

BOTSWANA'S MANUFACTURING SMEs INNOVATION & BUSINESS ACUMEN

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide firms are engaged in a fierce battle for the hearts of the masses by trying to produce products which can appeal to them. This is because a nation's quality of life is linked to the quantity and quality of products and services that can be generated by their entities for domestic and export markets. Exporting products and services enables firms to earn foreign exchange, continue to operate and contribute to the government coffers through taxes. The business environment is faced with tough competition from businesses targeting the same market with similar or upgraded offerings. The ability to hold the fort is dependent on innovative offerings that give customers more value than competitors. Botswana's manufacturing Small Micro Enterprises face fierce competition from the Global North manufacturers targeting the local and regional markets. Survival of local businesses is not guaranteed, and this paper seeks to investigate Botswana's manufacturing Small Micro Enterprises' business acumen as can be witnessed from their application of product innovation best practices. This will be compared with international manufacturing firm's product innovation best practices performance. The study adopted a qualitative approach by using a case study approach. The data collection was done through document analysis and semi-structured interviews of three local Small Micro Enterprises. The findings indicate that the business acumen of local manufacturing enterprises is very low due to their failure to observe product innovation business best practices and use of business forecast tools. The findings helped in drawing up the firms' collective Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis which painted a clearer picture of the businesses position. This calls for stakeholders to introduce proactive business intervention measures especially in product innovation and its best practices as well as in the business side of things.

Keywords: Product innovation, manufacturing, business acumen, strategy, small micro enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Governments worldwide are tasked with the mammoth task of ensuring that they develop manufacturing businesses in their countries. They try by all means to attract foreign direct investors and capitalise on their citizens to start businesses. The government of Botswana is also engaged in such practices. Having made less impact at attracting foreign investors, capitalising on citizen's remains a viable option. The government's efforts to attract investors have been going on for several decades. However, there are only a few success stories for such

investments. CEDA (2020) observes that the manufacturing sector has been chosen as one of the sectors that the Botswana government could develop to achieve its twin objectives of employment creation and diversification of the economy. Success in the manufacturing business is premised on several factors. The main one is the market, and according to Statistics Botswana (2023), Botswana's population is 2,346,179, thus providing enterprises with a small local market. CIMA (2010) opines that competitive manufacturing is an economy's foundation because of its critical role in a country's long-term prosperity. "Botswana aspires to have a manufacturing sector that produces commercially viable, high-value products targeted at the export market" (CEDA, 2020, p. 16).

“Manufacturing can be defined as the use of tools and labour in an industrial operation to turn raw materials into a finished product for sale at a profit” (Havas, 2009: 29). Manufacturing is premised as a source of more robust and sustainable growth (CIMA, 2010: CEDA 2020). It is also critical to economic growth, prosperity, and a higher standard of living (Havas, 2009: CIMA, 2010: AME,2020: CEDA, 2020). According to Ezell and Atkinson (2011) manufacturing is important for countries for the following reasons; it is extremely difficult for any country to balance its trade account without a healthy manufacturing sector; is a key driver of overall job growth; is vital to a country’s national security; is the principal source of Research and Development (R&D) and innovation activity; and its services sectors are inseparable and complementary.

Ezell and Atkinson (2011) also acknowledge a myriad of interventions to Small Micro Enterprises (SMEs) by developed countries confirming their importance. One way for SMEs to be competitive is by constantly developing new and unique products (Sheers & Mmatli, 2019). The entities must develop innovative offerings and outwit multi-corporations. This can be done through product innovation, which is key to a firm's market survival and growth (Ma & Jin, 2019). Local SMEs therefore need to follow suite and develop innovative products and services if they are to survive.

Innovation is a paradigm that points to the creation of value in a product whether through costs, quality or performance (Reguia, 2014). For manufacturing SMEs, innovation can be found in the type of products they produce, production processes, services rendered and so forth. For such to be innovative it has to depart from the norm or status quo. The current scenario in Botswana is that policies that promote innovation are not integrated and there is no coordinated implementation plan (CEDA, 2020, Sekonopo, 2023). Boubeker (2016) assessment of Botswana manufacturing SMEs revealed that most of these companies have focused on product development without a good understanding of market trends and demand. Thus resulting in products which are out of tune with the market or don’t earn much profits. SMEs therefore need to focus on their business's product innovation necessities and best practices for them to be able to forge an edge as is the case with large firms. De Araujo et al. (2022) note that it is relevant to expand research on best practices in new product development in developing countries if they are to be successful. It is against this premise that this paper discusses the research aims and objectives, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study, and the challenges local manufacturing entities face. The research method, product

innovation best practices/success factors and how the same were assessed against sampled manufacturing SMEs practices will be discussed.

OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to investigate the application of, or lack thereof, product innovation best practices amongst product manufacturing SMEs in Botswana. This was achieved by answering the following research questions:

- i) How does Botswana manufacturing SMEs operationalise product innovation best practices in their product innovation?
- ii) To what extent are business management tools applied in new product development entities?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was premised on the absorptive capability view (ACAP), which results in developing a dynamic capability that can be utilised to produce innovative products. The framework was developed by Cohen and Levintal (1990), who define it as the "ability to recognise the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends." Their definition was more focused on R&D and was expanded by Zahra and George (2002) to a set of organisational routines and processes by which firms acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit knowledge to produce a dynamic organisational capability. The main goal of absorptive capacity relates to learning processes of individuals, i.e., skills accumulation, and knowledge transfer. This capability strengthens a firm's potential for exploring external knowledge sources, adapting to environmental changes, increasing innovation, and responding to customer needs in diverse ways. The framework aims to improve performance and the generation of competitive advantages for firms. Training is certainly one of the principal intangible elements of intellectual capital items. Trainable employees who can learn are an asset to a firm. When the ACAP mediates, new knowledge is created, and new skills are developed (Perlines et al., 2014). Training can be done individually or in groups and can be planned, short or long-term. SMEs need to update products as technology changes to remain competitive constantly. Ongoing Training therefore becomes the foundation of product innovation in the face of fast changing technological developments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) as adapted from Sekonopo (2023) is premised on the thinking that Botswana's SMEs can use their absorptive capability to learn from international companies' best practices and challenges. Knowledge of the challenges experienced by other entities and how they were resolved should inspire them to grow their businesses. This is so as to leverage on other entities experiences for one's benefit. Such learning develops a dynamic capability that can be applied by local SMEs in their product innovation and best practices.

The framework is lively to the fact that international companies managed to be successful through the application of product innovation best practices. And during their journey they do

encounter challenges. Their solutions to challenges should serve as yard stick to Botswana SMEs who should take a leaf from and device strategies for their own challenges. The devised strategies to deal with challenges will be taken in conjunction with assimilated best practices and should lead to the development of an innovative dynamic capability in a firm. Thus resulting in innovative products.

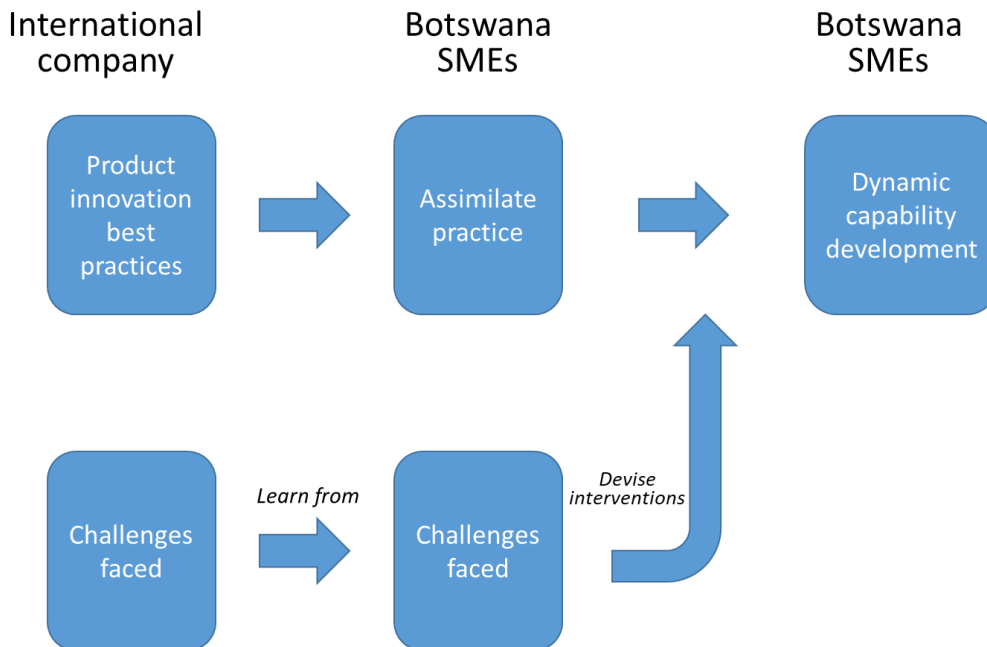


Figure 1: Conceptual framework (Sekonopo, 2023)

