

An Exploratory Study of Quality Management for Sustainability among Small Medium-Sized Enterprise

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Abstract

This study conceptualizes and validates a framework for quality management for the long-term viability of small and medium-sized firms. The study's premise is that the government and academia in South Africa are becoming more interested in the small business sector as a means of fostering economic development and job creation. This study analyzed the country's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are crucial to the generation of jobs in the construction sector as well as other parts of the South African economy. To understand the SMEs in the sector, a conceptual framework for quality management was created with a clear connection between the components. Sixty (60) SMEs participated in a self-administered questionnaire that was used to gather the data. The measurement and structural models were evaluated using the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) method. The study's findings demonstrate that quality management positively influences SMEs sustainability.

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are essential to a country's ability to grow sustainably [3]. Societies should base their growth strategy on the three main development goals. These are social inclusion, environmental protection, and economic growth [17]. The small business sector is gaining interest from both the government and academics. SMEs are essential to employment creation and economic growth. South Africa has a 30.80% unemployment rate, which is quite high. (South African Statistics, 2020) The country also experiences weak economic growth, high rates of poverty, and income inequality. SMEs are expected to play a significant role in generating new jobs and long-term economic growth. The SMEs sector is well-represented in the South African economy. This industry contributes between 51 and 57 percent of South Africa's gross domestic product and 91 percent of all formal business. Additionally, almost 60% of jobs in South Africa are held by SMEs [2].

The construction sector accounts for more than half of all fixed capital investment in South Africa. 2018 South African Statistics Construction

executives must effectively manage the daily activities of the workforce in the construction firm in order to produce high-quality work and achieve organizational objectives [9]. The construction industry in South Africa significantly contributes to the generation of jobs not just in the building sector but also in other sectors of the country's economy. The construction industry uses a variety of inputs (such building materials) from numerous other industries to produce its goods and services. As a result, the jobs created in these industries are indirectly supported by the building industry. Production in the construction sector benefits several companies, including those in manufacturing, mining, transportation, real estate, and business services. The construction sector employs about 9% of South Africa's total workforce and contributes about 9% of the country's GDP [19].

[18] claims that the construction industry has come under fire recently for its poor productivity and performance. [12] Distinguish the internal and external problems in the South African construction industry is experiencing. Examples of external issues include high levels of competition, corruption, and financial accessibility. A capacity problem, a lack of qualified employees, and a disregard for quality management processes are some internal problems. Most companies prioritize profitability, particularly those in the construction industry. However, the growing trend of sustainable development is having an influence on enterprises. Sustainable development is described as "fulfilling the demands of the present without jeopardizing the potential of the future generations to fulfill their own requirements" in the Brundtland Commission Report (1987, p. 8). In addition to their financial performance, businesses are under pressure to integrate, track, and report on their environmental and social performance. The importance of comprehending sustainability's complex nature is highlighted by [6] and [19]. The triple-bottom line indicators of economic, social, and environmental performance are only one aspect of sustainability, according to a recent study. The measurement of sustainability success is increasingly including innovation and quality performance (SPM) [11].

2. Literature Review

Studies have linked good management practices to businesses' financial performance [1]. Studies from South Africa include [20]. However, SMEs were the subject of very few earlier investigations [3]. Performance in terms of sustainability is a problem not just for large companies but also for SMEs [3]. This research omitted the other sustainability metrics in favor of concentrating on only one, namely financial success (environmental, social, innovation and quality performance). Additionally, a company's size, age, and availability to resources can have an influence on its quality management procedures and moderate how well it performs in terms of sustainability [17]. The impact of quality management methods on the sustainability performance of SMEs in South Africa has received very little scholarly attention. This study aims to develop a new theoretical framework for the interaction between SMEs' sustainability performance and quality management techniques.

The difficulties according to [14] highlight how the South African construction sector may be used to fight poverty, boost job creation, lessen economic inequality, and enhance women's empowerment. Low productivity and poor performance plague the construction sector. Quality management practices are one of the aspects that can improve the performance of construction businesses (Empirical research on quality management practices and firm performance have mostly focused on financial performance [2]. Most SMEs don't become financially stable until five years into operation. This provides a more thorough evaluation of performance.

Work completion is crucial since many small business owners lack expertise, have no history of success, and lack access to financial information [7].

