

STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE: A STUDY OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs) IN TURBULENT MARKETS, GLENVIEW AREA 8, HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the strategic flexibility and resilience of SMEs in turbulent markets, using Glenview Area 8, Harare, Zimbabwe as a case study. The paper reviewed literature on strategic flexibility, resilience and their relationship. Employing a mixed methods approach, this research investigates how SMEs perceive and respond to market turbulences and identifies effective strategies. A sample of 30 SMEs was drawn from the target population using purposive sampling method. The findings reveal that SMEs in Glenview area 8 employ adaptive strategies, leveraging dynamic capabilities and resource-based view theory. Key factors influencing strategy effectiveness include entrepreneurial orientation, innovation and networking were found to play a vital role in making the SMEs stay afloat. This study contributes to the understanding of SME resilience and strategic flexibility in turbulent markets, informing policy and practice for SME growth and economic development in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Strategic flexibility, resilience, SMEs, Turbulent markets, Glenview Area 8.*

1.0 Introduction

Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operate in increasingly turbulent markets, characterized by rapid changes in all

environments, uncertainty of the future, and unpredictability. SMEs must cultivate strategic flexibility and resilience in order to endure and prosper in these conditions, allowing them to successfully respond to environmental obstacles and adapt. This study explores the strategic flexibility and resilience of SMEs in the furniture industry, specifically those operating within the Glen View 8 Furniture Complex in Harare Metropolitan, Zimbabwe.

1.1 Background of the Paper

Zimbabwe is experiencing turbulent market conditions characterised by economic instability, currency fluctuation leading to rising inflation, fiscal policy uncertainty, policy inconsistency, power outages, water scarcity and transportation challenges. In addition, there is market volatility in terms of foreign exchange shortages, commodity price fluctuations and complex regulatory framework. SMEs play a vital role in the economy through job creation, GDP contribution, innovation, poverty reduction, community development and social mobility (World Bank, 2020, ILO, 2020 and UNIDO, 2020). They also help in women's empowerment drive, youth employment and local economic development. However, SMEs face a number of challenges such as limited access to finance, regulatory barriers, limited resources, competition from larger companies and technological constraints. Turbulent environments are characterized by complex and often contradictory forces, as well as a lack of fixed boundaries (Cottrell, 2014). Environmental turbulence in business refers to the unpredictable changes, developments, and uncertainties in the external environment (Arici and Gok, 2023). This dynamic, referred to as environmental factor turbulence (EFT), involves unpredictable market conditions, regulatory shifts, and technological disruptions that threaten business sustainability (Zahra, 2020). The study by Koç et al. (2022) highlights that environmental uncertainties such as fluctuating demand, unpredictable supply conditions, and rapid technological advancements pose significant challenges to businesses. Studies highlight that EFT can act as both a threat and an opportunity, depending on the organization's capacity to respond effectively (Linnenluecke, 2017).

SMEs contribute significantly to Zimbabwe's economy, accounting for approximately 70% of employment and 50% GDP (Zimstat, 2020 and ILO, 2020).

The furniture industry, specifically, plays a vital role in the country's manufacturing sector. Glen view 8 Furniture complex is a hub for SMEs in the furniture industry. Appiah, Prempeh, Benn and Oduro (2020).urged that in many countries, SMEs represent a significant portion of total employment and contribute substantially to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Furthermore, SMEs play a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship, driving innovation, and supporting local communities (Onyokoko & Needorn, 2021 and DiBella et al., 2023). Omowole, Olufemi-Phillips, Ofodile, Eyo-Udo, and Ewim, (2024) point out that SMEs play a significant role in driving economic growth, employment, and innovation. Despite their importance, SMEs in Zimbabwe face numerous problems, (World Bank, 2022, and African Development Bank, 2020), including the following:

- Economic instability comprised of unstable currency and ever-changing foreign exchange rates coupled with dwindling disposable incomes of the customers
- Intense competition is very much evident as seen by the numerous furniture manufacturers at the complex and the whole of Willowvale Road as well as along Highglen and even from out of Harare and from neighbouring countries like south Africa where a lot of customers are buying furniture it then appears to be the only business most people are seeing to be viable
- Rapid technological changes as more and more confiscated machinery is now being needed to come up with quality furniture which meet the new changing customer needs and preferences like other furniture goods being produced by other companies in the region due to globalization
- Shifting customer demands has been a cause for concern as customers now need customized products which is different from the traditional furniture goods

Challenges faced by SMEs include rising costs, reduced revenue, skill and talent shortages, securing and managing funds, among others (Beck & Demirguc-Kunt, 2006; Nicolas, 2022 and Mer and Viridi, (2024). Chikanda (2022) pointed out that the SMEs in Zimbabwe's furniture industry face additional challenges, such as:

- Import competition (Ragazou et al., 2022).
- Limited access to finance and resources since most banks are not willing to extent some credit facilities due to their inability to secure their loans and some

of the SMEs are very small and their production is low mostly for the survival of the owners (Driver & Muñoz-Bugarin, 2019; Nicolas, 2022 and Nguyen et al., 2021).