PRODUCT INNOVATION BEST PRACTICES/SUCCESS FACTORS

"Critical success factors associated with product development are tactics or methods that, when well executed, can contribute to increasing the likelihood of new product success" (Toledo et al., 2013, p. 57). "...it is unclear whether and to what extent New Product Development (NPD) practitioners are knowledgeable about what constitutes an NPD best practice" (Nicholas, Ledwith & Perks, 2011: 232). Success factors/best practices are a prerequisite for a firm's success. However, Liu, Wang & Wong (2022) caution that some firms do not understand how to integrate user knowledge into product innovation output. "If the government wants new and existing businesses to survive and grow, it is important to establish the factors that contribute to their success" (Gaetsewe, 2018: 2). Ma & Jin (2019) observed the extended list of Western-derived best practices and sought to develop those endogenous to China to advance the product innovativeness of Chinese products. They sought to measure a successful product using metrics such as patent applications, global and domestic sales, and market shares (Ma & Jin, 2019).

The concept of success factors is significant because its effects are felt company-wide and can be replicated as compared to when the success is just in one product. CIMA (2010) observed that the quality challenges that befell Toyota around 2009/10 were likely that colleagues from the new plants did not benefit from Toyota's previous resource-intensive mentoring policy to share good practices and disseminate values. Ma & Jin (2019) criticise

current empirical studies on product innovation and new product development which they opine focuses on the technical contents of product innovation and, somehow, ignore the big strategic picture, which is the application of the success factors.

Product innovation best practices assist enterprises in achieving the following: improved productivity; reduced waste and costs; enhanced firm competitiveness; built the value of the firm's brand; established new partnerships and relationships; improved employee relations; increased turnover; boosted the firm's market position, and improved profitability (Sekhar & Prabu, 2021; Zhang, Zhang & Song, 2021; Mazzoni, 2020; Lameris et al., 2015). Perhaps, this could hold the key to what the local manufacturing SMEs need to grow their businesses and compete globally.

MANUFACTURING SMEs CHALLENGES

No business undertaking is without challenges. Manufacturers face challenges on several fronts and are using several strategies to respond to the same (Havas, 2009; Shabanova, 2015). Some use management tools with the hope that they can help an entity to identify and pinpoint challenges it is likely to face. Strength Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and Political Economic Socio-cultural Technological Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) are analytical tools that help identify the key external and internal factors that should be considered to achieve success in a project or initiative (Mullerbeck, 2015). They are usually used together, to support effective strategic planning, decision-making and action planning (UNICEF, 2015; Suwanu-Europe, 2019). As PESTLE factors are essentially external, completing a PESTLE analysis is helpful prior to completing a SWOT analysis as SWOT is based broadly on half internal and half external factors (Swanu Europe, 2020). These can give a business a picture of what to expect in traversing the business landscape (Shabanova, 2015; Mullerbeck, 2015; Benzaghta et al. 2021). However, such tools can only shed light on possibilities and are not a panacea; companies will still face challenges and need to devise intervention measures.

Wysocki (2021) argues that managers need to shift away from a management model based exclusively on economic achievement in current environmental challenges. In the midst of global warming, eco-conscious strategies are gaining traction. Such strategies allow for the mitigation of environmental pollution while generating, at the same time, specific benefits for the enterprise. Enterprises must aim to achieve ecological innovation (eco-innovation). This approach is an ideal solution that allows business entities to achieve both environmental and economic goals. Therefore, enterprises must consider solutions that account for the environment and customers. That is, solutions that safeguard the ecological safety of products and production processes while respecting economic efficiency (Wysocki, 2021; Tetrault & Sur, 2013). Due to size constraints, some SMEs have not yet integrated environmental issues into their product development and production processes, to contributing to climate change issues. This results in being left behind in innovation driven technological developments. Evidence from the literature advance that other challenges affecting resistance to innovation in the manufacturing sector include traditional customer behaviour, employee's traditional behaviour, and social enterprise traditional behaviour (Liu et al. 2022; Ababneh, 2021; Nguyen, 2021;

Stryja & Satzger, 2019). These primary challenges lead enterprises to fear change. Without change, there is bound to be resistance to innovation.