Due to a shortage of funding, 75% of SMEs in South Africa collapse after two years of operation [7]. Because the majority of business owners lack the ability to create a business model to specify their objectives, financial institution managers are hesitant to extend loans to SMEs [14]. Self-financing may be preferred by small business owners in order to bypass strict banking rules and to remove the cost of loans. Small firms have financial difficulties that discourage innovation and sustainability, which has a negative impact on performance [14]. Construction projects are characterized as difficult to accomplish management tasks, which results in unfinished projects at the handover phase [9]. Business owners and managers should initially identify obstacles that affect their companies' ability to survive [1].

3. Conceptual framework for the study

There is hardly any empirical study on how quality management techniques affect SMEs' sustainability performance [10]. It is necessary to adopt QM for SMEs in South Africa since SME sustainability is crucial for the country's economic growth and unemployment issues. By creating a framework that will improve the sustainability performance of small and medium-sized construction enterprises in South Africa, this study will seek to address the issue at hand. The purpose of this study is to ascertain how quality management affects SME sustainability performance in the South African construction industry (see Figure 1).

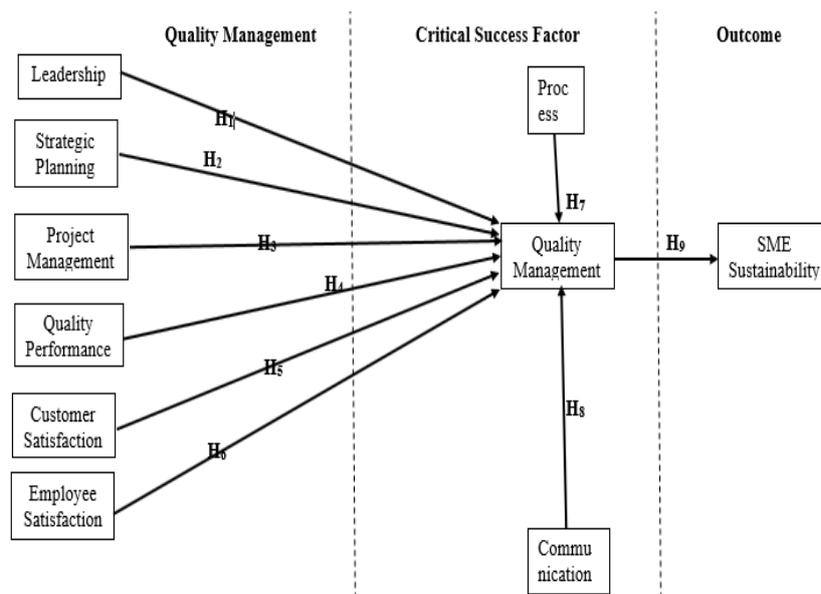


Figure 1. Conceptual Frame of QM for sustainability among SMEs

3.1. Leadership and quality management

To raise the bar for a customer-focused approach, senior executives should demonstrate strong, obvious leadership. A leader should guarantee that an organization develops policies, procedures, and techniques for attaining excellence in outcomes, fostering innovation, enhancing knowledge and abilities, and maintaining sustainability within the company in addition to allowing an organization to keep evolving. This factor measures how committed the SME leadership is to achieving the SME vision and purpose [13]. This aspect is said to as TQM's major "rocket" and featured senior management taking accountability for quality and participating in quality improvement initiatives [13].

H1: SME leadership positively influences quality management for sustainability.

3.2. Planning and leadership

To use the CSFs, everything must be prepared, including how and why employees should use them. The task may be simplified and completed more quickly by using tools. For each department, a single strategy may be developed.

H1a: SME planning positively influences SME leadership for quality management.

3.3. Communication channel and leadership

The business must gather its employees, who may all provide suggestions on how to best accomplish their objective. The two stages of the communication process that the business must pay close attention to are the initial launch communications, which will lay out the goals to be attained, and the ongoing communications, which will track the KSF's development (Contact us is a way to know if the KSF is working well).

H1b: SME communication channel positively influences SME leadership for quality management.

3.4. Strategic planning and quality management

The SME strategy entails tactical planning for the business's long- and short-term objectives and initiatives [16]. Focus is placed on customer-driven service and superior organizational performance as primary strategic business issues that must be a key component of overall company strategy. Achieving excellence consistently and sustainably requires effective strategic and business planning, strategy

growth, as well as a focus on the demands of customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders [16].

H2: SME strategic planning influences quality management for sustainability.