- Infrastructure constraints have been also a major challenge at the Glenview complex since there are no proper structures but makeshift shelters they use and which, maybe has been a cause for all the fires that have been rampaging the place for many years as their raw materials are not well kept some which are flammable like glue and turpentine paint just to mention a few due to lack of proper infrastructure (Christofi et al., 2013; Tortorella et al., 2019).
- Market Dynamics (Sandra, 2024; Klimova, I., Hordieieva, Sereda, Pashchenko and Petecki, 2023) regarding identification of growth opportunities and adapting to changing consumer preferences to remain competitive is important.
- Operational Inefficiencies: SMEs often face inefficiencies in processes, workflows, and resource utilization that can hamper productivity and profitability (Omowole, Olufemi-Philips, Ofadile, Eyo-Udo and Ewim, 2024 and Bakare, Achumie and Okeke, 2024). Such factors like inadequate technology adoption, lack of skilled workforce, and poor management practices.

In response to these challenges, SMEs in Glenview Area 8 must demonstrate strategic flexibility and resilience to survive and thrive (Hahn and Lee, 2020). Thus, this research highlights the importance of strategic flexibility and resilience for SMEs success in turbulent markets. Strategic flexibility enables firms to adapt and innovate. Resilience allows them to absorb and recover from disruptions in particular when their wares are stolen or burnt which a common feature at the complex let alone being destroyed by rain especially during the rainy season caused by lack of proper infrastructure to keep their goods in a safe place free of any disaster. This study aims to explore how SMEs in Glenview Area 8 demonstrate strategic flexibility and resilience in the face of challenges and to identify the strategies they employ to achieve this.

1.2 Problem Statement:

Despite their importance, SMEs in Zimbabwe's furniture industry struggle to develop strategic flexibility and resilience due to limited flexibility and resilience, The

Glenview 8 Furniture complex, in particular, faces challenges such as limited competitiveness, reduced innovation, increased vulnerability to market and environmental disruptions. There are also high failure rates mainly caused by lack of support services from financiers or even Government and poor management skills, which calls for training as a prerequisite at the complex as well. Specifically, SMEs at Glen View 8 Furniture Complex face intense competition from imported furniture, inadequate infrastructure and support services, uncertainty surrounding government policies and economic instability and policy uncertainty. Thus, this paper is going to examine the strategic flexibility and resilience of SMEs in turbulent markets.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in Glenview area 8.
2. To identify the key factors influencing strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in turbulent markets
3. To investigate the impact of strategic flexibility on SMEs to adapt to changing market conditions
4. To explore the role of leadership and organisational culture in fostering strategic flexibility and resilience.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in Glenview Area 8?
2. Which key factors that influence strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in turbulent markets?
3. What impact of strategic flexibility on SMEs in adapting to changing market conditions?
4. Do leadership and organisational culture have any role in fostering strategic flexibility and resilience in SMEs?

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Strategic Flexibility

Flexibility, according to Osita Ejikeme and Amah (2022), is the natural capacity to rethink and rearrange in order to properly accommodate and adapt to the

surroundings. EscrigTena et al. (2011) define flexibility as the ability to adapt swiftly and successfully to various demands and changes in the environment. The ability of a company to adjust and modify in response to environmental changes is known as strategic flexibility (Kraus & Kauranen, 2020). It entails having the flexibility to modify a company's plan, organization, and procedures in response to shifting consumer demands and market situations (Bocken & Short, 2020). Brozović, Jansson, and Boers (2025) claim that flexibility enables SMEs to adapt their main strategy, product lines, and services to internal operational restrictions or external market movements.

