic incentives for workers (Brovko & Karpova, 2021, p. 3). Financial resources also flow to the maintenance and development of non-productive objects, consumption, accumulation, and special reserves, among others

Table 2: KSF Descriptive Statistics

Rank	Key Success Factor	Min	Max	N	SD	WM	VI
Organization Dimension							
1	Strategy formulated	2	5	80	0.774	4.43	H
2	Organization structure	2	5	79	1.017	3.95	H
3	Organization culture	2	5	79	0.975	3.85	H
					0.922	4.08	
Human Resource Dimension							
1	Coordination	2	5	78	1.017	4.15	H
2	Leadership Style	2	5	79	0.886	4.1	H
3	Employee agility & engagement	2	5	78	1.075	3.87	H
					0.993	4.04	
Operations Dimension							
1	Financial Resources	2	5	80	0.75	4.64	VH
2	Time Factor	3	5	80	0.655	4.54	VH
3	Monitoring and Control	1	5	80	0.742	4.46	H
					0.716	4.55	
Customer & Market Dimension							
1	Customer Acquisition	2	5	79	0.856	4.32	H
2	Innovation	2	5	79	0.863	4.19	H
3	Branding	2	5	80	1.196	3.5	M
					0.972	4	
Overall					0.901	4.17	H

Note: *N* – population; *SD* – standard deviation; *WM* – weighted mean; *VI* – verbal interpretation; *VH* – very high; *H* – high; *M* – moderate”

Based on the interviews, the study’s participants cited that without sufficient financial resources, the enterprise cannot implement their strategy successfully. Hence, they classified financial resources as a factor influencing strategic implementation towards success. Financial issues could be considered SMEs’ weakest point based on the past research on SMEs (Karadağ, 2015, p. 28). However, the current study finds that SMEs are capable of coping with this issue, noting the very high percentage of respondents who are decisive in realizing their strategic intent of positive business performance.

It is also worth noting the “Time” factor under operational dimension, which is likewise very highly favored by the respondents. In Time Management, the element of time is important because “it helps a manager control an entrepreneur’s workday so he can build his business without compromising work-life balance” (Gül et al., 2023, p. 58). When an entrepreneur learns to block his daytime for all-important tasks, he will have a better idea of what he needs and how long each task takes to accomplish (Ning et al., 2023, p. 40). If the manager has a schedule to follow, he will likely have less time to decide what to work on and spend more time on important business matters (Ning et al., 2023, p. 40). In simple terms, this means that by managing time, management can help entrepreneurs focus on just the essentials of business ahead and avoid time-consuming distractions (Ning et al., 2023, p. 40).

In strategic management, the time factor is not just a deadline. Time dictates whether a strategy survives the real world. To effectively implement the defined strategy for the firm’s enhancement, “the strategic decisions should be taken in faster ways, and the implementer’s response should be high” (Baum & Wally, 2003). Timing is everything. An average strategy executed at the right time beats a perfect strategy executed too late.

The following participants’ statements during interviews demonstrate their knowledge, ideas, and the importance of time in business.

Participant 3: “Time is an important factor in every decision because opportunities open and close rapidly”.

Participant 9: “Speed allows you to capture market share”.

Participant 16: “Long delays kill employee buy-in and energy”.

Participant 32: “Slow implementation wastes capital and man-hours.”

Participant 45: “The world changes; a slow strategy becomes obsolete.”

Under the customer and market dimensions, customer acquisition is the most highly favored KSF. According to the current study’s participants, “customer acquisition is a critical factor in strategic management implementation because it directly influences business growth, profitability, and long-term sustainability.” “If SMEs can systematically attract, engage, and convert potential customers into paying clients, then business performance is assured.”