There are plenty of examples of countries and entities that lost their manufacturing prowess. Friedman, Mandelbaum & Culp (2011) argue that the USA has lost its initial shine and point to challenges of globalisation, the information technology revolution, the nation's chronic deficits and excessive energy consumption. They further propose measures to restore USA greatness, such as carefully planned tax increases, investment in education, infrastructure, research and development, opening society to talented immigrants and fixing regulations that govern their economy. They also state that America needs to implement changes and the only way this will have a long-term impact is with a prominent wake-up call that gets people's attention. Entities such as Toyota have also faced some challenges. For example, in 2009/2010, the Toyota Motor Corporation had to recall 5.3 million vehicles in the US concerning five separate issues affecting various models, some of which were linked to deaths (CIMA, 2010).

Locally, several challenges have been identified as well. These have been found to point to the infancy of Botswana's SMEs (CEDA, 2020). Boubekour (2016) outlined the challenges facing Small Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) in Botswana as; i) high costs on internationally sourced materials despite being able to source locally; ii) machinery equipment supply and maintenance without local technical backup support or parts; iii) plant layout, material flow and housekeeping being poor; and iv) issues of record keeping and costing. To counter the challenges, AME (2020) propose that some of the challenges facing SMEs could be solved by; i) Building a better educated and trained workforce; ii) Promoting product and process innovation, as well as research and development; and iii) Improving global competitiveness for companies.

Whilst overcoming the challenges is not enough to stay afloat in business as competitors too could have implemented similar strategies, there's need to observe the sector's specific best practices. Table 1 shows best practices as captured from the literature. These best practices are presented in no particular order. Effort has been made to align similar best practices across the authors in a row to aid easy understanding. The best practices identified by most authors were then consolidated and used to formulate semi-structured interview questions.

Table 1:
Best practices/success factors

Shields, 2022	Noordeman, 2017	Toledo et al., 2013	Araujo et al., 2022
Top Management Support	Top management support	Project leader's skills	
Market Orientation	Up-front homework pays off / market orientation	Marketing skills	Market research
Technology	Technology Seek differentiated, superior products	Technology sources	
New Product Development Strategies	Build tough go/kill decision points into your process – a funnel, not a tunnel.	Product advantage	Strategy
New Product Development Process	Demand sharp, stable, and early product definition	NPD process proficiency New product innovation degree	Process
	Organise cross-functional project teams.	Cross-functional integration Company skills	Company culture / innovative culture
Knowledge Management	Plan and resource the market launch ... early in the game!		
New Product Development Speed	Build an international orientation into the new product process. Build in the voice of the customer	NPD-related activity proficiency Project team organisation	Project climate Metrics

The emerging best practices from Table 1 include top management support; market orientation; technology; new product development strategies; new product development process; cross-functional teams, as elaborated below. The best practices can assist SMEs in building their capabilities in effective NPD management (Yan & Makinde, 2021). These best practices were used to develop a tool to assess the business management and product innovation prowess of local manufacturing SMEs.

Top management support

A project with top management support is likely to succeed. Top management can back the project and release adequate resources towards the initiative (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

The top manager has the function of keeping the project on the steady road, while the product managers have a more in deep view of the project and in addition they work on the project (Darasteanu and Moskalenko, 2010, p. 20).

There is no doubt that top management buy-in in a project is necessary, and therefore, they must be carried on board from project inception to finish. Sethi, Smith & Park (2001) opine that close monitoring of a project by senior management signals to the team and to others in the firm that a particular project is important, and more effort is directed to it.