According to Shimizu and Hitt (2004), an organization's flexibility in strategy is its capacity to identify changes in the external environment and employ resources to respond quickly. The adaptability of a strategy influences more than just a firm to adapt to change, but it will have an impact on knowledge management (Zhou & Wu, 2010) and business innovation performance (Nadkarni and Herrmann, 2010). Strategic flexibility encompasses a company's capacity to proactively act or promptly respond to alterations in competitive and environmental dynamics (Brozovic, 2018; Kortmann et al., 2014). Flexibility is essential for a company's capacity to react swiftly to issues by modifying its operations and plans to satisfy shifting environmental needs. Thus, the ability to anticipate potential threats, effectively handle unforeseen events, and learn from them to develop a flexible skill targeted at fostering organizational transformation can be defined as strategic resilience.

1.5.2 Resilience

The ability of a company to endure and bounce back from setbacks and emergencies is known as resilience (Albright & Klosinski, 2020). It entails having the capacity to recover from setbacks and failures as well as to absorb and adjust to changes in the environment (Cao & Lumineau, 2020). This calls for a change from reactive to proactive tactics, where resilience is ingrained in the culture and structure of the company to promote ongoing learning and adaptation (Linnenluecke, 2017). Even after facing numerous obstacles, organizations that possess resilience are able to remain relevant and more adaptable (Ibifaa and Chima, 2024). In the face of uncertainty, resilience—defined as an organization's ability to tolerate shocks and

quickly recover from disruptions (Irvine & Anderson, 2016)—is essential for SMEs. Resilience is the generic term for an organization's capacity to adjust to both anticipated and unexpected circumstances.

The ability of SMEs to adapt to, bounce back from, and carry on with their operations in the face of difficulties and disturbances is known as organizational resilience. Herbane (2019: 478) stated that ‘Resilience is an adaptive process and capacity of an organisation to address major acute and strategic challenges.’ Organisation resilience allows adapting to a devastating threat in the short term to stay in line with long-term needs. The ability of an organisation to adapt to both expected and unforeseen conditions is generally known as resilience. Organisational resilience in SMEs refers to the enterprise's ability to effectively respond to, recover from, and continue its operations in the face of disruptions and challenges.

Griffiths (2020) in Nalinda, Mohd and Ali (2024) and Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011), posit that resilience is the ability to respond to external disruptions effectively and efficiently, as well as fast recover to an organisation's pre-impact state after being subjected to external severe impacts. Resilient organisations, according to Lovins and Lovins (1982) and Somers (2009), are able to return to or bounce back to their original movement or circumstances after experiencing external shocks. This term is relevant to the concepts of crisis recovery and growth (Hall et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial resilience is a key capability that enables businesses to navigate environmental turbulence.

1.5.3 Relationship between Strategic Flexibility and Resilience

Previous studies have shown that strategic flexibility is a key determinant of resilience among firms (Kraus & Kauranen, 2020 and Bocken & Short., 2020). Firms with high levels of strategic flexibility are better able to adapt to changing market conditions and customer needs and are more likely to withstand and recover from disruptions and crises (Cao & Lumineau., 2020). Teece et al (1997) explain how firms achieve sustained competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments. They emphasise firm's ability to adapt and reconfigure resources. However, to improve performance under extreme turbulent environments, firms also need to

develop and maintain business continuity capabilities such as coping mechanisms, flexibility and resilience (Karman, 2020 in Brillyanes, Sharma and Kingshott, 2022). This implies an additional need for managers to define and understand the concept of strategic flexibility to design appropriate plans to boost organizational resilience (Onyokoko & Needorn, 2021; Uzoma Ebubechukwu and Edwinah, 2022 in Wided, 2023). This also involves adaptation, copying and anticipation capabilities (Duchek, 2020).

In addition, Strategic orientation towards resilience, on the other hand, promote open communication and collaborative behaviour, as well as mutual trust, involvement, group cohesion, and decision quality (Bode et al. 2017). Pertheban et al. (2023) claim that by proactively enhancing its whole competence, a firm's proactive resilience capability enables it to outperform in markets. Nemeth & Hollnagel (2021) assert that taking appropriate action in reaction to disturbances requires the capacity to flexibly monitor what is happening. Strategic planning is crucial in today's dynamic and turbulent business environment, as it can significantly enhance the sustainability and resilience of firms (Munro, 2023). Strategic planning is a crucial process for organizations to navigate a dynamic and turbulent environment (Valle and Sarturi, 2022). In a dynamic environment, where change is constant, organizations need to continuously assess and adjust their strategies to remain competitive (Kimmich, Baldwin, Kellner, Oberlack and Villamayor-Tomas, 2022).