The interview with the participants reveals that their businesses often have customers leaving. Customer acquisition efforts are vital in finding new customers and maintaining a stable customer base. Without a consistent influx of new clients, businesses cannot grow, expand their market share, or achieve their financial objectives. Hence, SMEs are aware that strategic implementation activities create opportunities for a healthy sales conduit. Moreover, while acquiring new customers can be expensive, “a well-executed strategy ensures that the Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) of these customers significantly outweighs the Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)” (Vysochyn & Ahata, 2021, p. 95). This favorable ratio is fundamental to long-term profitability (Vysochyn & Ahata, 2021, p. 95).

4.2. Barriers towards effective SM implementation

4.2.1 Planning Issues

Table 3: Barriers to SM Implementation (Planning Aspect)

Rank	Descriptor	Min	Max	N	SD	WM	VI
1	Unclear regulations and executive policies	2	5	76	0.697	4.32	H
2	Lack of a national attitude to strategy	3	5	79	0.759	4.25	H
3	Time limitation	3	5	80	0.755	4.25	H
4	Lack of identity - the major problem and barriers	3	5	79	1.121	4.23	H
5	Lack of exact strategic planning	3	5	79	0.716	4.11	H
6	Lack of efficient role formulators	3	5	79	0.747	4.08	H
7	Inadequate linking of strategy to goals	3	5	78	0.779	4.06	H
8	Lack of choice of a real strategy	2	5	79	0.855	3.99	H
9	Lack of consensus among decision makers	3	5	78	0.72	3.85	H

10	Unsuitable training system	2	5	79	0.912	3.61	H
Overall					0.806	4.07	H

Note: “N – population; SD – standard deviation; WM – weighted mean; VI – verbal interpretation; H – high”

Strategic formulation (aka: strategic planning) is “a management process that helps an organization set priorities, focus resources, align everyone toward shared goals, agree on desired results, and adjust its direction to adapt to changes” (Yurttadur et al., 2017, p. 115). Strategic implementation actualizes the results under strategic formulation. The actions include “establishing programs, determining budgets, and creating procedures on how to translate plans into reality” (Koech & Were, 2016, p. 3). In dealing with cited categories, the SME-participants’ knowledge and awareness of which of these categories has a greater influence on the failure of strategies in planning are uncovered.

Table 3 summarizes the barriers and issues that cause the faulty implementation of the business strategic plan. The respondents generally agreed (4.07) with the 10 barrier-descriptors in the survey. “Unclear regulations and executive policies in accomplishing the planned strategies by management’ is the leading barrier (4.32) ranked by the respondents. Policies are guidelines agreed upon by a group of people in a business organization to guide them in particular situations (Zakari, 2023, p. 37). Stainer et al (2009, p. 41) explicitly state, “at its core and purpose,

planning is fundamentally goal-setting, defining what the enterprise aims to achieve.” On the other hand, Eck (2000, p. 17) noted that “planning serves equally to articulate, define and clarify the business’s vision, making long-term direction clear to all involved.”

4.2.2. Managerial Issues

Managerial issues arise because SMEs as organizations are complex in nature, particularly in their structure (Storey, 1994; Gibb, 2005), decision-making (Wiklund et al., 2009), and operations and tasking (Julien, 1993; Ghobakhloo et al., 2012).

Table 4 describes the indicators of the strategic implementation of SMEs’ strategies on managerial issues. The unsuitable leadership and lack of adequate manager commitment are perceived as highly dominant. The absence of good leadership is a great hindrance not only to the success of strategic implementation but to successful business operations. Unsuitable leadership not only negatively influences overall organizational performance but also affects the employees’ morale (Chang et al., 2024, p. 4).