Market orientation

Market orientation the ability of a business to generate market knowledge regarding current and future customer needs, and to respond to these market needs by means of products and services (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). This refers to the firm's approach to developing offerings targeted for the market. Some firms are market-driven, whilst others are technology or design-driven. Market segmentation, which is the understanding of the market, defining various segments using identifiable criteria and targeting those with growth potential and developing a differentiated marketing strategy to position the company in each target market is required (Boubeker, 2016). A market orientation involves being responsive to changing customer/client needs with innovative marketing programs and strategies to appeal to clients (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Santosh (2018) opines that the millennials are a lucrative market since are more numerous, have a looser hold on their wallets, and desire the near-instant gratification.

Technology

Technology and innovation can lead SMEs to superior performance and competitive advantage (Mishrif and Khan, 2023). The technology adopted can either be in the running of business, products and or in the product's production process (Santosh, 2018; Juniarti and Omar, 2021). For example, the fourth industrial revolution brought digital fabrication, e.g., 3D printing. Products can be designed in one place and simultaneously manufactured remotely. Also worth noting is that the contemporary business environment requires the application and incorporation of new technological tools and management practices to remain competitive and sustainable (Santosh, 2018; Baleseng, 2015).

New product development strategies

It is essential to develop product strategies and tactics that will enable the product to fare well against the competition. The market trends and intelligence analysis determines the strategies and tactics to adopt to position product offerings. Some strategic initiatives could

centre around whether to be market, technology, or design driven entity. It can also centre around approaches like building alliances, joint ventures, licensing agreements and so fourth (Darasteanu and Moskalenko, 2010).

The new product development (NPD) process

The NPD process consists of the activities carried out by firms when developing and launching new products (Bhuiyan, 2011). The NPD process is the backbone of any new product development and innovation activity. It sets out the tasks to be carried out during the activity. The process should be suited to a particular company. Nicholas, Ledwith & Perks (2011) opine that if a company measures its NPD, it is easier to assess its performance. It determines the success or lack thereof of resultant products (Cooper, 2001).

Cross-functional teams

A product produced by a diverse multi-disciplinary team stands a better chance of success in the market than one produced by a small team. This is echoed by Sethi, Smith and Park (2001) who observes that integration of diverse perspectives and ideas is at the core of the creative process and therefore is a central determinant of the innovativeness of the new product concept.

This is because the team can thoroughly scrutinise the product and even bring forth features which can make it appeal to clients. Sethi, Smith & Park (2001) also decry that cross functional team integration is difficult to achieve in cross-functional settings because people from different functional areas can hold biases and stereotypes toward one another thus affecting productivity.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative approach using a case study of 3 purposively selected participants from the wood, metal, and leather manufacturing sectors. A case study was adopted for the study because it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth within its natural context, primarily when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2009). The research tools used were a semi-structured interview tool of three purposively selected SMEs. Semi-structured interviews are an effective method for data collection when the researcher wants to collect qualitative, open-ended data, explore participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic, and delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interviews were based on a pre-developed list of product innovation best practices synthesised from the literature. The interview sessions were recorded with a voice recorder app on a Samsung A20 phone. The data were then transcribed with Scribe transcription software. Later, documents were uploaded to Atlas.ti software to conduct thematic analysis.

FINDINGS

The study assessed the product innovation best practices derived from the literature against what the local manufacturing SMEs practices. The study sought to find out whether local SMEs were aligned to the product innovation best practices and if not, what could be the challenges.

Demographic information

Table 2 shows the demographic information of the participating SMEs. It can be observed that they are all micro-enterprises. Their distribution was around Gaborone City and its environs in Botswana. They have been in the business for four or more years.

Table 2
Participants' demographic information

	SME1	SME2	SME3
Sector	Metal	Wood	Leather
Years in business	9	5	4
Number of Employees	2	5	2
Business location	Mogoditshane	Pilane	Thamaga
Design/Innovation qualification	None	None	None
Source of funding	Self	Youth Dev. Fund	Youth Dev. Fund

The best practices that were assessed during the semi-structured interviews included the following:

Top management support

The businesses had no management team, as their promoters managed them. The product design approach was manager-inclined or manager-initiated.

"I am the manager, and no one is assisting me" (SME1).

"We are a small company, and there is no management team. I am responsible for the day-to-day running of the company" (SME2).

"Big companies have management teams, but we are a small company, and we do not have such a structure" (SME3).

Market orientation

All the firms were market driven. They were driven mainly by what clients wanted at a particular time. Some clients brought pictures of what they wanted to be reproduced. In support of this claim, participants stated that,

"Our off-road bumpers are made per client request" (SME1).