3.5. Planning and leadership

Customer-driven quality and operational performance excellence are emphasized as important strategic business problems that must be included in all aspects of the company strategy. To attain excellence in a consistent and long-lasting manner, effective strategy and business planning, creation of strategies, and attention to the needs of customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders are essential.

H2a: SME planning positively influences SME leadership for quality management.

3.6. Business process and strategic planning

A business process or business technique is a collection of interconnected, coordinated actions or tasks performed by people or machinery to provide a service or a good (serve a particular business goal) for a certain customer or consumer in a predetermined order. Consumers may or may not be aware that business operations occur at all organizational levels. A business process can alternatively be visualized (modeled) as a flowchart of a series of tasks with connecting decision points or as a process matrix of a series of tasks focused on the process's data and governed by the pertinent regulations. Using business processes has benefits such as better customer service and the ability to adapt to quickly changing markets.

H2b: SME business process positively influences strategic planning for quality management.

3.7. Project management and quality management

This variable evaluates the organized approach to identifying crucial criteria to meet customer needs [5].

H3: SME project management positively influences quality management for sustainability.

3.8. Management style and project management

H3a: SME management style positively project management for quality management.

3.9. Quality performance and quality management

A project's life cycle's systematic tracking of work processes is put to the test by quality management [5]. Performance output is a composite variable that is challenging to define specifically. The performance aspect of TQM is concerned with measuring success in terms of organizational, business, and quality outcomes. Customers' loyalty, staff satisfaction, effectiveness, production quality, and delivery performance are among the measures. Instead, this investigation followed the quality performance evaluation criteria of [14] from a plant level standpoint, which are meant to analyze the performance of the applicant's organization.

H4: SME quality performance positively influences quality management for sustainability.

H4a: SME planning positively influences quality performance for quality management.

H4b: SME business process positively influences quality performance for quality management.

3.10. Customer satisfaction, project management, and quality management

In order to assure satisfaction with the delivery of their services, customer satisfaction necessitates evaluating touch with the consumers [4]. Building a quality culture is crucial for organizations if they want to satisfy their consumers and succeed as a business. Customer satisfaction is the main objective of TQM, and it is expressed by the company's efforts to take into account both present and future consumer wants and satisfy them by creating high-quality goods and services and delivering them on time. This idea is based on the premise that long-term business performance is most critically dependent on customer pleasure, which necessitates a focus on customer demands inside the company:

H5: SME customer satisfaction positively influences quality management for sustainability.

H5a: SME management style positively influences customer satisfaction for quality management.

H5b: SME communication channel influences customer satisfaction for quality management.

3.11. Organization progress, project management and quality management

Regardless of how good they are, programs cannot advance an organization; rather, individuals must do it. Employee satisfaction gauges a worker's well-being and what drives them to deliver services [21]. These organizations drive all employees—not

just managers to think critically about their job and the company in order to get better results. People who have the necessary tools and abilities at work should be accountable for the caliber of their job [21].

H6a: SME management style positively influences employee satisfaction for quality management

H6b: SME communication channel positively influences employee satisfaction for quality management.

4. Methodology

Studies on SMEs have used a range of study methodologies; data gathering techniques and research approaches include surveys mixed with open-ended discussions, interviews, and observation [22]. The study will be conducted in two parts, with the pilot study to evaluate the research instrument taking place between September 1, 2022, and November 30, 2022. An online survey will be delivered to a sample of 30 construction SMEs. The questionnaire, conceptual framework, and methodology for the main fieldwork will be improved as a consequence of the pilot study's results. The main fieldwork will be conducted between December 1 and February 28, 2023. The pilot research will gather information on demographics, SMEs owners' and managers' opinions on the sustainability of SMEs, and their BEE compliance profiles. The study explores if a quality framework will promote the sustainability of SMEs. Why it is crucial to provide a sustainable research framework for SMEs was the researcher's question. Information on SMEs' ages, levels of education, races, and levels of training, for instance, will be needed to identify and characterize their sustainability. Finally, it will be examined to see if demographic factors like the age of the company and ownership characteristics have an impact on SME sustainability.