Table 4: Barriers to SM Implementation (Management Issues)

Rank	Descriptor	Min	Max	N	SD	WM	VI
1	Unsuitable leadership	2	5	80	0.613	4.44	H
2	Lack of adequate manager’s commitment	3	5	80	0.613	4.44	H
3	Lack of enough motivation among the managers	2	5	80	0.882	3.89	H
4	Unsuitable personnel management	2	5	80	0.917	3.76	H
5	Lack of adequate organizational support	2	5	80	1.008	3.65	H
6	Fear of insecurity among managers	2	5	80	1.031	3.50	H
7	Political factors regarding to power	1	5	80	1.034	3.50	H
8	Uncontrollable factors	2	5	80	1.034	3.36	M
Overall					0.892	3.82	H

N.B.: N – population; SD – standard deviation; WM – weighted mean; VI – verbal interpretation; H – high; M – moderate

The inadequate manager’s commitment to the organization’s goals hinders the strategic implementation process. Without their support and commitment, most programs will not progress. The staff implementer tends to treat the process with a lukewarm attitude. Worst-case scenario, the project’s implementation is shelved altogether. This finding is similar to the research findings of Allendoerfer et al. (2015, p. 12) and Wium et

al. (2021, p. 4), claiming that “without the support and commitment of the firm’s management, most programs will wither and die off quickly.” The same scholars opine that “most successful programs often have a critical program champion and require strong executive leadership support to push the program forward”. Moreover, Wium, Van der Merwe, & Venter (2021, p. 4) study find that “projects and programs simply

cannot survive without consistent support from those in authority.”

4.2.3. Organization Issues

Certain factors unfavorably affect the SME’s strategy implementation. The planned goals of most SMEs are achievable provided that proper planning and coordination between activities are active and efficient. Goal attainment relies on the division of work, the authority-responsibility relationship, and the desired objective outcomes, which have been discussed among employees (Chell, 1987).

Based on the survey with respondents on organizational issues, the duly processed data indicate that unsuitable resource allocation, evaluation, and control systems impacted the strategic implementation of the business enterprises’ planned activities. Unsuitable resource allocation comes in different forms. It could be a misalignment of resources, leading to poor allocation of funds and time; over- or under-commitment of the labor force; and a mismatch between the skills and technology applied to projects. These factors directly undermine the effectiveness of the strategies which SMEs have implemented, as noted by notable organizations (OECD, 2019, p. 53; Beck & Demirgüç-Kunt, 2006, p. 29-38).

Table 5: Barriers to SM Implementation (Organization Issues)

Rank	Descriptor	Min	Max	N	SD	WM	VI
1	Unsuitable resources allocation	3	5	80	0.613	4.44	H
2	Unsuitable evaluation and control systems	3	5	80	0.661	4.44	H
3	Lack of effective coordination	2	5	79	0.753	4.25	H
4	Lack of an adequate information system	2	5	80	0.816	4.18	H
5	Incompatible organizational culture	1	5	80	0.839	4.08	H
6	The organizational structure & strategy are not compatible	3	5	80	0.832	4.06	H
7	Lack of adequate communication	1	5	80	1.217	3.93	H
8	Competing activities among people	1	5	80	1.184	3.66	H
9	Insufficient physical facilities	1	5	80	1.198	3.53	H
10	Competing activities among units	1	5	80	1.222	3.04	M
Overall					0.933	3.95	H

N.B.: *N* – population; *SD* – standard deviation; *WM* – weighted mean; *VI* – verbal interpretation; *H* – high; *M* – moderate

On the other hand, unsuitable evaluation and control systems also pose a significant barrier to strategic implementation. Progressive organizations usually employ monitoring and evaluation for every decision they make and implement to learn and avoid project delays or misuse of funds. SMEs’ control systems come into play because this sector is characterized by fewer staff, limited funds, and other resources as compared with large firms (Drury, 2018, p. 811). SMEs’ unsuitable control systems may be caused by the absence of, or outdated policy controls, informal, irrelevant measures, poorly aligned measurements, and overly complex feedback and correction processes (Slack & Brandon, 2020, pp. 56–59). Evaluation and monitoring are essential, as they enable organizations to identify deviations and make necessary adjustments. Control systems track usage, eliminate waste and unnecessary costs, and ensure every resource supports core business goals, directly boosting profitability (Julien, 1993).