"It is widespread for us to receive pictures. Some pictures are sent through

WhatsApp” (SME2).

Technology

The businesses are still in their infancy and, therefore, cannot afford to invest in relevant technologies. The technology used to produce products was rudimentary. The products produced carried little to no technological features.

“We just fit indicators and spotlights; what else can we fit?” (SME1)

“I cannot afford expensive machinery; that is why I use hand tools” (SME3).

New product development strategies

No product development or business management strategy was found to be utilised by the businesses. It was anticipated that the businesses would have product roadmaps and strategies to deal with different business challenges, for example, the seasonal availability of some materials.

“...strategies? What is that? We just make to request”(SME1).

“We target different seasonal requirements”(SME3).

The new product development process

The firms under study were using no product innovation process. However, some Design and Technology students at secondary schools have been exposed to the Booz, Allen & Hamilton product development method. The expectation was that the firms with Design and Technology graduates should apply the same in product innovation. The unavailability of a model to guide product innovation prevented the businesses from being able to design export-quality products.

“We do not have that...” (SME1)

“Our business does not develop products; we only make them” (SME2).

“Clients bring pictures of what they want...” (SME3).

Cross-functional teams

A low staff complement was observed within the companies. All the businesses were micro-enterprises, i.e., with a staff complement of less than six, including the promoter. This prevents the firms from having a meaningful cross-functional team.

“My team comprises just me and my business partner” (SME1).

“We do not do much design work, as clients bring their requests, and we make” (SME2).

These findings can be used to draw up the SWOT analysis of a firm more than the PESTEL

which will require more information. Also SWOT factors are more within the control of the firm than the PESTEL factors (Jaden, 2020). “Strengths and Weaknesses are internal characteristics of the system that give it an advantage/disadvantage over others, while Opportunities and Threats are elements of the environment (external) that could cause trouble/advantage to the system” (Suwanu-Europe, 2019;p.5). Table 3 shows the resultant SWOT analysis from the findings. There hasn’t been any observable strengths but a lot of weaknesses.

Table 3

Resultant SWOT analysis

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
	No top management support
	Smallness in size, no cross-functional teams
	No requisite qualifications
	No advanced technologies
	No documentation
	Limited budget
OPPORTUNITY	THREATS
Country on industrialisation drive	Established multinational corporations
	Regional trade agreements
	Ever demanding customers

DISCUSSIONS

The findings showed that the businesses are all micro-enterprises, including the enterprise with nine years in business. It shows that there has been no growth in business over the years to create employment for others. The businesses are four years and older, thus implying they have gone past the start-up teething problems stage and are thus better placed to forge ahead as they have overcome multiple business challenges. Whilst the enterprises were engaged in product manufacturing; they do not possess any product design qualification, thus implying there will be little to no innovation and job creation. This finding is congruent with Moalosi et al. 2013 study which found no product innovation in SMEs.

The businesses had no management team, as their promoters or family members managed them. This is congruent with CEDA (2020) which noted the need from respondents for business management mentoring. The product design approach was manager-inclined or manager-initiated. The limited staff complement in the firms stifles the development of these firms. There is a limited headcount to develop designs and scrutinise them. There is also no specialisation. The limited headcount also affects the absorptive capability of the firm, as only a few employees are in the firm. Limited absorptive capability means limited avenues for developing and internalising new and existing skills. Regionally in South Africa, Yan & Makinde (2021) observed that management needs to actively seek expertise from the industry on NPD implementation. Businesses need to shift from sole reliance on a market-pull strategy to engage other strategies, such as technology-push, in their product road maps. This will enable the firms to have a broad offering base. The firms should have an export orientation to

broaden their market; this view is also shared by CEDA (2020) and Moalosi et al. (2013). A multitude of enticing market offers, and after-sales services are also needed to enable the market to buy one's products.

The businesses are still in their infancy and, therefore, cannot afford to invest in technologies. The technology used to produce products was elementary (used essential hand tools and machinery). This finding is in line with Baleseng (2015); CEDA (2020), who noted that SMEs use obsolete equipment in manufacturing, which is characterised by low technology and automation. The products were equally produced without any technological components or following any established national or international standards. Lack of advanced mass production machinery such as robots means that production quantities will remain low, and products will be expensive, thus, failing to benefit from economies of scale. There was, however, some notable use of the internet and social media applications such as Facebook and WhatsApp to market the products.