The study will be carried out in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, which is the largest municipality in South Africa and is located in Pretoria, the nation's capital and the location of the second-highest concentration of embassies in the world. As a consequence, the database will accurately represent SMEs operating in the nation's construction sector. According to Section 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998, the Municipal Demarcation Board has classified the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality as a Category A municipality (Act 117 of 1998). A number of councils and municipalities that have previously provided service delivery to the greater Pretoria region and its environs merged to create the Municipality on December 5, 2000. On May 28, 2008, the Government Gazette published a

proclamation that further altered the boundaries of the City of Tshwane by including the old Metsweding District Municipality, which included Dinokeng tsa Taemane (Cullinan) and Kungwini (Bronkhorstspuit), into the City of Tshwane which was further divided into 7 Regions. Following the local government elections in May 2011, Tshwane was included, increasing its size to 6 345 km². Currently, Tshwane is the business hub of South Africa, stretching over 121 km from east to west and 108 km from north to south. Additionally, it covers an area of 19 055 km², or more than 30% of Gauteng. The Gauteng Global City Region Strategy, which aimed to reduce the number of municipalities in Gauteng, is consistent with the incorporation of Metsweding District Municipality into the City of Tshwane.

The City of Tshwane offers opportunities for any size of business from the crucial SME and entrepreneurs to high-technology firms, global commercial operations, as well as light and heavy industry. The province accommodates small businesses in the CBD and a bustling atmosphere in the city, as well as its tranquil office parks. The City has a strong history dating back several decades and has established itself as a leader in a number of fields, including design, building, electronics, research, and education. In South Africa, organizations like Armscor, the Medical Research Council, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and the Human Sciences Research Council conduct the majority of the country's research and development (Research and Development; some estimates put this number as high as 90%). (HSRC). World-class educational institutions like the University of South Africa (UNISA), Tshwane University of Technology, and the University of Pretoria are undoubtedly a complement to these organizations. Seven districts, 107 wards, and 214 councilors make up Tshwane. The City's economy is thriving and varied, allowing it to contribute at least 26,8% of the GDP of Gauteng Province and 9,4% of the GDP of the entire country. As a result, the study's estimated population is around 52 000, and its estimated total sample size is 2,800.

5. Research instrument

Theoretical and preliminary empirical research are both reflected in the data gathering tool employed in this study [23]. The quality management for sustainability among SMEs is the main topic of this study. There were 54 items in the questionnaire used to collect the data. The four sections into which the questions are divided are as follows: Section (1) Demographic information used to gather the respondent's personal information (gender and race). Data on the variables impacting

quality management for sustainability among South African SMEs was collected under Section (2). Data on the crucial success factor impacting quality management for sustainability among South African SMEs was collected using the section (3) questions. A sample of 80 South African SMEs was employed in a pilot study to validate the questionnaire, and 60 of these questionnaires were useable for the data analysis in this study. The updated questionnaire will be utilized for data collection in this project after all necessary revisions have been made following the completion of the pilot study.

6. Sample data

Only SMEs working in the Gauteng Province's construction industry were included in the survey. Registered companies in South Africa with five to two hundred full-time paid employees are referred to as SMEs [24]. 96 enterprises were taken into consideration with the assistance of the City of Tshwane (Table 1). The ability of the respondents to offer the required information was the primary criterion for selecting respondents. The owners of construction businesses, managers, senior engineers, and anybody in a top position who is ranked among SMEs are the target respondents in each organization, however in some circumstances, there are more than one participant from one SME. Only SMEs working in the Gauteng Province's construction industry were included in the survey. All legally recognized private companies in South Africa with five to two hundred full-time paid employees are referred to as SMEs [24]. 96 enterprises were taken into consideration with the assistance of the City of Tshwane (Table 1). The ability of the respondents to offer the required information was the primary criterion for selecting respondents. The owners of construction businesses, managers, senior engineers, and anybody in a top position who is ranked among SMEs are the target respondents in each organization, however in some circumstances, there are more than one participant from one SME.

6.1. Data analysis

We used Statistical Analytical Software (SAS) to handle and analyze the data once it was collected in order to examine the survey responses. We conducted several statistical tests in this study, including frequency distribution and ANOVA tests. The frequency distribution of the SMEs who took part in the survey is shown in Tables 1 and 2. It suggests that many of the sample South African SMEs implementing quality management have many employees. We presented the sample South African SMEs in Table 3 including the elements that help and impede the adoption of quality management.