4.2.4. Individual Employee Issues

Table 6 presents the managers’ opinions on the main issues related to individual employees during the actualization of strategic plans. The biggest problem is that most employees don’t feel connected to the company’s core purpose or mission. This situation is a major obstruction to making plans work well. When staff don’t understand or care about what the business stands for, they are far less likely to support its goals. They may even resist the much-needed changes.

If people don’t know the big picture, their daily work activities will not align with the company’s mission. This wastes time and money and pulls the team in different directions instead of together. Also, when workers don’t feel linked to the mission, they are less motivated and less productive. Conversely, the lack of clarity or connection leads to disengagement and reduced productivity (Mas-Machuca & Marimon, 2019, p. 107). Moreover, people work better and harder when they feel their work matters, according to Dobrinić & Fabac (2021, p. 128).

Table 6: Barriers to SM Implementation (Individual Employee Issues)

Rank	Barrier	Min	Max	N	SD	WM	VI
1	Insufficient connection to the mission	3	5	80	0.684	4.38	H
2	Lack of employee commitment	2	5	80	0.826	4.03	H
3	Lack of understanding of strategy	1	5	80	0.906	3.94	H
4	Resistance to change among people	2	5	80	0.93	3.91	H
5	Lack of sufficient capability of employees	1	5	80	0.999	3.81	H
6	Lack of employee motivation	1	5	80	1.109	3.8	H
7	Resistance to change among units	1	5	80	1.133	3.55	H
8	Fear of insecurity in the new territory	2	5	80	1.005	3.25	M
Overall					0.949	3.83	H

N.B.: “N – population; SD – standard deviation; WM – weighted mean; VI – verbal interpretation; high; M – moderate”

H –

4.3. Degree of impact of barriers to the success of strategic implementation of SMEs in PNG

Table 7 shows the summary of the Pearson correlation coefficient, which was employed to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent variables, namely: Planning Consequences,

Management Issues, Organization Issues, and Individual Issues, with the dependent variable Strategic Management Implementation.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Matrix between Study Variables

Barrier Category	Pearson Correlation (r)	Degree of Relationship	Direction of Relationship
Planning Barriers	0.921	Very Strong	Negative
Organizational Barriers	0.894	Very Strong	Negative
Management Barriers	0.876	Very Strong	Negative
Individual Employee Issues	0.843	Very Strong	Negative

Based on the data presented, it appears that as planning barriers increase (e.g., unclear policies, poor strategy design), implementation success decreases drastically. Planning issues are the most critical predictor of failure.

The issues with resources, systems, structure, and culture have a very strong negative impact. These structural factors determine whether plans can actually be executed.

Leadership quality, manager commitment, and motivation levels are strongly linked to outcomes. Weak management is almost always associated with poor implementation results.

4.4. Test of Hypotheses

Table 8: Summary of Pearson Correlation Analysis between Strategic Implementation Practices and Business Performance

Variable	N	Σx	Σy	$\Sigma x \cdot y$	Σx^2	Σy^2	r	df	α	Two-tailed t	Critical t ($t_{\alpha/2, df}$)
Business Performance (x)	80	325	1,450	1,385	1,535	—	0.88	78	0.05	1.52	1.99

Strategic Implementation (y)	80	345	—	—	—	1,535	—	—	—	—	—
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Note. Σ = sum of values; $\Sigma x \cdot y$ = sum of products; Σx^2 = sum of squared x values; Σy^2 = sum of squared y values; $r =$

Pearson correlation coefficient; df = degrees of freedom; α = significance level; t = calculated test statistic.

Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to assess the linear relationship between Business Performance and Strategic Implementation Practices among SMEs in Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. The analysis was based on a sample size of $N = 80$. Descriptive sums and computational values required for the correlation calculation are presented in Table 8.