Svydruk (2020) emphasizes the need for flexible strategic tools to stimulate innovation and improve production quality, while Torrez (2021) underscores the importance of agility in strategic decision-making to capitalize on opportunities and navigate risks. Mufudza (2018) adds that dynamic strategy and capabilities are essential for coping with rapid changes in the business environment. Danilov (2023) emphasizes the need for organizations to continuously scan their surroundings and respond proactively to stay competitive. This is echoed by Godwin and Sorbarikor (2022), who underscores the role of strategic agility in responding to environmental changes. Thus, there is need for SMEs to prioritise strategic flexibility for them to survive in turbulent markets.

1.5.4 Factors that influence Strategic Flexibility and Resilience

Several factors have been identified as influencing strategic flexibility and resilience among firms. These include:

- Leadership style and leadership capabilities such as strategic thinking and problem solving, are positively related to strategic flexibility. (Chen & Li, 2022, Mavhiki, 2019 and Pfupa, 2019). According to Jennings and Beaver (1997), the management activities of SMEs are contingent upon the context and characteristics of the owners/managers. The strategy-making process is informal and intuitive, influenced by the owners' and managers' mindsets.
- Organisational culture and organisational capabilities such as innovation and adaptability are positively related to strategic flexibility. (Bocken & Short, 2020, Mavhiki, 2019). Nyamwanza (2020) found that innovation and entrepreneurial orientation are positively related to strategic flexibility in Zimbabwe SMEs.
- Access to resources and resource allocation (Kraus & Kauranen, 2020, Mazarire, 2020, Nyamwanza, 2020 and Tendai, 2020). Organizations would be more adaptable and able to withstand emergent shocks if they possessed the right resources, including financial, material, and social capital (Linnenluecke et al., 2012; Sawalha, 2015). Thus, SMEs should have access to financial resources for them to have strategic flexibility.
- Environmental uncertainty and environmental complexity (Albright & Klosinski, 2020, Tendai, 2020 and Mavhiki, 2019). They found out that environmental uncertainty is negatively related to strategic flexibility in firms.

1.5.5 Gaps in the Literature

There are still gaps in the literature despite the increasing amount of research on resilience and strategic flexibility. These include.

- A lack of research on strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in developing countries (Kraus & Kauranen, 2020)
- A lack of research on the role of leadership and organisational culture in influencing strategic flexibility and resilience (Bocken & Short, 2020).

- A lack of research on the impact of environmental uncertainty and environmental complexity on strategic flexibility and resilience (Albright & Klosinski, 2020).

Thus, this paper is going to look at the strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in a turbulent market.

1.6 Methodology

This research used a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in Zimbabwe. The target population included all SMEs operating at Glenview Area 8 industrial site in Harare. A sample of 30 SMEs was drawn using purposive sampling method. The advantage of employing this approach is that it makes effective use of resources and enables the selection of participants with certain traits, experience, or knowledge pertinent to the study. A questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions was used to gather data. The data was analysed using theme analysis, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics. The data gathering tool underwent pilot testing, and its validity and reliability were evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.85. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were considered during this study. Data collection instruments were physically distributed to SMES, this resulted in high return of completed instruments.

1.7 Data Presentation, Discussion and Analysis

1.7.1 Results Presentation

1.7.1.1 Quantitative Results

Table 1.1 Descriptive Statistics

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD EVIATION	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Strategic flexibility	3.75	1.20	1	5
Resilience	4.10	1.15	1	5
Financial performance	3.50	1.25	1	5
Non-financial performance	4.20	1.10	1	5

Table 1.2 Inferential Statistics

HYPOTHESIS	TEST	SIGNIFICANCE
H1: Strategic flexibility positively impacts financial performance	Regression analysis	0.01
H2: Resilience positively impacts non-financial performance	Regression analysis	0.05
H3: Strategic flexibility and resilience interact to impact financial performance	Moderation	0.10

1.7.1.2 Qualitative Results

Table 1.4 Thematic Analysis on key factors that influence strategic flexibility and resilience among SMEs in turbulent markets

THEME	FREQUENCY
Adaptability	25
Innovation capabilities	20
Partnership (strong networks)	15
Risk management	10
Leadership adaptability	5
Entrepreneurial orientation	18
Government support	20

1.8 Discussion and Analysis

The results of this study shed important light on how resilience and strategic flexibility relate to SMEs in Glenview Area 8, Harare. The findings indicate a positive relationship between resilience and strategic flexibility, indicating that SMEs with greater strategic flexibility are more likely to demonstrate resilience when faced with difficulties (Hitt et al., 2011 and Teece, 2007). The findings show that resilience and strategic flexibility are essential for SMEs in Zimbabwe. The quantitative findings indicate that resilience and non-financial performance as well as strategic

flexibility and financial performance are positively correlated. The results of the study align with the body of knowledge regarding resilience and strategic flexibility. According to research by Teece (2007) and Hiit et al. (2011), for example, strategic flexibility is a crucial factor in SMEs' resilience.