Table1: Distribution Frequency for Gender

Gender	Frequency	%	Cum %	Cum %
Male	43	71.07	43	71.07
Female	17	28.93	60	100.00

Table 2. Distribution Frequency for Race

Race	Frequency	%	Cum %	Cum %
Black SA	32	52.89	32	52.89
African	21	31.71	53	84.60
Coloured	4	7.44	57	92.04
Indian	2	4.13	59	96.17
Foreigner	1	0.83	60	100.00

Table 3. Simple Statistics for Constructs

Simple Statistics		
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
LD	3.75443	0.78865
SP	3.63542	0.82476
PM	3.35673	0.75849
QP	3.67590	0.89756
CS	3.85321	0.66274
ES	3.50675	0.59854
PS	3.72098	0.54512
CM	3.22665	0.68792
QM	3.98823	0.65879
SS	3.65372	0.68795

Table 4. PATH List

PATH List						
Path			Para	Est	Std Error	t Val
LD	→	QM	_Pam1	0.0875	0.1246	0.5876
SP	→	QM	_Pam2	0.0925	0.0947	-0.982
PM	→	QM	_Pam3	0.1726	0.1457	1.2547
QP	→	QM	_Pam4	0.0947	0.0578	5.4127
CS	→	QM	_Pam5	0.0852	0.0721	-0.2448
ES	→	QM	_Pam6	0.0967	0.0921	-0.2548
PS	→	QM	_Pam7	0.0125	0.0287	0.3659
CM	→	QM	_Pam8	0.0875	0.1225	-0.5268
QM	→	SS	_Pam9	0.0985	0.0897	0.1256

It demonstrates the suggested variables that are typically seen by the respondents as significant factors that could encourage or hinder the adoption of quality management by South African SMEs. Table 4 shows that, with one exception for which the factor loadings are examined, all of the items are trustworthy and meet the established standards.

7. Structural model assessment

The explanatory power of the model is evaluated by measuring the discrepancy amount in the dependent variables of the model. The R² and the path coefficients are the essential measures for assessing the structural model [25]. As shown in

Figure 1, the model has R2 and the path coefficient leadership and quality management has the value of 67.9%, the path coefficient strategic planning and quality management has the value of 92.7%, the path coefficient project management and quality management has the value of 84.6%, the path coefficient quality performance and quality management has the value of 72.5%, the path coefficient customer satisfaction and quality management has the value of 97.4%, the path coefficient employee satisfaction and quality management has the value of 87.7%. These are the factors loading of the weight of the quality management constructs on quality management. The path coefficient for critical success factor loading on quality management has process and quality management has the value on 78.5% and communication and quality management on 84.2%. While quality management on SMEs sustainability is 85.4%.

The path analysis demonstrates the path coefficients and p-values for each hypothesis. It can be noticed that all the hypotheses are supported, which in turn indicates that all the paths are significant between the independent and dependent variables. H1 ($B = 0.08746$, $p < 0.05$) describes the path between leadership and quality management; indicating that the leadership enhances the quality management expected from SMEs. H2 ($B = 0.09247$, $p < 0.05$) shows the path between strategic planning and quality management, representing that the strategic management influences quality management. H3 ($B = 0.17256$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrates the path between project management and quality management; revealing that project management positively influences the SMEs construction job quality management. H4 ($B = 0.07213$, $p < 0.05$) shows the path between customer satisfaction and quality management, representing that the strategic management influences quality management. H5 ($B = 0.09214$, $p < 0.05$) shows the path between employee satisfaction and quality management, representing that the strategic management influences quality management. H6 ($B = 0.01247$, $p < 0.05$) describes the path between process and quality management, indicating that process has less significantly affecting the quality management. H7 ($B = 0.08754$, $p < 0.05$) describes the path between communication and quality management, indicating that process significantly affecting the quality management. H8 ($B = 0.09855$, $p < 0.05$) describes the path between quality management and SMEs sustainability, indicating that quality management significantly impact the SMEs sustainability.

The main objective of the current study is to identify and investigate the factors affecting the sustainability of SMEs in the South African construction industry. In order to achieve this, the

study gathered and examined the pertinent data described above. The top management's dedication to quality, the desire to improve construction jobs and quality, the effectiveness of management and employee communication, and the capacity to achieve and foster positive change through construction processes and activities were all factors that our study identified and ranked as factors that will enhance SME sustainability [24]. The following factors that prevent the implementation of quality management were also found and ranked: Lack of employee training, resistance to change inside the firm, inadequate infrastructure, lack of resources, inadequate knowledge base, lack of government support for SMEs, and employees' reluctance to participate in decision-making are all factors.