The results indicated a strong positive association between the two variables, $r(78) = .88, p = .134$. However, statistical testing revealed that this relationship was not significant at the 0.05 significance level. The calculated t-value was 1.52, which was lower than the critical t-value of 1.990 for a two-tailed test with 78 degrees of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis that the population correlation coefficient (ρ) equals zero could not be rejected. These findings suggest that while higher strategic implementation practices appeared to align with better business performance in the sample, this trend was not statistically significant and may be due to chance variation.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study found that the most important factors for success are having a clear plan, good teamwork/coordination, sufficient funds, and acquiring new customers. These matter more than things like company structure, staff skills, daily operations, or market conditions.

When it comes to putting plans into action, small and medium businesses in this area face big challenges. These include: unclear rules and policies for planning; weak leadership and a lack of commitment from managers; poor use of resources and ineffective systems for checking progress; and employees not understanding or caring about the company’s main purpose.

The results showed a strong link between how well strategies are used and how well the business performs — but statistically, this link wasn’t strong enough to count as proof. Based on the test results, we cannot say for sure that using strategic management actually improves business performance for these companies in Eastern Highlands Province, PNG.

Overall, businesses here are not very interested in using strategic management to build long-term goals. This is mainly because they are small, have limited resources, or are located far from main centers. Very small businesses focus on daily sales, while larger ones care more about getting paid faster and moving stock quickly.

6.0. CONCLUSION

This study carefully explores how small and medium-sized businesses in the Eastern Highlands Province implemented strategic plans into action and what helps them run better and achieve more. The results clearly show that strategic management helps managers understand exactly what matters most when carrying out these plans. The study identified the main factor that drives success — covering how the business is organized, how staff is managed, daily operations, and how you serve and attract customers. The study also found the biggest obstacles that get in the way, related to planning, the business itself, business management, and the level of employees’ engagement.

Statistical tests showed a strong link between using these strategies and better business results — but mathematically, this link wasn’t strong enough to count as solid proof for the businesses we studied in Eastern Highlands Province, PNG. This means that while there may be a connection in theory, we couldn’t confirm it clearly in this specific setting.

Putting all the findings together, it’s clear these businesses already have a basic understanding of strategic planning and how to use it. They also mostly agree on what leads to success and what causes problems. Although the study didn’t find a proven link to better performance, this shared knowledge gives a solid starting point in building better support and strategies for them in the future.

7.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study’s findings, the following are the suggested measures to help small and medium-sized businesses in Eastern Highlands Province, PNG, put plans into action better and do well:

1. Business owners are strongly advised to join training courses on operations, human resource and financial management; monitoring, evaluation and control systems’ formulation and implementation. Programs run by the government or other organizations are great ways to learn. The suggested areas of training will help SMEs turn their future goals into real results, and set clear priorities using medium-term business plans.
2. SMEs should it a priority to help their employees learn new skills and feel more committed to the business, through formal courses or on-the-job training. Also, give some planning and management tasks to supervisors or team leaders. This helps them grow as leaders and makes work run more smoothly.
3. Groups-in-charge of helping small businesses in PNG, both government and private, should pay more and special attention to smaller businesses in remote areas. They should give help that matches their needs particularly in IT, e-accounting, monitoring, evaluation and control system’s tools and wares; and those special provisions embodied in the 2016 SME

Policy, so these businesses can overcome their unique challenges.

4. Suggestions for future studies:

- i. Why plans fail: Research could create tools to show exactly what causes strategic plans to fail, and how much each problem matters.
- ii. What matters most locally: A study to look at what goals PNG businesses focus on most when planning.
- iii. Useful planning tools: To find out which planning tools business owners actually trust and use, and what stops them from using them more widely.

8.0. Conflict of interest

The study has gained no sponsorship from external sources. Hence, there is no conflict of interest in this study.

9.0. Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to extend his sincere gratitude to the SMEs' participants and respondents for their unselfish cooperation and time devoted during the survey and interview sessions. Sincere acknowledgement is also accorded to Ms. Margaret Sellers for her assistance to the researcher during the data gathering in the remote districts of EHP, PNG

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