In a similar vein, Lengnick-Hall and Beck's (2005) study discovered that SMEs with greater strategic flexibility are more likely to adjust to shifting market conditions for SMEs in Zimbabwe, as well as resiliency. The quantitative findings indicate a favourable correlation between resilience and non-financial performance as well as between strategic flexibility and financial performance. As Folke (2006) stated, resilience is “not only about being persistent or robust to disturbance. It is also about the opportunities that disturbance opens in terms of recombination of evolved structures and processes, renewal of the system and emergence of new trajectories”.

The findings of the study further emphasize how crucial strategic flexibility is to SMEs' increased resilience. According to the research, SMEs with greater strategic flexibility are better able to handle market uncertainties and problems (Ibifaa & Chima, 2024). Hamel and Valikangas (2003); Chima and Chima, 2024). This supports the idea that a crucial element of resilience is strategic flexibility (Teece, 2007). According to a different study by Sumiati, Ainur Rofiq, and Sigit Pramono (2019), strategic planning not only has a significant impact on market orientation but also mediates the impact of the internal and external contexts on it. According to research showing the beneficial effects of innovation on performance and an organization's capacity to adjust to shifting conditions and settings, innovation practices are essential to the survival of SMEs (Adam & Alarifi, 2021). Strategic agility has an impact on firm resilience in SME sector companies, according to a study by Nalinda, Mohd, and Ali (2024). This notion was also found in studies done by Kottika et al., (2020) and Sriyani, Fairoz & Munasinghe, (2022) that strategic flexibility is important for an organization resilience during turbulent periods. A study by Muhammad (2024) discovered that in dynamic and chaotic business environments, strategic planning is crucial for firms to manage uncertainty and attain long-term growth.

Nonetheless, the qualitative findings emphasize how crucial partnerships, innovation, adaptability, and risk management are to attaining strategic flexibility and resilience. Lengnick-Hall and Beck (2005) also made note of this. One of the participants noted, *"We have to be flexible to survive in this market. We must be able to change our strategy quickly in response to changes in the market."* Another participant observed, *"Strategic flexibility is key to our success. We must be able to adapt to changing market conditions and to respond to challenges and uncertainties."* This is also consistent with the view that reliance is a multifaceted construct that requires a comprehensive approach (Hamel and Valikangas, 2003).

In addition, most of the respondents noted that there was need for SMEs to have entrepreneurial orientation for them to survive in turbulent markets. Respondent D said, *"There is need for SMEs to be entrepreneurial oriented so that they will be able to sail through turbulent business environments."* Another respondent J points, *"SMEs need to think outside the box during turbulent times for them to survive the harsh business environment."* In addition, respondent M noted that *"there was need for SMEs to be proactive when dealing with turbulent business environments like what happened during the COVID 19 pandemic outbreak when the Zimbabwe government had to implements some lockdowns."* Participant H says, *"Our company's propensity and readiness to encourage innovation, creativity, experimentation, and the introduction of new goods, services, and creative processes that are helpful in predicting the nature of a company's success and prosper"*. Thus, from these observations from the respondents, it can be noted the importance of SMEs to have entrepreneurial skills to deal in turbulence environments. The ability of a company to investigate novel concepts, comprehend and act upon the future, and prosper in unpredictable settings through a combination of managerial philosophies, decision-making, strategic planning, and entrepreneurial behaviours is known as environmental orientation (Brouthers et al., 2015; Rank and Strenge, 2018).

Respondent D said, *'We are facing the challenge of lack of support through training and development by the responsible Ministry.'* This was also concurred by Respondents H, M and P. SMEs thus confront the problem of inadequate assistance from the appropriate Ministry. There is need for the Ministry to regularly hold

training development sessions to equip SMEs with the necessary business skills. Governments and other support systems must therefore provide SMEs with all the assistance they can, including business-friendly environmental laws and policies (Dwikat, Arshad, and MohdShariff, 2023). According to an analysis of the research findings, the external political environment has a greater influence on management strategies than the internal features of the SMEs sector (Yapicioglu, 2023). According to Rigby, Sutherland, and Takeuchi (2018), training guarantees that staff members understand agile principles and can successfully use them in their workflows, which improves the success of agile transformations.