The firms did not have a product development approach used by the businesses. It was anticipated that the businesses would have product development approaches to deal with different business challenges. The findings are consistent with Boubeker (2016), who observed that very few companies have a roadmap, even those in a growth phase and envision expanding into new markets. Most SMEs lack expertise or skills in strategic management (Sentsho et al., 2007; Baleseng, 2015; Boubeker, 2016; CEDA, 2020). Ma & Jin (2019) recommend adopting a prospector rather than a defender strategy, as the former positively relates to patent application and general firm success.

The firms used no product development process/innovation model therefore no basis for best practice application (Rapitsenyane, 2014; Sekonopo, 2023). The unavailability of a model to guide product innovation prevented businesses from developing innovative and quality products that could be exported (Sekonopo, 2023). There is a need to introduce radical innovation within the manufacturing SME sector to address such a scenario (Moalosi et al., 2013). SMEs should be forward-thinking entities that aim to continuously improve their product development processes by benchmarking their current development practices against other companies (Nicholas, Ledwith & Perks, 2011). Furthermore, a new product development process differentiates between success and failure (Nicholas, Ledwith and Perks, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The multiple case study across sectors have provided credence to the conclusion that Botswana's manufacturing SMEs' product innovation business acumen is very low. They do not have a developed company best practices blueprint. Such a blueprint is essential as it assists the firms in gauging their innovation performance against competitors. They also lack the use of tools like SWOT analysis and others which results in an unsystematic management of business. There is a need for Botswana's SMEs to consider developing their own product innovation approaches and tool kits. The findings from this study are consistent with Boubeker (2016), who observed that despite a lack of business acumen, they had pursued their

dreams of running their businesses in challenging market conditions.

It is interesting to note that Botswana SMEs are still relentlessly pursuing product manufacturing. This is despite the continued low market share of their products. There is a need for Botswana SMEs to start taking heed of product innovation best practices, as they are necessary for their businesses to flourish. Botswana SMEs must start learning from their international counterparts so that they can be able to devise strategies to out-compete their peers from elsewhere. Government agencies tasked with SME development must resource SMEs on business management and product innovation best practices. There is also a need to develop design interventions targeted to SMEs to enable them to produce products that can appeal to the masses. This has ripple effects and, as such, can lead to employment creation, export potential and economic upliftment.

If this sector is not assisted in developing, achieving some of the best innovation practices will be impossible. For some best practices to be achieved, they need a sizeable number of employees with various skills to be involved in product development. However, SMEs could be encouraged to outsource some of the services they do not have within their firms. Outsourcing some design work is a well-accepted practice in product development as it reduces costs, saves time, and improves product turnaround time. Part manufacturing can also be outsourced, thus saving time and money. External design consultancy can also bring their own resources like laptops with design suite thus cutting on SME costs. Macpherson & Vanchan (2010) and Hong & Kim (2020) sum up that outsourcing is growing, maturing, and evolving to deliver value well beyond cost savings. The SMEs stand to reap the benefits and lead the way to the rise of collaborative partnering.

Entities like CEDA, LEA and others tasked with development of local businesses need to review their intervention measures to determine how effective the marketing of their services is. Also there is need for the same agencies to go an extra mile by going out into the field to meet the businesses and conduct needs assessment. This will help in the development of appropriate intervention measures which is likely to result in positive results.

LIMITATIONS

The study was limited in that the sample was very small. Therefore, there is need for a study that investigates this topic with a larger sample of study to increase the validity of the results.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Impediments to access to government intervention measures needs to be determined as despite their availability, access and or utilization seems to be challenging. There is also a need to investigate the long-term impact of innovation on the growth and sustainability of manufacturing SMEs in Botswana. This can be done by analysing case studies of SMEs that have embraced innovation and assess how it has affected their market position, profitability,

and ability to adapt to changing market demands over an extended period. Also a study that examines the extent to which Botswana's manufacturing SMEs are adopting advanced technologies and Industry 4.0 practices. Such a study can explore the barriers and enablers to technology adoption and its implications on productivity, competitiveness, and job creation in the sector.

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