This implies that the introduction of quality management tools becomes more necessary when top management introduces new, innovative managerial tools, hence enhancing organizational performance. Our findings also concur with other research in that SMEs are likely to struggle to adopt quality management due to issues including inadequate employee training and incompetent management [27].

The study emphasized that SMEs should fully support quality management implementation because it may have a favorable effect on continual improvement and long-term growth [28].

According to the study's findings, many respondents said that a lack of resources was one of the things that made it difficult for South African SMEs to manage quality. This may be due to the South African government beginning to cut back on cash and incentives given to SMEs as a result of the privatization strategy that was put in place. Recent studies have found that one of the major issues impeding the growth of a quality culture is a lack of resources [29].

8. Conclusion and Future Work

The significance of SMEs to South Africa's economic growth was highlighted by this study. the causes of economic development and job creation in a nation where unemployment is high. By focusing on the construction industry, which accounts for more than half of South Africa's total fixed capital investment, the research was able to accomplish this feat by examining the construction sector literature, since the construction business has historically been criticized for its poor performance and productivity, emphasis has been placed on the sector's SMEs sustainability.

Many research in this field of study examined the relationship between good management practices and a company's financial success. But few research have specifically addressed SMEs sustainability. Performance in terms of sustainability is a problem

for both SMEs and large companies. This research omitted the other sustainability metrics in favor of concentrating on only one, namely financial success (environmental, social, innovation and quality performance). Additionally, a company's size, age, and availability to resources can have an influence on its quality management processes and moderate how closely it is related to its performance in terms of sustainability. A framework for quality management for sustainable SMEs was developed by the study.

The findings of the fieldwork will be presented in future research on the significance of supporting SMEs in South Africa's construction sector. This will help the research better comprehend the relative importance of the factors in the suggested framework for quality management to support the sustainability of SME. Although the study was undertaken in the setting of South African SMEs, it may support existing initiatives in other rising African countries and other countries. It emphasizes the importance of concepts, processes, and procedures in identifying and eliminating quality flaws in order to continuously improve the building sector. This study views it as a key instrument that enables SMEs to balance meeting the demands of new environmental limitations with maintaining their ability to compete sustainably. This study emphasized how the factors could either help or hinder the successful application of quality management. It can play a significant role in either facilitating or impeding the effective application of quality management for SME sustainability. Although implementing quality management does not ensure SMEs will be successful, we contend that doing so increases the likelihood that success will be compromised. The quality management strategy's implementation is a time- and complexity-intensive problem. We contend that persistence and patience are necessary for SMEs willing to apply quality management.

Accordingly, we suggest the following: (a) In order to successfully adopt quality management principles and procedures, top senior managers must show the required level of dedication, engagement, and support. The key factor promoting the application of quality management, according to the respondents, is the dedication and assistance of top managers of SMEs. Similar to the past studies, it was found that the success of quality management is significantly influenced by the dedication and support of senior managers. Top managers' backing enables the impacted departments to have a well-trained and staffed workforce.

Additionally, their support promotes and mandates line managers' cooperation in successfully adopting quality management. (b) It is crucial to offer employees the proper training, and to have a capable management team on hand. Although the availability of competent management and the

supply of pertinent employee training are essential for the implementation of quality management, respondents placed the absence of such resources as the second factor impeding the successful application of quality management. This highlights the need to increase all stakeholders' ability for action execution. SMEs should increase management proficiency at all levels and offer pertinent employee training. For the implementation of quality management, it is crucial to enhance employee training programs that are specifically tailored to the needs of the workforce. SMEs exhibit the desired dedication and enthusiasm to permit staff members to participate in strategic and operational company decisions. According to our research, SMEs' readiness to permit staff members' active involvement in crucial business decisions plays a key role in encouraging the introduction and adoption of quality management in SMEs.

As previously said, it is advised that two significant issues be brought to the notice of interested SME entrepreneurs and other stakeholders, including government organizations. An ongoing competitive advantage at all levels, including the national level, is necessary to achieve overall quality. Rising nations like South Africa are worried about the sustainability and quality of their businesses in emerging economies, particularly about integration and eradication. Eradication is the process by which a corporation gets rid of outdated methods that can prevent the successful application of quality management, as opposed to integration, which refers to how a company assimilates new management practices. SME policymakers need to be aware of the integration and eradication problems. They must ascertain what, in their environment, is advantageous for successfully implementing quality management and what poses a hazard to such an effort. Instead, then trying to entirely alter current procedures, they need to figure out what works and what will not work.

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