Training programs centred on agile and change management can improve client interactions, which are crucial for the sustainability of SMEs, in addition to building internal resilience. client centricity is emphasized by agile techniques, and skilled workers are better able to react swiftly and efficiently to client feedback (Bamidele et al., 2024). According to Storey (1994), SMEs are distinguished by their restricted resources, which have a significant impact on their growth strategies, as well as their capacity to function in the face of increased external uncertainty. According to earlier research, SMEs' operational performance can be improved by addressing these inefficiencies through process optimization, automation, and training programs (Christofi et al., 2013; Tortorella et al., 2019). Purnama (2024) noted that developing training programs to bolster employees' innovative skills, establishing cross-functional work teams to foster collaboration, and implementing reward systems that incentivize change and experimentation is essential.

The significance of leadership in fostering strategic adaptability and resilience was also emphasized by the qualitative findings. One of the participants noted, *“Our leader is very flexible and adaptable. He can change in the market.”* Another participant observed, *“Our leader is very resilient. He can motivate us to work hard and to adapt to changing market conditions.”* These findings are consistent with past research showing that executives in SMEs should place a high priority on developing an agile organizational culture that encourages staff members at all levels to adopt iterative procedures and flexible thinking (Bamidele et al. 2024, Ghezzi & Cavallo, 2020, and Cohn, 2010). Reactive resilience depends on leaders' capacity to react

favourably to every single employee in the organization (Jia et al., 2020). Resilient organizations are more likely to succeed in organizational restoration during periods of economic uncertainty, instability, and threat because of a high level of employee participation and involvement (Huang, Chen, & Nguyen, 2020).

The results of the study add to the body of knowledge on SMEs' resilience and strategic flexibility. The results suggest that SMEs in Zimbabwe face unique challenges including turbulent market conditions and limited resources. However, by adopting strategic flexibility and resilience strategies, SMEs can improve their performance and competitiveness.

1.9 Conclusion

This study has shed important light on the connection between resilience and strategic flexibility among SMEs in Glenview area 8, Harare. The study's findings indicate a positive relationship between resilience and strategic flexibility, indicating that SMEs with greater strategic flexibility are more likely to demonstrate resilience when faced with difficulties.

The study's qualitative findings provide more light on the connection between reliance and strategic flexibility and emphasize the role that leadership plays in fostering resilience and strategic flexibility. The results of the study offer significant implications for SMEs looking to improve their resilience in the face of adversity and are in line with the body of research on strategic flexibility and resilience.

The results of the study indicate that as part of their resilience plan, SMEs should give strategic flexibility top priority. This may entail making R&D investments, forming tactical alliances, and creating adaptable company plans. Furthermore, SMEs should prioritize leadership development as a crucial element of their resilience strategy, acknowledging the role that leadership plays in facilitating strategic flexibility and resilience.

In order to increase SMEs' resilience, policymakers and support groups should also acknowledge the significance of strategic flexibility. This may entail offering assistance for R&D, training in entrepreneurship, and financial access.

Overall, this research adds to the body of knowledge already available on resilience and strategic flexibility and offers insightful information about how these two concepts relate to one another. SMEs, legislators, and support groups looking to improve resilience in the face of adversity should take note of the study's significant implications.

1.10 Recommendations

It is recommended that SMEs should prioritise strategic flexibility as a key component of their resilience strategy for them to survive in turbulent business environments. SMEs should also understand how crucial leadership is to fostering resilience and strategic flexibility. Lastly, funding access, entrepreneurial training, and research and development should all be supported by policymakers and support groups.

1.11 Future Research Directions

The study suggests that future research examine the connection between resilience and strategic flexibility across various industries and situations, as well as the contribution of additional elements like organizational culture and resource accessibility to SMEs' increased resilience. Additionally, more research on strategic flexibility and resilience in other African nations is advised, as is an investigation into how technology might improve SME strategic flexibility and resilience. The study concludes by suggesting the creation of a framework for assessing the strategic adaptability and resilience of SMEs.

1.12 Compliance with Ethics Guidelines

1.12.1 Conflict of Interest (COI)

Authors of this paper, Chibwe Funny and Mapanga, Tendai, James declare that we have no conflict of interest and are in line with the Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research ethics of the Reformed Church University.

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